Political Campaigning 2.0: How the 2008 Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin Campaigns

and Web Users Framed Race, Gender, and Age

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Abstract

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<u>Political Campaigning 2.0: How the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin Campaigns and</u>
<u>Web Users Framed Race, Gender, and Age</u>

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This qualitative study explores the impact of new media, specifically social media and campaign websites with greater direct user participation and involvement. With the historic election of the first black president of the United States, Barack Obama, and the candidacy of the first Republican woman nominated for vice-president, Sarah Palin, the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns remain important for study.

"Political Campaigning 2.0" analyzes campaign and user-generated web content covering a wide array of new media: Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, and campaign websites. The study is based on Erving Goffman's theories of Framing and Impression Management and complemented with James Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics. In contrast to other studies, this research includes the issue of age and explores the intersectionality of race, gender, and age. It uses a multi-method approach, combining textual analysis with in-depth interviews, focus groups, and self-reports made up of 66 Ohio University undergraduate student participants.

Findings reveal that a majority of web users interpreted and represented the Democratic candidates in the same way as the campaign framed them, indicating convergent and successful representation in terms of race, gender, and age. The Obama-Biden campaign was able to take advantage of Obama's race as a historic milestone and Biden's age as a sign of experience. In contrast, most web users interpreted and

represented Republican candidates differently than intended by the McCain-Palin campaign, indicating a divergence in framing. A majority of users framed McCain as old, rather than experienced, and Palin as inexperienced, rather than a "maverick." The McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent Palin as a candidate who would appeal to women, but her representation in terms of gender did not resonate with a majority of web users.

Emphasizing the importance of new media technology, this study shows how the 2008 campaigns traversed racial tolerance, gendered roles, and an increasing generational gap. It proposes lessons in political campaigning, particularly for future presidential and vice-presidential candidates, not only with regard to the appropriate use of social media, but also in view of a clear understanding of the socio-demographic composition of the targeted audiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The 2008 presidential and vice-presidential elections were watershed elections in three important ways: the historic election of the first black[*] president of the United States, Barack Obama; the candidacy of the first Republican woman nominated for vice-president, Sarah Palin; and the impact of social media and enhanced campaign websites with greater direct user participation and involvement, especially among young people, than in previous elections. These significant aspects of the elections relate to how issues of race, gender, and age intersect.

In most previous presidential elections the word "race" has been associated with such synonyms as "election" and "campaign," with notable exceptions in 1984 and 1988 when race also referred to black candidate Jesse Jackson. At the end of the 2008 primary, the race for the presidency was charged with attention to and outrage of racial prejudice, with many Americans still subscribing to Herbert Gans' explanation of racial hierarchy in the United States that places whites at the top of the list, above blacks.[1]

A woman candidate representing one of the major two parties in American politics in a general election last occurred when Geraldine Ferraro ran for vice-president in the 1984 Walter Mondale campaign. With Hillary Clinton's failed bid for the presidency, the end of the 2008 primary resulted in heated charges of sexism.

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[*] Obama is biracial, and refers to himself as "black" in his 2004 autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance.* Antiracism author Tim Wise further suggests in his 2009 book, *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racisim and White Denial in the Age of Obama*, that, "It is worth pointing out that throughout US history and still today, to be biracial hardly erases one salient fact: a person so designated will typically be seen as a member of whichever group is lowest in the racial hierarchy. So, to be black and white in terms of parentage is to be black" (14).

Along with race and gender, age was a third important issue in the 2008 elections. The Iowa primary caucuses showed a generational divide with 60 percent of voters under 25 who supported Obama and 45 percent of voters over 65 who supported Clinton.[2] During the 2008 general elections, Obama was 47 years old; John McCain, the Republican candidate for president, was 72 years old; Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate for vice-president, was 65 years old; and Palin was 44 years old.

The 2008 elections were also different from any other previous election as race, gender, and age were impacted by such new social media as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, none of which were accessible to the general p.ublic in 2004. The astonishing growth of web 2.0 sites provided enormous and novel communication capabilities for candidates. For instance, in 2007, reflecting on his defeat as a 2004 Democratic candidate for president, Howard Dean stated: "YouTube is an extraordinary innovation that basically turned the US Senate over to the Democrats. Would I have remixed the Dean Scream?[*] Absolutely. If YouTube existed at the time, we would have had something out the next day, saying, 'This is what really happened.'"[3] Moreover, Peter Greenberger, who worked on campaigns for Bill Clinton in 1996 and Al Gore in 2000, suggested that in 2008, campaigns could more effectively reach young people through the Internet.[4] Participatory websites, including official campaign websites as well as social networking websites, changed how political organization, voter mobilization, and overall campaign strategy were conducted. Although thinking about the broader implications of social networking is important, this study explores how public discourse regarding

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[*] 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean's overly-enthusiastic speech to supporters after the Iowa caucuses was widely rebroadcast in part, emphasizing a lack of composure dubbed the "Dean Scream," which contributed to the decline of his campaign.

political campaigning evolved during the election of 2008 and, specifically, how new communication technologies were used to represent race, gender, and age of the candidates to online publics.

An enormous number of publications addressing the issues of race and gender have appeared since the 2008 elections. This study investigates some of these same issues regarding race and gender, but in a much broader and comprehensive context. First, it explores the intersectionality of race, gender, and age. This study provides a closer look at the issue of age in conjunction with race and gender, which has often been overlooked in research on the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns. While racism and sexism in the United States have been a comprehensive part of the discourse on American politics, ageism is an area that merits additional attention. The 2008 elections, with a Republican ticket consisting of an older presidential candidate and a younger vice-presidential candidate and a Democratic ticket consisting of a younger presidential candidate and an older vice-presidential candidate, provided an ideal opportunity for examining this issue more closely.

Second, this study diverges from studying the representation of candidates in the mass media and instead considers the perspective of campaign and user-generated web content. Similar to how campaign websites merited attention in 2004, when Democratic candidate Howard Dean tapped the netroots[*] with individual donations made via the Internet, averaging $80,[5] the social media landscape in 2008 provided a distinctive and novel backdrop for the study of online political campaigning. Social networking, now an

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[*] Political blogger Jerome Armstrong coined the term "netroots" in 2002 to describe "political activism organized through blogs and other online media," according to him and co-author Markos Moulitsas Zuniga in *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassoots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics*.

ingrained aspect of daily life, was still new and exciting. Moreover, it was not just the political candidates who used these social media sites to represent themselves; web users, too, took advantage of new online outlets to represent the candidates in both similar and divergent ways.

Third, this study encompasses a wide array of new media: campaign websites, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google, and even the newly emerging Twitter in 2008. MySpace was declining in popularity while Facebook was on the rise. YouTube, which did not exist until 2005, made its presidential campaign debut. And Twitter, now a standard networking tool, was so new that the McCain campaign did not have a Twitter account until halfway through the campaign. The comprehensive view of social media in this study provides a unique perspective compared to studies that may focus just on one example of social media.

The unique dynamics of the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns may never be repeated in the same way again. In 2012, Barack Obama ran as an incumbent, making it a different kind of campaign. While he certainly received grassroots support, the level of enthusiasm was not replicated to the extent from 2008, when his campaign strategy was in large part dependent upon his experience as a community organizer with volunteers made up of the idealistic Millennial Generation. A candidate like Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska may never come along again in a presidential or vice-presidential campaign; she exhibited a rare dichotomy of feminine and masculine characteristics, exemplified in web users' nickname for her: Caribou Barbie. Moreover, these two candidates could be studied in conjunction with the candidacies of older, white men John McCain and Joe Biden. With this exceptional

ensemble of actors and the setting of newly emerging social media, the 2008 elections

provided a unique opportunity to study a new kind of digital persuasion: political

campaigning 2.0.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The title of this study, "Political Campaigning 2.0: How the 2008 Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin Campaigns and Web Users Framed Race, Gender, and Age," should be taken apart to construct the relevant areas of published literature. First, literature on race, gender, and age will be considered. Next, the idea of "new" media, referenced in "Political Campaigning 2.0," will be explored with historic background on how communication such as political talk radio, late night talk shows, campaign websites, and web 2.0 participatory applications, including blogs and web-based communities. Finally, the theoretical literature on Framing—which will be used as a primary framework—as well as the Situational Theory of Publics—which will be used as a secondary framework to discuss the relationships between the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns with web users—will be addressed in order to present three research questions posited in this study.

2.1: Issues of Race

Two main aspects of race will be considered in this study: the concept of the "magical negro" and the prevalence of racism in today's society.

First, the concept of the "magical negro" is one that should be considered. The term was popularized by film director Spike Lee through his criticisms of how African Americans are portrayed as having special powers in films.[6] Examples include Will Smith's character in *The Legend of Bagger Vance*[7] and Morgan Freeman's character in *Evan Almighty*.[8] Lee asked: "How is it that black people have these powers but they use them for the benefit of white people?"[9] In "Obama the 'Magic Negro,'" David Ehrenstein

of the *Los Angeles Times* suggested, "like a comic-book superhero, Obama is there to help, out of the sheer goodness of a heart we need not know or understand. For as with all Magic Negroes, the less real he seems, the more desirable he becomes."[10] He added, "Even the mild criticisms thrown his way have been waved away, 'magically,'"[11] although certainly Obama faced his share of criticism during the 2008 primary and into the general election. Conservative political talk radio host Rush Limbaugh responded to Ehrenstein's article by playing a parody of the song "Puff the Magic Dragon" called "Barack the Magic Negro"; it included the line, "A guy from the L.A. paper said he makes guilty whites feel good."[12] *The Nation* columnist Patricia J. Williams added to this concept, suggesting: "There are many people to whom [Obama's] appeal rests not on what he is but on what they imagine he isn't. He's not a whiner; he's not angry. He doesn't hate white people. He doesn't wear his hair like Al Sharpton."[13]

Is the concept of a "magical negro" racist? Perhaps not overtly so, but many consider it a type of covert racism in which we herald a stereotype instead of an actual candidate; moreover, it puts down Obama's white supporters by suggesting they believe in a fictional character and not a "real" politician. Further, when it comes to actual overt racism, studies point to persisting discrimination. In a 1990 study of middle-class black Americans, Joe Feagin found common examples of discrimination that included poor service, verbal threats, and avoidance, such as "a white couple crossing a street to avoid walking past a black college student"[14] and a black professor who noted that her profession "protected" her from discrimination at work, but she experienced unpleasant encounters of racism in places where her profession is indistinguishable, such as the

grocery store.[15] Overall, Feagin concluded, "in spite of decades of civil rights legislation, black Americans have yet to attain the full promise of the American dream."[16]

Tim Wise, a white anti-racism writer, pointed to results from the Ohio Democratic primary which suggested that "an awful lot of white folks, especially rural and working-class whites, are still mightily uncomfortable with voting for such a candidate," at least partly because of race; one-fifth of voters in the state said race was important to their decision, and roughly six in ten of these voted for Hillary Clinton.[17] In *The New York Review of Books,* Andrew Hacker added, citing the Bradley Effect,[*] that "we are left to wonder just how much of a factor and how many more would have said the same if they had been frank with the interviewer."[18]

In the general election, however, Obama was elected with 52.9 percent of the popular vote.[19] Historian Alice Echols described the election of the first black president in the United States as the "Prius factor," suggesting, "Obama supporters can feel self-congratulatory about striking a blow against racism in the way that Prius drivers can feel they're striking a blow for energy responsibility and independence."[20]

As the first black presidential frontrunner candidate since Jackson, Obama was faced with how to present himself and his candidacy in terms of race. Black journalist Gwen Ifill—who moderated the 2008 vice-presidential debate between Joe Biden and Sarah Palin—pointed out that even Jackson's 1988 campaign included a white campaign manager and emphasis to reach beyond the black church base.[21] She added that the "Age

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[*] The Bradley Effect was coined in 1982 when Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, who is black, lost the California gubernatorial race after being ahead in voter polls, suggesting that likely voters responded in those polls that they were undecided or planned to vote for a black candidate, when in fact they voted for a white candidate.

of Obama" forced a further redefinition of black politicians and black politics.[22] As Ifill

described, "You would never catch this black man with his fist in the air."[23]

In recent years, a flurry of research has been published on the 2008 presidential

and vice-presidential elections. Many authors have addressed issues of race, such as

Emily Bernard, who explored the myth of racelessness;[24] Brian Ward, who compared the

2008 election to the 1960s Civil Rights movement;[25] Richard King, who discussed

Obama's success in appealing to both black and white voters (from an offline

perspective);[26] and Maria Lauret, who explored "how to read Michelle Obama" as both a

black woman and as a mother.[27] In *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of*

Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance, Robert Smith suggested that 2008 is "only the

second time in history that an 'ethnic' American—[defined as] a nonwhite Anglo-Saxon

Protestant—has been elected president," and compares the election of Obama with that of

Kennedy, suggesting parallels between Irish Catholics in the 1960s with African

Americans in 2008.[28]

2.2: Issues of Gender

Three major issues related to gender should be considered in the context of this

study: gender power, transgendered behaviors, and the "gender gap."

First, it should be noted that gender is not simply a biological difference of sex,

with the word "gender" equated to "women." It is a social construction in which men

and women are both gendered,[29] with varying degrees of masculinity and femininity. For

instance, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a woman, can be viewed as

highly masculine.[30] Judith Lorber suggested that, "gender is such a familiar part of daily

life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced."[31] Governor and vice-presidential candidate Palin, especially as a mother of five children, exemplified this kind of disruption of expectations.

Georgia Duerst-Lahti and Rita Mae Kelly defined gender power as, "the power that results from our gendered (e)valuations of things and behaviors, our ways of being, behaving, and structuring social relations."[32] Mary Hawkesworth added that, "gender power normalizes male dominance and renders women, along with their needs and interests, invisible."[33] For most countries, including the US, men hold gender power in politics[34]—especially in the executive branch[35]—although certainly there have been notable female chief executives in other countries, such as Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto. Gender power can also be influenced by current salient issues. For instance, Clyde Wilcox was prescient ten years before the 2008 election when he stated: "If the electorate has special concerns about the president's ability to defend US citizens from foreign and domestic aggression, then women who run for the presidency will have to overcome doubts about their role as commander in chief."[36] We have accepted that women may be elected to public office, yet these women in governance must adhere to the ideological norms of masculinity.[37] That is because, without question, politics has a masculine identity.[38] As Susan Carroll and Richard Fox pointed out, even political language is gendered; metaphors such as a "battleground" state stems from war, while "horserace" media coverage is drawn from sports.[39]

R.W. Connell separated masculinity into two gendered practices: dominance and technical expertise, which "coexist … sometimes in opposition and sometimes

meshing."[40] Duerst-Lahti pointed out that in the 2000 presidential election, Al Gore showed technical expertise, but had "shortcomings in projecting alpha-male dominance."[41] In 2004, she added, "adequate or desirable masculinity became integral to the campaign as Republicans systematically sought to 'Frenchify' or feminize John Kerry."[42] These modes of masculinity will be applied to the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential candidates in this study.

Transgendered behavior was embodied through presidential candidate John McCain's choice of Sarah Palin as a running mate; although, since Palin was a candidate for vice-president, this was not transgendered to the extent of Hillary Clinton's presidential bid. While Clinton (like Attorney General Janet Reno) was primarily represented in masculine ways, Palin was not portrayed by the campaign or by web users in strict masculine or feminine terms. Gendered representations will be applied to the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential candidates, with an emphasis on how Palin was represented in terms of transgendered behavior.

The "gender gap" can refer to income disparity between men and women or to the number of professionals—such as US senators or governors—who are women in comparison to men, but it also was being used in the context of which 2008 ticket voters supported. Some strategists suggest that this gender gap is more about women's loyalty to a woman candidate "than about men's reluctance to vote for a woman."[43] In her June 7, 2008 concession speech, Clinton spoke of putting 18 million cracks in the "glass ceiling" with the help of her supporters.[44] Scott Taylor's study suggested women have imposed their own glass ceiling, finding that women are more likely than men to underrate their bosses' view of them.[45] Carroll noted that during the 1990s, women

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political candidates were viewed as representatives of change,[46] but clearly this perception was not successful for Clinton in the 2008 primary. In *Thirty Ways of Looking at Hillary*, Lorrie Moore suggested, "The cultural moment for feminine role models may have passed."[47] Lionel Shriver suggested that gender and power is a complicated relationship: while many heralded Clinton's candidacy as a woman, others felt she was just not the "right" woman.[48]

And while Clinton was referred to frequently during the 2008 campaign as the "first" woman presidential candidate, Erika Falk's content analysis of eight women presidential candidates in history highlighted those who came before Clinton, including black Democratic Representative Shirley Chisholm in 1972—who was not endorsed by the National Organization for Women nor the Congressional Black Caucus[49]—white Republican Cabinet member Elizabeth Dole in 2000, and black Democratic Senator Carol Moseley Braun. Falk explored overt ways the press advantages men candidates and stereotypes and gender roles perpetuated by the press, finding coverage may make women less likely to run for office.[50]

Certainly, the emergence of Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin added a whole new dimension to exploring gender and sexism. Many authors have written on gender issues in the 2008 election. Duerst-Lahti looked at the campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin to describe the "potency that masculinity [in political campaigning] gains from simply being 'ordinary.'"[51] Susan Carroll and Kelly Dittman asserted that Clinton and Palin, "as pioneers in seeking the country's top executive positions, faced challenges in their campaigns that male contenders for president and vice president did not."[52] Melanie Gustafson suggested: "The McCain team may have chosen

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Palin to win the votes of women, and those of conservatives, but they failed to understand or deal directly with the problem people have with associating 'woman' with 'political.'"[53] In *Framing Sarah Palin: Pit Bulls, Puritans, and Politics*, Linda Beail and Rhonda Kinney Longworth focused on the Republican and gender narratives of Palin, including frontier woman, political outsider, hockey mom, and beauty queen.[54]

Mitch Kachum suggested that Michelle Obama was criticized by the mainstream media for her comments dealing with race, but "seemed to back off … by late summer 2008 … [when] the media had a new female target—Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin." Kachum explored the intersection of race and gender, but from the perspective of media coverage.[55]

Robert Kuttner, author of *Obama's Challenge: America's Economic Crisis and the Power of a Transformative Presidency,* suggested that Palin was presented as a cultural symbol in lieu of policy, resulting in "Hockey Mom Sarah Palin" as the basis for her candidacy.[56] Matt Bai, author of *The Argument: Inside the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics*, added: "Palin was elevated from obscurity largely on the basis of her womanhood and treated by her party and the media, during the convention in St. Paul, as if she had just won 'American Idol.'"[57]

2.3: Issues of Age

The Millennial Generation is often criticized for a culture built around such television programs as "American Idol"—when, in fact, Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais stated that more Millennials have voted in a national US election than have voted for an *Idol* contestant.[58] The Millennial Generation is the first to be raised with access to

the Internet and is the largest and most ethnically diverse American generation.[59] It

makes sense, then, that age factored as an integral part of Obama's support.

During the primary election, the media drew attention to McCain's lack of

computer knowledge and reference to "a Google." Bai, in his role as chief political

correspondent for *The New York Times Magazine* stated, "Not knowing what Google is is

problematic."[60]

Generational differences like this became an important factor in the 2008 general

election. While Obama, born in 1961, is technically a Baby Boomer, many voters,

particularly in the Millennial Generation, associated him with GenerationX.[61] Andrew

Sullivan suggested in *The Atlantic* that Obama was capable of moving the country "past

the debilitating, self-perpetuating family quarrel of the Baby Boom generation."[62] While

the presidency of Bill Clinton in the 1990s and the Swift Boat attacks against presidential

candidate John Kerry in 2004 highlighted the Vietnam power struggle, Obama was not

imprisoned by this "Boomer legacy."[63] McCain, however, emphasized his identity as a

Vietnam Veteran and former P.O.W. while Obama was characterized as a young, modern

candidate.

In exploring this generational gap, Julie Bosman of *The New York Times* asked:

"Has ageism run rampant in mainstream discourse because America exalts youth?

Because older people, secure in their political clout, have transcended the notion that they

are a disadvantaged group? Or is the oldster an archetype so ingrained in the American

comic sensibility—a la 'Grumpy Old Men' and 'Golden Girls'—that it trumps identity

politics?"[64]

2.4: "New" Media

Thomas E. Patterson argued that news coverage is more of a barrier, or wedge, than a bridge that connects candidates and voters.[65] Historically, presidential candidates were forced to filter their appeals to voters through the news media, with the exception of televised debates; "new media," however, has lessened this reliance. Although we may associate the term new media with the Internet age, James W. Carey's seminal "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph" pointed out that many earlier communication technologies, such as the telegraph, were forms of new media, bringing change to journalism, language, and commerce.[66] For instance, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous radio addresses on specific topics related to the Great Depression and World War II, dubbed "fireside chats" by a White House reporter, can be viewed as a form of "new" media during the age of radio. During the presidential campaigns in 1988 and 1992, "new" media, in fact, were political talk radio and late night talk shows.

With the end of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, the popularity of talk radio increased, particularly with *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, which became nationally syndicated in 1988 and remains one of the most listened to talk show programs.[67] Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella argued that, though assessment of the most likely presidential candidates first fell to property-owning elites and later political party leaders, today, the conservative opinion media—defined by the political communication scholars as Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*—shoulder much of that function for Republican candidates.[68] Further, the authors suggested that these conservative media create a self-protective enclave, or echo chamber, through ideological coherence, reinforcement of views and values, and

inoculation from counter-persuasion.[69] Jamieson and Cappella called this balkanization,

arguing that this kind of rhetoric can create a "polarized view of political phenomena."[70]

Their research study of the 1996 presidential debates found that:

> No one was surprised to find Republicans who watched the debate saying
> that Dole did a better job. However, Republicans who were Limbaugh
> regulars did so more often than Republicans who were regular listeners of
> other talk shows and than Republicans who did not listen to PTR [political
> talk radio] regularly at all.[71]

While conservatives have dominated talk radio during the past several decades,

late night talk shows provided a "new media" outlet to both Democrats and Republicans.

In fact, Patterson pointed out that Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton's

popularity—and, as a newcomer from Arkansas to national politics, his notoriety—

increased when he reached voters directly through appearing on late night talk shows,

especially his saxophone performance on *The Arsenio Hall Show,* in 1992.[72] For the next

three presidential campaigns, in 1996, 2000, and 2004, much attention was paid to

television campaign coverage, both through late night talk show research and more

traditional television campaign advertising research—particularly after public outcry

regarding the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" commercials that undermined Democratic

presidential candidate John Kerry's credibility in 2004.[73]

Beginning in 1996, a "new" kind of new media had caught researchers' attention.

Studies began to explore how presidential candidates were using the Internet, mainly

through official campaign websites. These followed Senator Ted Kennedy's first website

for a national politician in 1993[74] and Governor Jesse Ventura's successful use of e-mail

in his 1998 campaign[75] as important milestones in the new media timeline. Many

researchers, such as Carol Anne McKeown and Kenneth D. Plowman, came to the same

conclusion: While campaign websites offered the ability to provide more in-depth content on issues, candidates were not using the new media to increase interaction between voters and candidates.[76] Specifically, the authors suggested, campaigns only communicated with and involved voters in ways that would benefit the campaign—notably through raising money.[77] In 2000, McCain's primary campaign helped pave the way for successful online donation-gathering and gave that candidate a web-savvy reputation— something often forgotten by 2008 when McCain was pegged as a fuddy-duddy, techno-phobic candidate. By 2004, research addressed topics ranging from a comparison of the press releases posted on the candidates' sites with newspaper content[78] to the kinds of material, such as walking lists, which users could download for offline involvement.[79] Other important "firsts," however, went largely unnoticed: few know, for example, that in 2004 John Kerry announced his vice-presidential choice of John Edwards first via e-mail[80]—four years before Obama would do the same with Joe Biden via text messaging.

The new, non-traditional media of today that is heralded as bringing unprecedented change to American politics therefore has a foundation of earlier new media, through talk radio, late night talk shows, and web 1.0 sites. The balkanization that Jamieson and Cappella described for political talk radio, for instance, is not so different from the "Daily Me" that Cass Sunstein lamented is exasperated by partisan websites and political blogs.[81] Kate Kaye, author of *Campaign '08: A Turning Point for Digital Media,* emphasized that technology watersheds in fact build on previous frameworks, suggesting, "…the use of the Internet by the 2008 campaigns was evolutionary rather than revolutionary."[82]

In 2008, the novelty of new media was centered on web 2.0 participatory applications, such as blogs and web-based communities. Some of this interest stemmed from the notorious fundraising success of 2004 Democratic primary candidate Howard Dean's "Blog for America." Studies explored how blogs were correlated with political participation,[83] and such researchers as Kaye D. Sweetser Trammell questioned whether blog posts were strategically used to reach young voters (her content analysis suggested they were not, with findings that only 8 percent of posts were effective in reaching this group[84]). The social networking of 2008 took blog research one step further and offered some new areas of study. But again, these web-based communities were not necessarily "new."

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia written and updated by a community of users that is in itself a type of social networking website, defines a social network service as one that "focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities."[85] In 1995, Sherry Turkle referred to virtual communities as "a new kind of community,"[86] and as early as 1993 Howard Rheingold described virtual communities in online networks as very real communities.[87] In *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, he heralded the advances of computer-mediated communication (CMC), specifically through ARPANET and other computer bulletin-board systems (BBSs):

> I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives. I also suspect that these new media attract colonies of enthusiasts because CMC enables people to do things with each other in new ways, and to do altogether new kinds of things—just as telegraphs, telephones, and televisions did.[88]

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And long before Facebook or YouTube, such sites as eBay, Craig's List, and Napster helped users get what they wanted from each other through the Internet.

What was new in 2008 was how political candidates were using participatory websites, and how, as James Surowiecki pointed out in *The Wisdom of Crowds,* campaign communities were working toward the collective development of information.[89] In other words, campaign online communities in 2008 contributed to setting the agenda for what was best and relevant for the campaign (a bottom-up approach) to a greater extent than in previous campaigns, when the agenda was in large part dictated by the campaign (a top-down approach). This change in political campaigning includes the popular "Obama Girl"[90] and "Vote Different"[91] user-generated YouTube videos, providing the chance to explore power hierarchies and opinion leaders within cybercommunities. These communities now have greater implications for mass media and journalism, and specifically public relations, as more and more Americans are spending greater amounts of time online and as communication technology makes creating videos or embedding URLs simpler and more accessible than ever before. Further, the low cost and prevalence of Internet access, and particularly high-speed Internet, in 2008 influenced the use of this kind of technology.

2.5: Framing

Many studies have used Framing as a theoretical and methodological approach in mass communication and journalism and in political science research. Authors such as Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella,[92] Robert Entman,[93] Dietram A.

Scheufele and David Tewksbury, [94] and George Lakoff[95] have contributed to the rise of Framing to explain, essentially, that, "It's not what you say, it's how you say it."[96]

However, the self-descriptive aspects of Erving Goffman's notion of Framing are often overlooked in present-day Framing theory as used by researchers. In *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Goffman (drawing on Gregory Bateson) developed the basis of sociological Framing theory: "Definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them."[97] In other words, through Framing, certain views are made more salient and meaningful. Goffman put it this way: "…The meaning of an object or act is a product of social definition and that this definition emerges from the object's role in the society at large."[98]

Goffman's Framing uses interpretive sociology, as he explained: "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them: frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase 'frame analysis' is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience."[99] The Symbolic Interactionist perspective of Goffman's Framing is especially appropriate for the qualitative textual analysis of interactive communication in this study.

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman described one's personal identity: "He is a concrete organism with distinctively identifying marks, a niche in life. He is a selfsame object perduring over time and possessing an accumulating memory of the voyage. He has a biography. As part of this personal identity, he claims a multitude of capacities or

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functions—occupational, domestic, and so forth."[100] The intersecting issues of race,

gender and age were explored in this study from the perspective of the different roles the

candidates played. "… Each individual will … perform more than one role. Each

individual will, therefore, have several selves, providing us with the interesting problem

of how these selves are related,"[101] suggested Goffman.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman described how performers

work to represent themselves, defining a performance as, "all the activity of a given

participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other

participants."[102] Specifically, Goffman extended and gave deeper analytic meaning to the

notion that "all the world's a stage" through his model of Impression Management. He

described the concept of self as a "theatrical performance" in which one expresses

himself or herself and others are, in turn, "impressed" by him or her.[103] Goffman

suggested that, "sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner,

expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others

that is likely to evoke from them a specific response."[104] He also addressed how

audience members interpret these impressions when he asked, "… What message is the

message to be seen in, what systematic, word-by-word rereading is to be given it?"[105]

Some studies have used Impression Management as a framework in studying

political campaigns. Peter Hall applied Goffman's ideas to the presidencies of Carter and

Ford, suggesting that political impression management represents "processes of power,"

including the gathering of information and the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols.[106]

James Mayo, Jr. used Goffman to analyze political rallies,[107] and Joanna Gillespie

focused on how Impression Management can be used to study the wives of political

officials, including Martha Washington, Dolly Madison, Sarah Polk, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon, and Rosalynn Carter.[108]

Of course, these particular studies were conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s before the widespread public use of the Internet and computer-mediated-communication. While Goffman developed the metaphor of theatre to apply to face-to-face communication in 1958, self-presentation can be applied to the CMC of the 2008 presidential election, 50 years after his seminal book was first published. Karen S. Johnson-Cartee suggested that, "While Goffman's impression management is a dominant scientific theory within interdisciplinary academic literature focusing on corporate leadership, very few researchers have utilized this approach within the political realm, which is unfortunate in that the political arena is an ideal setting for impression management studies."[109] If we consider a political campaign and the candidates within that campaign as Goffman's performers, then Barack Obama, John McCain, Joe Biden, Sarah Palin, and the candidates' spouses worked to "…act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing [the candidates] in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke … a specific response"[110]—with the endeavored response as political support and one's vote. The stage, props, and costumes that Goffman described can be applied to web content, both through content posted by the campaigns as well as content posted by users. The online communication chosen, such as e-mail or Facebook, can be viewed as the stage; embedded videos can be viewed as props; and clothing choices can be viewed as costumes.

In his monograph *Gender Advertisements*, Goffman specifically addressed how visual content was framed, providing relevancy for studying the impact of multimedia

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content, such as videos and photographs, in how the candidates were framed. His analysis of advertisements relates to gender power through advertisements in which, for example, a woman is taller than a man only when the man is her social inferior, or in advertisements that feature a man instructing a woman.[111]

User-generated content on websites like Facebook and YouTube showed that there was greater power in the hands of users to frame the candidates in 2008 than in the campaigns and media of earlier elections. This power shift was illustrated by campaign staffers, Goffman's "performance team,"[112] who wrote blogs, produced video clips, and posted an extraordinary amount of website material in haste to keep up with the multitude of user-generated comments and content.

Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley suggested that Goffman can be read in a wide variety of ways,[113] describing his books as "kaleidoscopes, which give a different view every time they are turned."[114] Johnson-Cartee identified five areas of how Impression Management can be applied in politics: first impressions, life narratives, vision narratives, minor narrative forms (such as metaphors), and interwoven communications, since "political impressions … in one medium …will not reappear in other media as well."[115] These five areas will be explored in the framing of the candidates and their spouses in this study. Particularly in regard to interwoven communications, a secondary framework of public relations theory will assist in analyzing the influence of new media on how the candidates were framed.

2.6: Situational Theory of Publics

The Situational Theory of Publics was introduced by James Grunig in 1984, long before campaigns were managing candidate websites, let alone Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter accounts; however, similar to Goffman's Framing, its key concepts can effectively be applied to how both the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns adapted messaging to online publics. That this theory has been underused reinforces the need to expand its application to the social networking environment of the 2008 campaign.

Moreover, Grunig's theory provides a public relations lens with which to analyze the effects of new media in 2008. Segmentation of audiences is an important component of current public relations research.[116] The Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns assigned different values to online publics; and how they prioritized online communication to a segmented audience that, in large part, was young, is important in understanding how age played a vital role in how the candidates were framed.

Although the Internet has changed how political campaigns are conducted, the targeting of specific voters remains important to overall candidate success. Voters can be targeted by age, gender, race, religion, socio-economic status, and even zip code. As shown in this study, the 2008 candidates targeted online publics based on the specific demographics of race, gender, and most of all, when considering the success of Obama's appeal to online publics, through age.

Grunig suggested that "the publics that develop around problems or issues differ in the extent to which they are aware of the problem and the extent to which they do something about the problem."[117] Drawing from Dewey's description of publics,[118]

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Grunig proposed the three concepts of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement—with the latter most pertinent for participatory websites—to explain how strategic communication can be most successful.[119] Essentially, the major tenet of the Situational Theory of Publics applied to this study is: "…An involved public usually will be the most active public."[120]

The active publics Grunig described may be involved through writing a letter (or, in a new media analogy, posting to a blog) or attending a rally (which, in 2008, could be virtually attended by watching a live video feed). These examples show that the same principles from Grunig's description of involvement in citizens' organizations apply to online communities.

2.7: Research Questions

Using Goffman's Framing and Impression Management as a major theoretical framework and Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics as a secondary theoretical framework, this study of the 2008 presidential election draws on qualitative research techniques in its overall design. It employs textual analysis, including rhetorical analysis, complemented with in-depth interviews, focus groups, and self-reports, to address three research questions:

RQ1: How and in what ways did the candidates work to represent themselves in terms of race, gender, and age through their campaign websites, social networking websites, and campaign-generated e-mails?

RQ2: How and in what ways did users interpret the candidates' identity in terms of race, gender, and age through the candidates' campaign websites, social networking websites, and campaign-generated e-mails?

RQ3: How and in what ways did users represent the candidates' identity in terms of race, gender, and age through blog comments on the candidates' campaign websites and through social networking websites?

These three qualitative research questions were used to reveal how the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential candidates used participatory websites to manage their identities and how online publics, in turn, responded to this new kind of campaign discourse.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative research project encompassed textual analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and self-reports as methods to explore how the 2008 Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns and web users framed race, gender, and age. First, the researcher used textual analysis to thematize how the candidates were represented by the campaigns and how the candidates were represented by web users. Next, analysis of transcripts from fourteen in-depth interviews and three focus groups and self-reports of undergraduate students were used in conjunction with textual analysis to determine how users interpreted the campaign representations of the candidates in terms of race, gender, and age. The interview, focus group, and self-report data was also used to glean insight into user-created web content that represented the candidates in terms of race, gender, and age.

3.1: Textual Analysis[*]

Textual analysis provides the opportunity to clarify how the candidates showcased their identities and how these identities were managed through situating the texts of the 2008 campaign in the larger political and cultural context. As public relations scholar Patricia Curtin pointed out, through this methodology, "text is the means to the study in textual analysis, not the end."[121] Written text (e.g., e-mails, blog posts, Wall posts) and video (e.g., YouTube videos, speech clips embedded in blog posts, campaign

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[*] Institutional Review Board approval was not required for textual analysis in this study because the definition of human subject from the federal regulations (45 CFR46) was not met. That definition is: "A living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information." The websites used in this study were all public (open to anyone) and the researcher did not interact or intervene in any way. User names cited in this study were anonymized by the author.

advertisements embedded to an official campaign website home page) were examined; rhetorical components, such as font size and style, were also included within this analysis. Because the purpose of this study is to explore how the candidates and users represented the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns in terms of race, gender, and age, both official campaign content and user-generated content were examined.

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin suggested a grounded theory methodology when conducting qualitative research in areas where relatively little is known.[122] With the participatory web changing at such a rapid pace, and the emergence of social networking sites since the 2004 presidential campaign, this study of this topic will contribute to a growing understanding of how candidates and users are responding to this new kind of campaigning. Strauss and Corbin added: "Some will use our techniques to generate theory, others for the purpose of doing very useful description or conceptual ordering (classifying and elaborating)."[123] This study uses the latter as the methodological approach with textual analysis through open and axial coding[124] of a three-dimensional matrix—(1) communication media; (2) campaign strategy, communication, and user response; and (3) presidential and vice-presidential candidates—with Framing and Situational Theory of Publics as theoretical frameworks. This allows the findings to emerge through discovery,[125] while drawing on established theory relevant to race, gender, and age.

Some web 2.0 studies of the 2008 presidential election may focus on Facebook, or YouTube, or Twitter, but the goal of this study is to examine communication through the candidates' official websites and social networking websites in a more comprehensive, integrated way. The overall strategies that were employed—particularly

those that showcased the candidates as black and white, as a woman or man, and as young or old—through a multitude of communication technology outlets will provide important understanding for future elections and candidates.

In this vein, along with official website and social networking website texts, e-mail messages sent by the campaigns were also analyzed. Although sites like Facebook and YouTube did not exist in the 2004 presidential election, e-mail has been used for several elections now. It was therefore important to look at how this established form of communication was being used in conjunction with new applications. E-mails can illustrate prominence given to a subject, if the subject of a blog post was echoed in an e-mail message sent to supporters. E-mails can also make the sender more salient to issues of gender, such as if a McCain campaign e-mail was signed by Palin or an Obama campaign e-mail was signed by Michelle Obama. Kate Kaye provided further support for including this communication technology in her book, *Campaign '08: A Turning Point for Digital Media*: "It was the election when everything digital seemed to come together: the communication building, the organizational tools, the video, the social networking, the blogger engagement, the e-mail…"[126]

Kaye also emphasized how closely online paid advertising and public relations go hand-in-hand, and for this reason this study also includes the top 100 results, for Columbus, Ohio, in Google searches of the candidates' and vice-presidential candidates' names. Ohio has long been viewed as a bellwether state, one that both political pollsters and pundits look to as a gauge of the national political climate, with Columbus as the state's capital. E-mails analyzed in this study were those sent to an online subscriber designated from Columbus, Ohio (since campaigns now target different e-mails to users

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in different states and regions), and the Google search results reflect those for an ISP address in Columbus, Ohio (since Google results are also geographically affected). While many studies of the 2008 campaign may focus solely on social networking, or one aspect of social networking, this comprehensive web 2.0 study includes social networking and campaign web communication, e-mail communication, and Google search results—all targeted to a politically important Midwestern state.

Of course, analyzing data for official campaign websites, social networking websites, campaign e-mails, and Google results throughout a general election is a very large task. Data was collected each week on the mid-day of Wednesday, which included the day *before* the vice-presidential debate (October 1), the day *after* the second presidential debate (October 8), and the day *of* the third presidential debate (October 15). A single sample was used across all media to make the data consistent. The week before Labor Day was included as it was the week of the Democratic National Convention, while Labor Day week was the week of the Republican National Convention;[*] in this way, both conventions were included in the sample, as opposed to a traditional Labor Day start date. October 15, 2008 was chosen as the end date as it was the day of the last presidential debate and when early voting had begun. Moreover, interviews and focus groups conducted October 22 through October 29 provided analysis of the final weeks of the campaign. The weekly web data sample, then, consisted of the dates: August 27, September 3, September 10, September 17, September 24, October 1, October 8, and October 15.

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[*] Data on vice-presidential candidates Biden and Palin began on September 3, when Palin accepted the vice-presidential nomination for the Republican Party.

For these sampled dates, data collected included:

(1) Official campaign website home pages for Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin;

(2) Official campaign website blog posts and user comments for Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin;

(3) Official campaign-generated e-mails for Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin;

(4) Official press releases posted by Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin;

(5) Official Facebook home pages for Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin;

(6) Official Facebook user Wall posts for Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin;

(7) Official MySpace home pages for Obama, McCain, and Biden (and search results for Palin, who did not have a MySpace page);

(8) Official YouTube home pages for Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin;

(9) YouTube search results for Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin, including most relevant[*] and most popular[**] campaign-generated and user-generated videos listed under those results, and user comments on those videos;

(10) Official Twitter home pages for Obama and McCain (and search results for Biden and Palin, who did not have Twitter pages), and live tweets that tagged the candidates during the third debate, when both Obama and McCain had Twitter pages;

(11) Wikipedia home pages for Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin; and,

(12) Google search results[***] for Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin.

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[*] Data was collected for the first 20 relevant videos listed, which consisted of the first page of hits.

[**] "Most popular" was designated as videos that had a view count of 100,000 or higher.

[***] Google searches collected the top 100 search results for Columbus, Ohio (recognizing geographic search engine bias).

Each date of data collection included web content from 8 a.m. until the following morning at 8 a.m. This 24-hour period made more sense than a 12 a.m. to 12 p.m. collection for several reasons. First, data was collected in Columbus, Ohio, with Eastern Daylight Time (EDT); collecting data after midnight provided online discussion that occurred after 9 p.m. on the West Coast, with Pacific Daylight Time (PDT). Second, blogs posted by the Obama-Biden campaign, including the popular "Open Thread," were often posted after midnight EDT, and were never posted before 8 a.m. EDT.[127] Third, collecting data during the early morning hours captured more complete threads from blogs that were posted the day and evening before. Finally, web users, especially on Facebook, tended to be especially conversational in the early morning hours.

The data collected for just eight sampled dates of the campaign was staggering: 16 campaign website home pages; 171 campaign blogs and 42,584 user blog posts; 22 emails; 8 press releases; 32 Facebook home pages; 33,600 user Facebook posts; 24 MySpace home pages; 16 YouTube home pages; 20 campaign YouTube videos; 42 user YouTube videos; 43 YouTube user comments; 12 Twitter home pages; 264 Tweets; and 32 Wikipedia home pages. For this study 76,886 separate items were analyzed.

All content was read by the author without the use of qualitative software, since a search for a word like "race" would have returned references to the campaign as a race, along with words related to skin color. Moreover, racism, sexism, and ageism manifested itself in many different ways without the use of such keywords as "race," "sex," or "age," requiring reading of individual posts.

Repeated user posts that appeared twice or more in a row were only coded once, assuming this was likely the result of a technical glitch or mistake in posting, as

evidenced by comments immediately afterwards such as, "Sorry about the double post."[128] The rare occurrence of repeated comments that were posted in separate discussion threads, however, were coded as two separate items, since this was likely intentional on the part of the user who posted, and the post may have been read by additional users in a different thread.

Videos that appeared more than once on the candidates' website and YouTube pages were only coded once. Most videos appeared on the sites every week, and so would have been coded up to sixteen times—eight weeks of website content and eight weeks of YouTube content—and would have therefore skewed the results of this study.

User comments, particularly on Facebook, were not omitted from this study because of references in the user name or profile picture that suggested non-US citizens or those who were not of voting age. This is because many users who had a high school listed in their profile network commented that they were, in fact, freshmen in college; in this way, biographical information may not have always been up to date. Other users commented that although their profile was listed as Paris, France, for example, they were US citizens living abroad.

While textual analysis highlighted key themes that emerged of how the candidates represented themselves and how users represented the candidates in terms of race, gender, and age through their official websites, social networking websites, and e-mails, this exploration would be incomplete if it did not follow up on whether users were persuaded by the candidates' strategies and if the identities the candidates attempted to represent in fact matched how users viewed them. Moreover, John Creswell noted that all researchers bring their own worldviews and paradigms to a research project,[129] and as

a researcher I have a particular worldview influenced by my professional background and involvement in Democratic politics.[*] Additionally, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln stated "…research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity."[130] It is my hope that the biases that stem from my background and the fact that I am a white woman were tempered through a multi-method approach to my research through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and self-reports to balance and complement textual analysis.

3.2: In-depth Interviews[**]

Andrea Fontana and James Frey suggested interviews are "one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings,"[131] and this approach is well-suited to determining how users are responding to the candidates' websites, social networking sites, and e-mails. Because of interest in the field of communications related to how young people are using new media, and social networking sites in particular, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Ohio University undergraduate students. Research, such as that done by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, continues to suggest that young people are the ones who are most using Internet websites. A report titled "Teens and Technology" states that "not only has the wired share of the teenage population grown, but teens' use of the

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[*] The author was legislative aide to Democratic State Representative John R. Bender (1999-2000) and Assistant Director of Communications to the Democratic Caucus (2000-2001) in the Ohio House of Representatives. Also, the author was Senator Joe Biden's driver for a day in 2006 and met Senator Barack Obama at a small, 50-person fundraiser in 2007.

[**] Institutional Review Board approval, 08X159, was granted by the IRB at Ohio Universitiy on October 16, 2008 to conduct in-depth interviews. Interview participants' names were anonymized by the author in this study.

Internet has intensified. Teenagers now use the Internet more often and in a greater variety of ways. …"[132] Additional Pew findings suggest that 58 percent of those aged 18 to 29 are using the Internet and/or text messaging "to get news about politics or to exchange their views about the race."[133] Many from this group of sophisticated Internet users had entered college and, more important, voted for the first time in the 2008 presidential election. Moreover, Doris Graber noted that once people have formed their basic attitudes about politics, these attitudes usually stabilize.[134] Therefore, interviewing college students who constituted part of this age group provided insight from those who were most politically engaged online and old enough to vote in the 2008 election. Ohio's status as a political barometer in national elections provides support for sampling students attending Ohio University—a large public university in Athens, Ohio, 90 miles from the state capital—to provide understanding of how the candidates successfully or unsuccessfully targeted key publics.

Fourteen face-to-face interviews were conducted on October 22, 23, and 24, 2008, two weeks before Election Day. Open-ended interviews are often favored since they do not impose "a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry."[135] Interview questions were broad enough to get at how users viewed the candidates' websites, social networking sites, and e-mails, and, specifically, what the users thought of the candidates' identities in terms of race, gender, and age. As a convenience sample, the 14 students were pooled from an Introduction to Mass Communication lecture course with an enrollment of 151 students, and represented a diversity of majors, from English to

Communications to Business to Undecided.[*] Participants ranged in age from 18 to 21, with a mean age of 19 (18.92). Eight women and six men were interviewed.

3.3: Focus Groups[**]

In-depth interviews gleaned important issues to further explore with users, leading to employment of focus groups to further facilitate understanding of how and in what ways users *interpreted* the candidates' identity in terms of race, gender, and age (RQ2). David Morgan defined focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction…" with the interaction of participants serving as the data source.[136] These interactive discussions that follow individual interviews provide rich data in that the participants respond and explain themselves to each other. Morgan suggested: "This strategy has the advantage of getting reactions from a relatively wide range of participants in a relatively short time."[137] In fact, he added that two eight-person focus groups might generate the same number of ideas as ten individual interviews.[138] However, Fontana and Frey cautioned that focus groups are not meant to replace interviewing,[139] and the methodology of focus groups was therefore used in conjunction with interviews in this study.

Moreover, the inclusion of focus groups addressed the limitation of the use of Framing as method in this study. As Stephen Reese, Oscar Gandy, Jr., and August Grant noted in *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the*

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[*] A minimal amount of extra credit was provided to students who agreed to participate. Criteria mandated that subjects be: (1) English-speaking, (2) female or male at least 18 years old (of voting age), and (3) attending Ohio University as a full-time student.

[**] Institutional Review Board approval, A 08X159, was granted by the IRB at Ohio Universitiy on October 20, 2008 to conduct focus groups. Focus group participants' names were anonymized by the author in this study.

Social World, there exists the "slippery quality of many approaches to describing frames."[140] In order to help temper the author's personal views imported into the frames that emerged from textual analysis, focus groups functioned as "independent framers."

Janice Morse suggested that, "…the logic and power behind purposeful selection of informants is that the sample should be *information rich*."[141] Three focus groups were conducted on October 28 and 29, 2008: a six-member group consisting entirely of men and facilitated by a man researcher; an 11-member group consisting entirely of women and facilitated by a woman researcher; and a eight-member mixed group with four men and four women, conducted by both researchers. Like the interview participants, focus group participants were undergraduate students pooled from the Introduction to Mass Communication course at Ohio University. As this was a large lecture class of 151 students, some participants recognized each other but most were not familiar with one another as they might have been in a smaller class. The subjects had homogeneity in age, with a range of 18 to 22 and a mean age of 19 (19.0). Fifteen women and 10 men were included in the focus groups in total. Further, that they were not pooled from a political science or political communication course suggests that their participation was a more typical perspective of the campaign, versus an atypical campaign insider perspective.

Semi-structured questions, developed from interview findings, were asked in the funnel pattern described by Morgan, which begins with a core set of questions but allows flexibility in discussion for the variations of each group.[142] This provided elaboration of responses gleaned from the interview component of the study with a more rich investigation of how users are creating meaning from the candidates' official websites, social networking websites, and e-mails.

3.4: Self-reports[*]

In addition to interviews and focus groups, self-reports were collected in the form of campaign diaries from 27 undergraduate students, ranging in age from 18 to 21 and with a mean age of 19 (19.35); participants consisted of 15 women and 12 men.

Diaries, a methodology drawn primarily from psychology,[143] have been considered an accurate representation of behavior,[144] and online communication research further found a significant correlation between retrospective recall and diary data for general Internet use.[145] This study expands on the methodology of diaries to record behavioral data—such as logging on to a campaign website or watching a YouTube video—with responses to what was occurring in the general campaign. Participants were instructed to record seven days of responses during the campaign (which did not need to be consecutive) and to limit their responses to "what presidential campaign websites you have visited, what presidential networking websites you have visited, what features you have used on these websites, and what are your views of the candidates in terms of race, gender, and age?"

As with the transcribed interview and focus group data, diary entries were analyzed using Corbin's and Strauss' open and axial coding methods[146] with line-by-line coding.

Of the 66 total interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants, 40 (61 percent) considered themselves Obama supporters, 22 (33 percent) considered themselves McCain supporters, and four (6 percent) supported a third-party candidate. Moreover,

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[*] Institutional Review Board approval, A 08X159, was granted by the IRB at Ohio Universitiy on October 20, 2008 to collect self-reports. Self-report participants' names were anonymized by the author in this study.

there was a wide range of political knowledge among users, from those who had never seen a photograph of what Palin looked like or did not know how to pronounce her name, to volunteers who had met Obama or attended a Palin or Biden rally.

In these ways, the use of qualitative methods provides meaning and understanding of the process of how candidates represented themselves to online publics and, in turn, how users both interpreted and also worked to manage the candidates' identities. Textual analysis provided a way to explore the official websites, social networking websites, and e-mails in depth, while the interviews, focus groups, and self-reports strengthened findings by comparing this analysis to users' interpretations. Through this multi-method approach, how the candidates and users represented the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns in terms of race, gender, and age revealed some interesting and informative findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1: Overview

The 2008 general elections highlighted the differences between how the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns and web users represented the candidates in regard to race, gender, and age. Descriptive statistics can help to provide an overview of the data in this qualitative study; however, these statistics are not intended to provide representation of the general population. Both campaigns and users highlighted gender (43 percent) more than race (30 percent) or age (27 percent), particularly for vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, but users highlighted race and age to a much greater extent than did the campaigns, as shown in figures 1, 2, and 3; and table 1 (see Appendix).
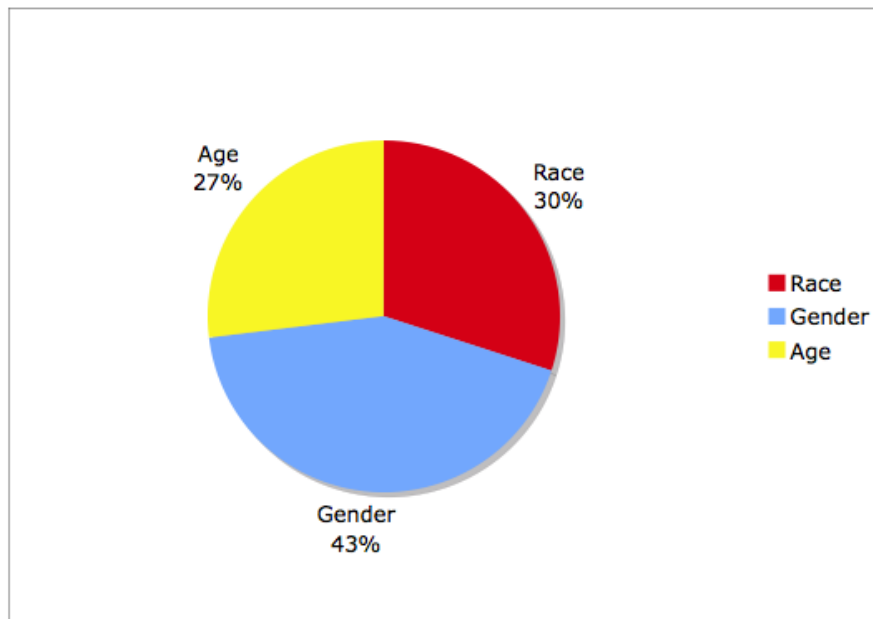
Figure 1. Overview of Combined Campaign & User-Generated Web Content on Race, Gender & Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-presidential Campaigns
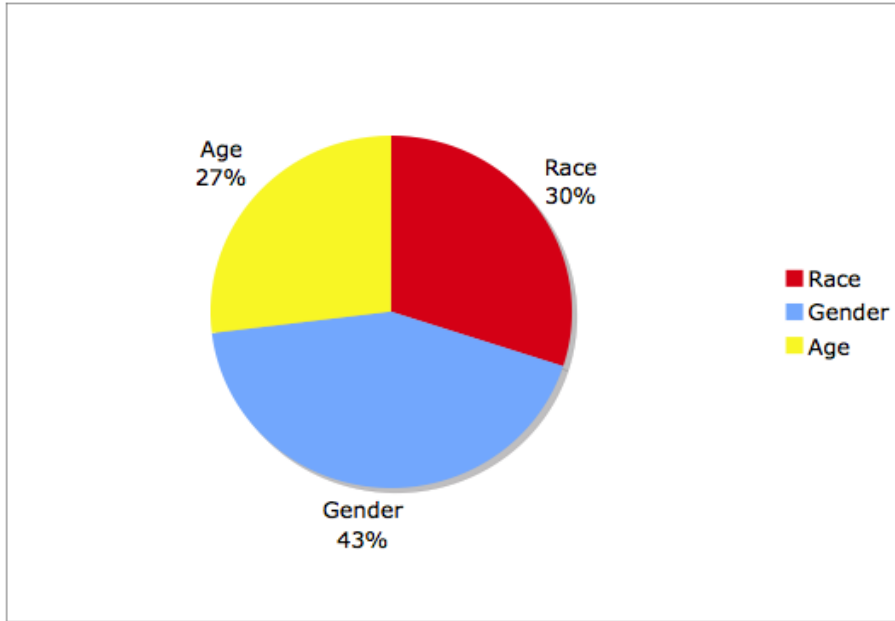
Figure 2. Campaign-Generated Web Content on Race, Gender, & Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns
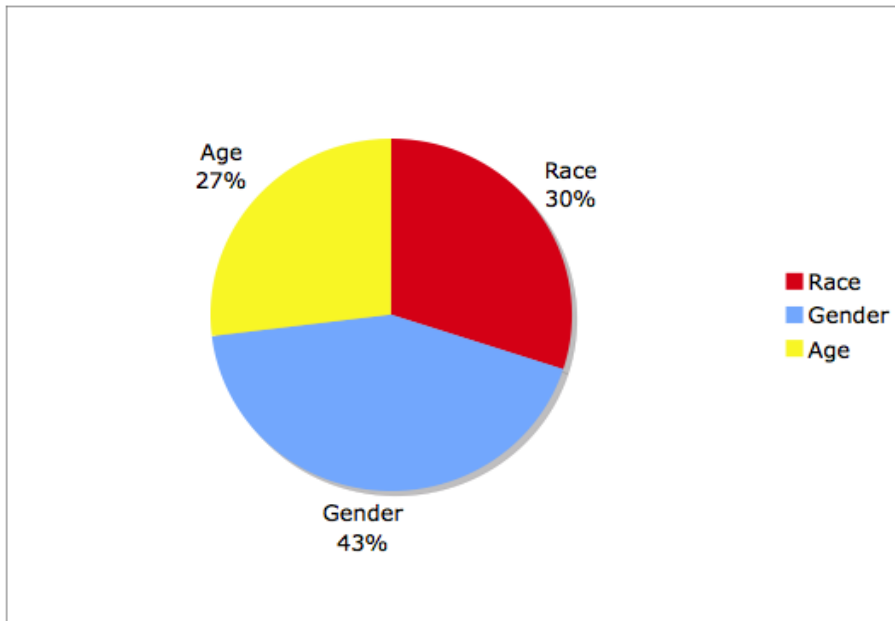
Figure 3. User-Generated Web Content on Race, Gender & Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

Web users' emphasis on age of the candidates is even more pronounced when examining the data for interviews, focus groups, and self-reports in this study. The Ohio University students focused much more on age (55 percent) than gender (28 percent) or race (17 percent), as shown in figure 4 and table 2 (see Appendix). This can likely be attributed to online versus face-to-face discourse, as participants may have been more reticent to talk about issues of race or gender out of fear of being perceived as racist or sexist.
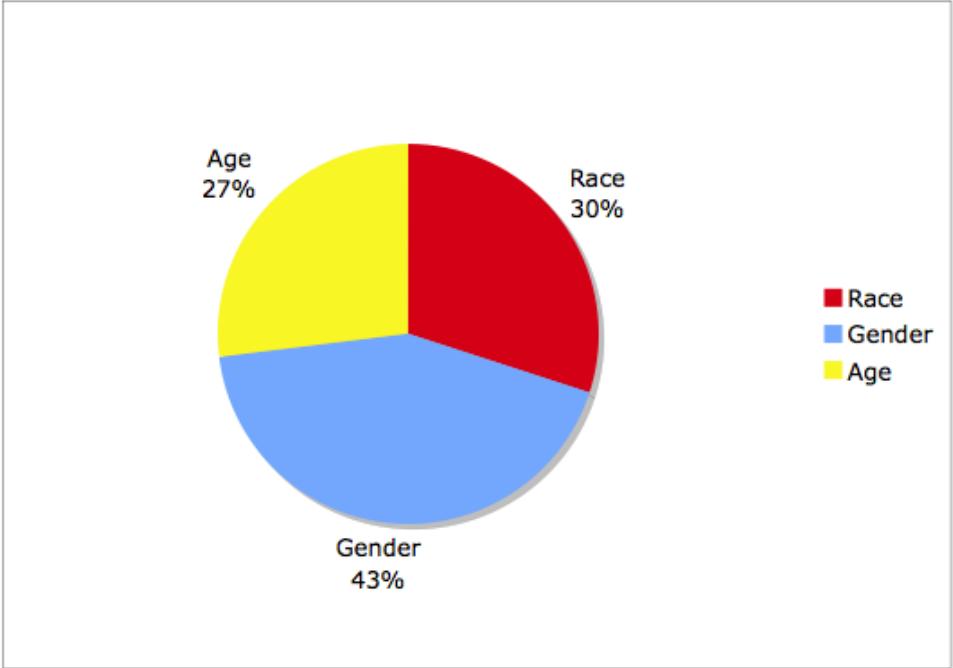
Figure 4. Overview of Content from Interview, Focus Groups, & Self-Reports on Race, Gender & Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

The web data, collected over eight weeks of the campaign, illustrated how race, gender, and age were highlighted by the campaigns and users as the 2008 presidential

race progressed, as shown in figure 5[*] and table 3 (see Appendix). Race was more

prominent at the beginning of the general election campaign, and spiked in week seven

with race-related events, such as criticism of debate moderator Gwen Ifill, author of *The*

Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama; and attention to racist supporters

attending McCain-Palin rallies. Gender-related discussion peaked during week three

with the announcement of Palin as the Republican vice-presidential candidate, with less

attention paid to gender as the weeks went by. Dialogue of the candidates' age increased

as the campaign progressed, perhaps indicating that McCain's age, in particular, became

more important to users as they learned more about Palin's experience.
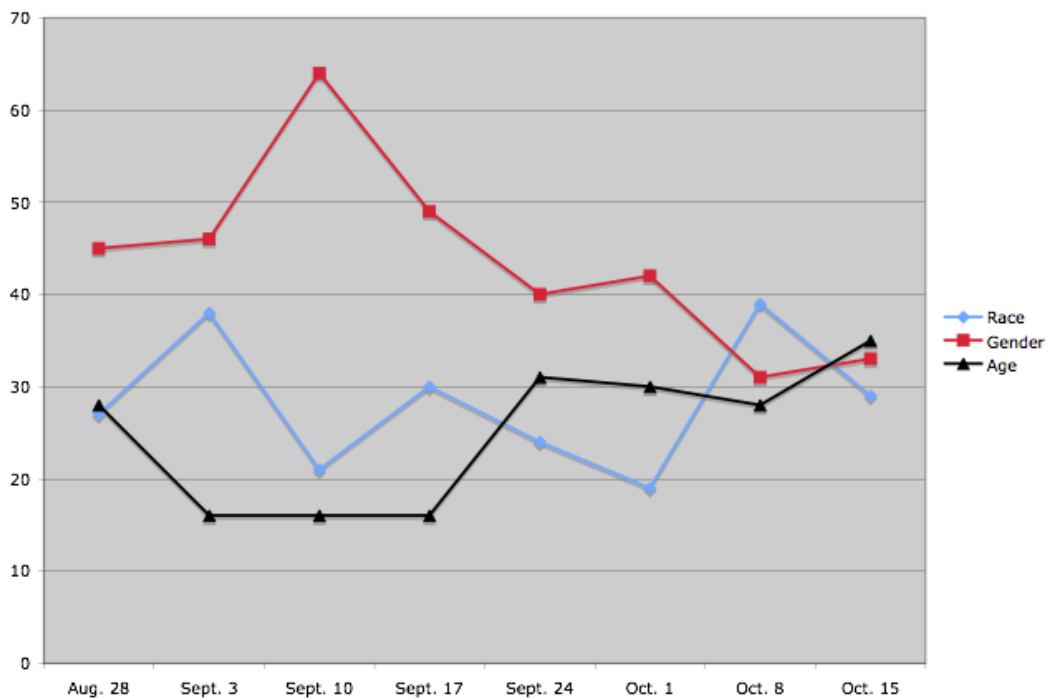
Figure 5. Web Content on Race, Gender & Age by Week in the 2008 Presidential
and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

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[*] Data from interviews, focus groups, and self-reports is not shown week-by-week
since this data was all collected during the final two weeks of the campaign.

Descriptive statistics further illustrate attention paid to vice-presidential candidate

Palin, with 22 percent of web content related to race, gender, and age: nearly as much

paid to each of the presidential candidates, with 25 percent for Obama and 31 percent for

McCain, as shown in table 1 (see Appendix) and figure 6.   Similar findings show

participants from interviews, focus groups, and self-reports discussed Palin 23 percent,

with 34 percent for Obama and 24 percent for McCain, as shown in table 2 (see

Appendix) and figure 7.   Findings throughout this chapter will reflect this statistic, with

emphasis on Obama, McCain, and Palin.
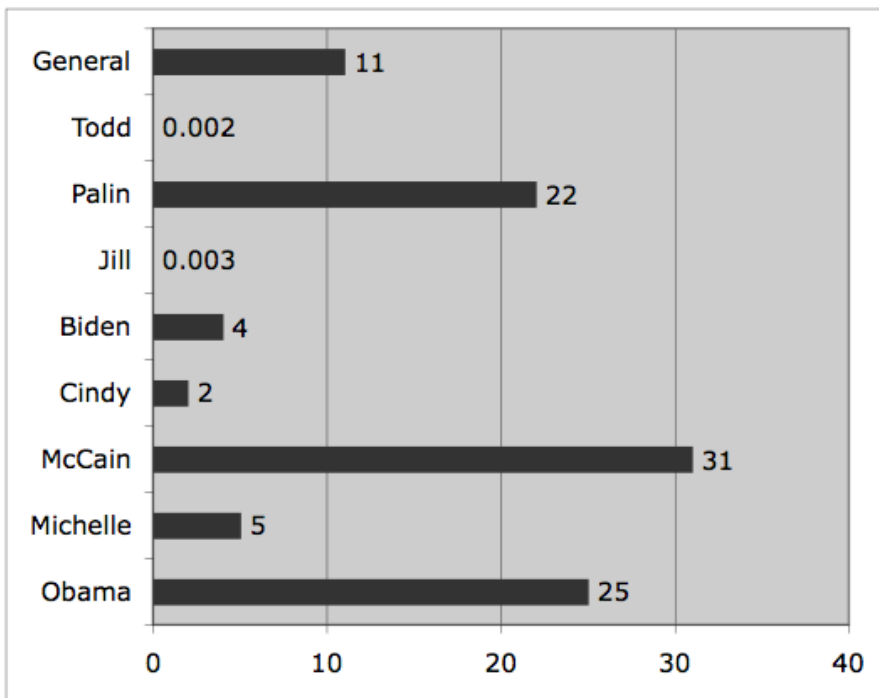
Figure 6. Frequency of Web Content Referencing Candidates and Spouses in Terms of
Race, Gender, or Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns
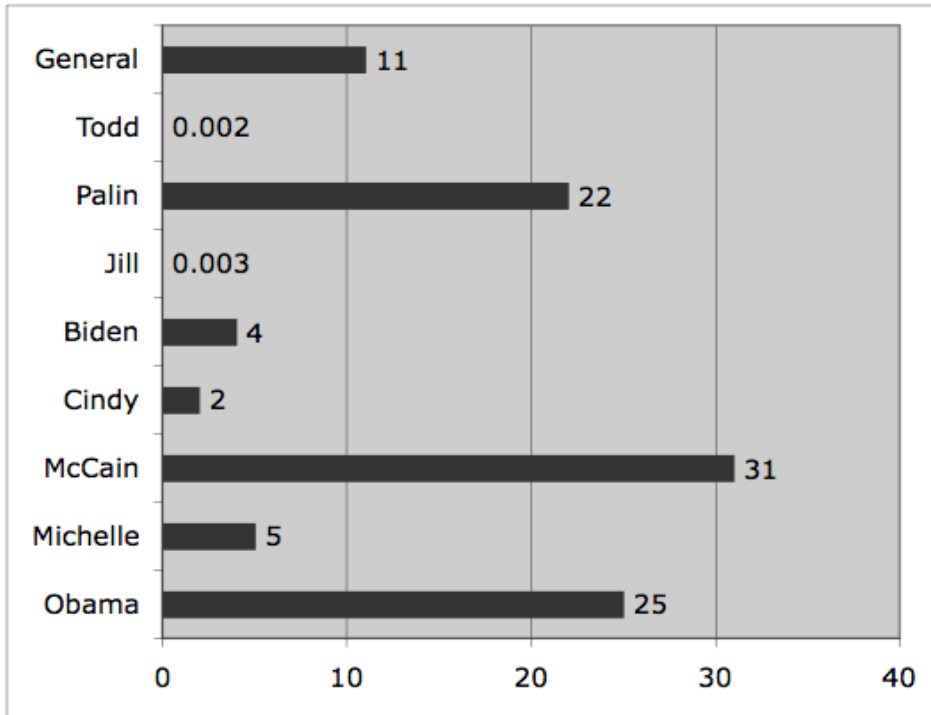
Figure 7: Frequency of Focus Group, Interview, and Self-Report Participants Referencing Candidates and Spouses in Terms of Race, Gender, or Age in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

4.2: Race

4.2.1: Campaign Themes

4.2.1.1: Campaign Theme 1: Obama's Balance Between Black and White

As a black presidential candidate, how did Obama highlight his race? Most overtly was his "A More Perfect Union" speech, given during the primary but featured on his YouTube channel throughout the general election campaign:

> … [The Constitution] would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part—through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk—to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

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This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign—to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together—unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction—towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story. I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. … I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave-owners. … It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. …

Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans. This is not to say that race has not been an issue in the campaign. … Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy – particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own. …[147]

Through this speech, Obama linked his campaign to the struggle for civil rights. This correlation was further shown through "Voter Registration: The Struggle in Mississippi," a video posted to his blog in which black men and women recalled their experiences in 1964:

| Sound bite, black man: | We used to have to lay out in the woods at night. My father would say, "Don't let 'em catch you in the house; they'll bomb the house and you'll get killed and burned up." That went on that whole summer. … One of the men, about a month after he registered, he was killed. And that haunted me for a long time. So people who feel that my vote |

	doesn't count, I think about that one man who lost his life. And I say, "They didn't want his vote to count."
Sound bite, black woman:	Too much blood was shed by men for you to callously say, "I don't need to vote. My vote won't count." Your vote will count. Every vote counts.
Sound bite, second black man:	That was an exciting time for us, because for the first time, we could register to vote and we could vote.
Voice-over, black woman with b-roll of registration drive with young white people in Obama shirts:	Obama's campaign is very similar to those days. You can't hardly tell the difference of one from the other.
Sound bite, Obama:	Hello, Columbus!
Voice-over, with b-roll of rally:	People are extremely excited about change.
Sound bite, black man:	There's so many exciting things and expectation is so great. It's a very good time.
Voice-over, black woman with b-roll of Obama logo:	Yes it is. That is the same. The feeling, back then and now, the excitement. Feeling engaged and empowered. You know, the possibility of thinking that this is possible. That feeling is the same.[148]

Other ways in which the Obama campaign highlighted race included website and

Facebook content. On the front page of his campaign website, Obama included

BlackPlanet as one of his social networking sites,[149] described by Wikipedia as, "an

online niche social-networking site targeted especially for the African American

community and … the 4th highest trafficked social-networking site [in December

2007]."[150] On Facebook, *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison was listed as Obama's

favorite book, some of Obama's favorite musicians were listed as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Stevie Wonder, and his favorite quotation was listed as, "The Arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice," by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[151]

More often, Obama used his supporters to address issues of race. At the Democratic National Convention (DNC), Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton gave an anticipated speech in support of her former rival, Senator Barack Obama, quoting the famous abolitionist Harriet Tubman: "If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep going. If there's shouting after you, keep going. Don't ever stop. Keep going. If you want a taste of freedom, keep going."[152]

The campaign used comedian Chris Rock to contrast Obama's candidacy with George W. Bush's presidency in terms of race: " … [During] the fires of L.A., [Bush] was there the next day. White people burning, he's there quick. Black people drownin' [in New Orleans]? No time. He was in California so fast, he was helpin' them out, he was putting out fires with Katrina water. He was pouring Katrina water on the fires."[153]

Another surrogate, Queen Latifah, a black rapper and actress, was used through a video posted to Obama's blog. In the clip, Latifah held signs that read, "Some people believe one person can't effect change. Over 50 million eligible voters are not registered. Register to vote right now. VoteForChange.com. Your vote is your voice."[154]

Black performers also served as surrogates for the campaign. The campaign held a free concert registration drive rallies with black rapper Jay-Z[155] and black musician John Legend, [156] and promoted both events on Obama's blog.

The supporters featured on the Obama-Biden website can also be considered surrogates. When interviewed, S4 noted that, "On Obama's site, when I was watching

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one of the videos there were black people rallying and stuff. And they also had other kinds of people so it wasn't just them, but you could tell if there was a McCain video it wouldn't have so many black people as that."[157] Photographs chosen by the campaign for blog posts included images such as two young white women holding two black babies.[158]

To a greater extent, however, the campaign presented the black candidate in a "less black" way. On Facebook, his favorite music included Bob Dylan and Johann Sebastian Bach;[159] his favorite movies listed were *Casablanca*, *Godfather I & II*, *Lawrence of Arabia* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.[160] While some may argue favorite music and movies are not representative of important issues dealing with race— like affirmative action or restitution—social media provides a unique opportunity to use white culture to help frame a political candidate. With significant numbers of white voters on a social networking site like Facebook, Obama secured a chance to connect with like-minded fans of Bob Dylan or the *Godfather* movies.

At the DNC, Michelle Obama's speech conveyed that the Obama family was just like any other American family.[161] The campaign video shown directly afterwards built on that theme, showcasing Obama in a white middle-class home surrounded by a white middle-class family. In addition, Obama remained calm and collected in campaign posted videos, even in the powerful aforementioned "A More Perfect Union" speech, therefore successfully avoiding any impression of an "angry, black man." This was a black candidate who could easily connect with white America.

The campaign also worked to connect with white voters through Obama's vice-presidential running mate, Senator Joe Biden. While religion was not examined as a

separate variable in this study, it is impossible to entirely separate issues of race and religion, and the campaign's emphasis on Biden's Catholicism is a clear example of Biden's "whiteness." On Facebook, Biden's profile included two favorite books: *American Gospel* and *Irish America*.[162] His two favorite quotations were from poets Seamus Heaney and John F. Kennedy.[163]

However, the campaign was careful to frame Biden as a white candidate who was also comfortable with black people and black culture. In a video posted to the campaign website, Biden's speech to the DNC ended with the song "We are Family" by Sister Sledge, a group composed of four black women, as the Biden family mingled on stage for hugs and photographs.[164]

4.2.1.2: Campaign Theme 2: McCain, Palin, the Republican Party and Race

The McCain campaign was faced with a real challenge in 2008: how to attack the opposition without being accused of being racist. The campaign was exceptionally careful not to address race in its web content, except in several indirect ways. One was to emphasize McCain's religion as a member of the North Phoenix Baptist Church,[165] a traditionally white affiliation. S16 suggested when interviewed that McCain, on his website, played up the fact that he was an "All American boy next door" type of guy,"[166] a description that carries with it the connotation of being white. Another more important indirect reference to race was the emphasis on Obama's message of change.

While "change" can be interpreted in a myriad of ways—change in foreign policy, change in economic policy, change in health care policy, etc.—it can be interpreted as racial change, as S10 suggested:

I feel the McCain campaign is feeding off the Obama campaign and its desire for change and instilling a sort of fear in people that, 'Do you really want change? Do you really want everything you know to change?' Because people are afraid of change, people are not comfortable with trying something new if they're not sure it's gonna work. And, truthfully, Obama is the epitome of change, because he's a black candidate; we've never had a candidate who wasn't white. It's different, especially for older people, I think, because they grew up in the time period when there was that transition from segregation through the civil rights movement to equality. I feel like, for them, it is difficult to see how Obama could be a legitimate candidate, because for them, growing up, they were always taught, 'Black people aren't as good as you' and stuff like that. Which obviously isn't the case.[167]

Users framed McCain as being racist in other ways. His political record was noted in McCain's Wikipedia[*] entry: "In 1983, McCain … opposed creation of a federal Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, but admitted in 2008: 'I was wrong and eventually realized that, in time to give full support [in 1990] for a state holiday in Arizona.'"[168] McCain was also viewed as racist during the presidential debates. Facebook users asked, "Anyone else noticing Obama looks at McCain as he answers, but McCain can't look at Obama? I think he's afraid if he looks too long at a black man, it might turn him black."[169]

Users also pointed to prejudice by the Republican Party. Real-time dialogue unfolded while members of the Facebook community connected online while watching the Republican National Convention:

Lisa: There's like ONE black guy in the entire audience, and they keep showing him.

Dot: Where are all the "exotic" people?

Emily: Last time I checked, America consisted of several races. Not just rich white folks!

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[*] Wikipedia is a social media site on which content may be written by campaign staff, but is often written, revised, and updated by web users.

Darren: As I said earlier they call it Republican Convention, but it smells like Klan to me.

Farhia: Really, they could have shipped in token people of color!

Mitch: You see the one poor old black lady in the back row? She is probably wondering, "Where is Obama?"

Darren: They probably have her serving.

Daniel: A Republican was asked yesterday, "What are the Repubs [sic] gonna do for blacks, Asians & Latinos at the RNC?" He replied, "Let them park our cars."

Katie: They've got the lowest black turn out in years. Only 2% of the delegates are black. Not to mention there are twice as many men there as women.

Jared: You're right. There were about four African Americans there, and probably three of them were reporters or journalists of some sort. There is a ton of white hair.

Farhia: It's like a White Christmas.

Lisa: There's the black guy again!

Farhia: Yayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy the one sole black man!!!!!!!!!!!!!![170]*

Users poked fun at the RNC's lack of black supporters, but they were outraged at

the perceived acceptance of the McCain-Palin campaign of racist remarks by supporters

attending Palin rallies during week seven of the campaign. A post on Obama's blog

provided an eloquent description of the controversial rallies:

> … McCain, on his stump speech, is asking crowds that he has warmed up
> with untruths about Senator Obama: "Who do you think he is?"

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* User comments were minimally edited by the author for clarity and easier readability; for instance, comments that did not include capitalization or punctuation. When incorrect grammar enhanced a user comment, however, such as showing exuberance with multiple exclamation marks, or included an emoticon or acronym (such as LOL, standing for "laugh out loud"), the comment remained unaltered. User names that did not appear to be pseudonyms were altered to protect web users' anonymity.

From within the all white crowd someone screams: "A terrorist."

McCain smiles. Permission to hate.

Palin fires up her all white crowd by stating that Senator Obama is "not like us" and implies that he hates America, and then she charges that he "pals around with terrorists." From within the all white crowd someone screams: "Kill him."

Palin smiles. Permission to hate.

… The Republican strategy is now to get the most rabid of their base stirred up into a frenzy. They have taken the right wing-nut talking points of Limbaugh and Hannity and lob them like red meat to the crowd.[171]

Fellow bloggers added: "I would hope for the love of God and country that the FBI and Secret Service deal with McCain and Palin inciting violence and racial hate crimes. It's not just those folks yelling, 'Kill him.' They were encouraged by McCain and Palin. … There are limits to free speech and McCain, Palin and the GOP have demonstrated those limits by crossing a very, very dangerous line."[172] "Their behavior is reminiscent of those persons in Germany and in the old south,"[173] suggested another. Even as careful as the campaign was not to appear racist, McCain, Palin, and the Republican Party were still framed by many users as being racist.

4.2.2: User Themes

4.2.2.1: User Theme 1: Racism in 2008

A weakness of the World Wide Web as an open public forum is that speech that may be ruled obscene or hateful by a court of law is often tolerated. In this study, racist remarks were avoided on the candidates' blogs, but were prevalent on the candidates' Facebook pages, where the overwhelming number of Wall posts made it impossible for

the campaigns (or Facebook administrators) to monitor and eliminate every inappropriate post.

Blatant, revolting racist comments posted to Facebook included, "Keep the White House white,"[174] "I fear for the world with a primate in charge of the USA,"[175] and "Spank that wet behind the ears manchild."[176]

Others told racist "jokes," such as "I don't care who is president, as long as he does not have to eat chicken, peas and watermelon at every mealtime,"[177] and "What three things can't you give a black man? A black eye, a fat lip and the presidency."[178]

The term "nigger" was also heavily used on Facebook discussion boards, such as the comment: "fuck obama your nigger ass would be the worst president this country has ever had! … if you somehow pull out a victory over mccain i bet you'll do a terrible job and be a suckish president [sic]."[179]

As ugly as these findings are, comments made by participants in interviews, focus groups, and self-reports did not include any racist slurs or jokes. This difference between online and face-to-face discourse will be discussed in chapter five.

4.2.2.2: User Theme 2: Historic Significance

Despite the racist remarks made on Facebook, most Facebook users, along with campaign website users and participants in interviews, focus groups, and self-reports, described Obama's race in a positive way: historic significance. Many shared statements such as, "Obama & Michelle are the new face of this country."[180] A flurry of excited dialogue was posted on the night of Obama's nomination at the Democratic National Convention, such as, "I'm soooooo excited about this historic moment!"[181] and,

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... I GIVE YOU THE NOMINEE OF THE

DEMOCRATIC PARTY, THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN IN HISTORY TO BE

GRANTED SUCH AN HONOR, AND IT'S ABOUT TIME, HIS NAME IS: BARACK

OBAMA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"[182] Others cited historic references from the civil rights

movement such as "We shall overcome,"[183] and referenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

and his "I Have A Dream" speech directly, with statements such as, "For the fierce

urgency of now!"[184] Focus group participant S18 referenced Dr. King indirectly with

fears that, "Obama's going to be assassinated because he's African American."[185] Most

comments related to historic significance, however, were positive, with users expressing

pride in the role they played in electing the first black president of the United States.

4.3: Gender

4.3.1: Campaign Themes

4.3.1.1: Campaign Theme 1: Wooing Hillary Supporters

Even after Clinton's "Glass Ceiling" concession speech, many Clinton supporters

remained committed to their candidate throughout the summer. As the DNC convened in

Denver on August 25, some delegates still claimed to support Clinton. As a result, the

Obama-Biden campaign carefully orchestrated the role Clinton would play at the

convention and throughout the campaign.

Her biggest role was speaking to the delegates—and, more important, a national

television audience—during primetime and nominating Obama as the Democratic

nominee. In the speech, streamed live on the Obama website, Clinton solicited support

for Obama, stating, "Whether you voted for me, or voted for Barack, the time is now to

unite as a single party with a single purpose. We are on the same team, and none of us

can sit on the sidelines."[186]

Later that evening, after Clinton's speech, the campaign sent an e-mail from

Clinton, reiterating her support of Obama, to those on Clinton's e-mail list:

Dear Erin,

Standing on that stage tonight in front of 20,000 Democrats unified
behind Senator Obama, I saw a bright future for America. I saw millions
of people across the country working as one to elect the next Democratic
President. I saw a new President and a new Congress giving a voice to the
voiceless. I saw America, the land of endless potential, regaining its role
as a leader in the world.

I couldn't be prouder of our party, of our nominee, and of all the
work you and I have done together over the course of this campaign on
behalf of the American people.

I knew that as I stood in front of that podium, I wasn't alone. I had
you, and everyone who has supported me, standing right up there with me.
And that means the world to me.

Thank you again for everything you've done. Now let's get to
work helping elect Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and all of our great
Democratic candidates!

Sincerely, Hillary[187]

The Obama-Biden campaign was careful in its strategy to appeal to Clinton

supporters by having Clinton communicate directly with those on her e-mail list. This

was not a message from Obama sent to Clinton's registered supporters; nor was it a

message from Clinton sent to Obama's registered supporters. Both Obama and Clinton

had separate messaging through separate channels, but together, they were both building

support for Obama through presenting minimal or overt support from Clinton, depending

on the audience.

Perhaps the Obama-Biden campaign anticipated many Clinton supporters would log on to the site after watching her speech at the DNC or receiving her e-mail in support of Obama. The featured blog entry, located where a new user's eye could easily catch it, on the upper-middle left of the front page, was "Senator Hillary Clinton Addresses the Democratic National Convention." The introductory text quoted Clinton saying, "Barack Obama is my candidate. And he must be our President."[188] It continued with the description:

> Senator Hillary Clinton took to the podium tonight and delivered a resounding speech to the assembled delegates and to Americans across the nation. As one of the most groundbreaking candidates ever to run for the Presidency, Senator Clinton has inspired millions of women and men with her unyielding commitment to the causes that we all care so deeply about. And tonight, she left no doubt about what we all must do to face the challenges ahead of us: unite behind Barack Obama and present a fully unified Democratic Party to the country and the world. Senator Clinton's speech was a stirring reminder that presidential campaigns are not about a single person, but about the power of what people can do when they come together to unite for change.[189]

By clicking on "Continue Reading," a user was taken to the full blog entry with accompanying video of the full speech.[190] The twenty-three minute speech was also included as a "favorite" video on Obama's YouTube page, netting 22,454 views during the week of the DNC.[191]

A blog entry, titled "Scenes from the Convention Floor: Hillary Clinton," was an entire Flickr slideshow dedicated to photographs of Clinton's speech.[192]

Most notably, the front page of Obama/Biden's site included a new feature: a box announcing, "Welcome Hillary Supporters" with an image of a smiling Clinton.[193] By clicking on the "Get Involved" link in this box, users were directed to a page, "Join our National Movement for Change" with the accompanying text:

Senator Clinton made history in her historic campaign—not just because she broke barriers, but because she inspired millions of Americans with her strength, her courage, and her commitment to causes like universal health care that make a difference in the lives of hardworking Americans. It's up to us now to come together to take on John McCain.[194]

Meanwhile, during the DNC, the McCain campaign was also trying to woo Clinton supporters. The McCain campaign highlighted the former rivalry between Obama and Clinton on its official campaign website and YouTube page, and through e-mail. When logging on to www.johnmccain.com during the Democratic National Convention, the featured images in the upper-middle of the front page are a smiling, dark-haired, young white woman holding a Hillary for President sign, and the same woman holding a McCain sign.[195] Clicking on this visual took users to the thirty-second "Debra" advertisement:

I'm a proud Hillary Clinton Democrat. She had the experience and judgment to be president. Now, in a first for me, I'm supporting a Republican: John McCain. I respect his maverick and independent streak. And now he's the one with the experience and judgment. A lot of Democrats will vote McCain. It's OK. Really.[196]

The "Debra" advertisement received 317,201 views on McCain's YouTube site during convention week.[197] The "Passed Over" thirty-second advertisement, also posted to YouTube, received 381,919 views:

Voice-over, with b-roll of Clinton speaking and Obama smiling:	She won millions of votes, but isn't on his ticket. Why? For speaking the truth on his plans. …
Clinton sound bite:	We still don't have a lot of answers about Senator Obama. …
Voice-over, with b-roll of Obama scowling and McCain logo:	The truth hurt. And Obama didn't like it. [198]

Along with these videos, McCain's campaign sent out an e-mail to its supporters, stating:

> Senator Clinton, a long-time admirer of John McCain, has repeatedly said she believes Senator Obama is not ready for the presidency because he lacks the experience necessary to lead. She said, "In this election we need a nominee who can pass the Commander in Chief test." ... Senator McCain will bring a time of experience to the campaign. "I will bring a lifetime of experience and Senator Obama will bring a speech he gave in 2002. I think that is a significant difference" [said Clinton].[199]

By using Clinton's remarks from the primary campaigns, both in video and text, McCain's campaign attempted to remind voters of the nasty seventeen-month primary, and why Clinton supporters had chosen their candidate in the first place. The McCain campaign's emphasis on Clinton supporters who now supported McCain had another purpose as well: to represent McCain as the "woman-friendly" candidate. Of course, no issues were ever mentioned in these persuasive appeals that might have been perceived negatively by women, such as McCain's pro-life stance. Instead, the campaign focused on peripheral credibility cues such as "Debra," the young white woman who urged users that it was "OK" to vote McCain.

After the announcement of Palin as McCain's running mate during the Republican National Convention, the Obama-Biden campaign further highlighted Clinton's support of Obama. While Michelle Obama's speeches[200] had been emphasized in previous weeks, Clinton's speeches on the campaign trail were now streamed live on the Obama blog.[201] Blog content also now included speeches by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi[202] and the "Burden" advertisement, highlighting McCain's opposition to an equal pay law,[203] as the campaign worked to appeal to women voters and, particularly, Clinton supporters.

One of the most interesting blogs posted by the Obama-Biden campaign was the

September 17 live video of Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton discussing women's issues.

Biden stated in his introduction, "We're here to talk about why we think the Obama-

Biden ticket is the right one for America's women. … I'd like to continue to make history

with Hillary by having her help us get elected ..."[204]

Clinton spoke of women's issues, such as equal pay and insurance discrimination

against pregnant women, and complimented Biden's commitment to women and family:

> He [Biden] has always—maybe it's because of your mom, and your wife, and your sister, and your daughter, all of whom I know—he has always been one of the leaders on behalf of women. He has always been there with us, fighting by our side. ... including The Violence Against Women Act, which he wrote, he championed, he got passed through the Congress. ... You have been such a great example, going home every night from the Senate back to Delaware. I don't know how you did it, but your family obviously came first in every respect.[205]

In their conversation, Biden and Clinton shared experiences as primary caregivers

to their children, as Biden pointed out, "I've never missed my kids' parent-teacher

meetings, I went to their games ... You ought to have 7 days a year when you get that call

that your child is sick or has to be taken to the hospital because of a playground accident,

like my son, Hunter. I remember getting the call. You remember those days. Every

parent does."[206]

Biden concluded by thanking Clinton: "It's a big deal, you being here. If there is

any ultimate validator in the United States of America for whether or not we care about

the plight and circumstances of women in America, it's you."[207]

As the Obama-Biden campaign increased web content highlighting Hillary

Clinton's support, the McCain's campaign's last prominent reference to Clinton was in

Sarah Palin's speech at a McCain rally in Dayton, Ohio, on August 29:

> To serve as vice president beside such a man would be the privilege of a lifetime, and it's fitting that this trust has been given to me 88 years almost to the day after the women of America first gained the right to vote. I think as well today of two other women who came before me in national elections. I can't begin this great effort without honoring the achievements of Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, and, of course, Sen. Hillary Clinton, who showed such determination and grace in her presidential campaign. It was rightly noted in Denver this week that Hillary left 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America. But it turns out the women of America aren't finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all.[208]

Now, the McCain-Palin campaign could reach out to Clinton supporters through

its vice-presidential candidate. During the week of the Republican National Convention

(RNC), the McCain website featured video of the television advertisement "Alaska

Maverick" and an image of a smiling Palin (with a video featuring Cindy McCain

relegated to fourth in a rotation of four featured items on the home page).[209] McCain's

Facebook picture was now an image of both McCain and Palin (replacing the previous

image of McCain with a flag and the text, "Country First").[210] The campaign added a

new, featured photograph to McCain's Facebook page of the McCains meeting Palin at

their ranch.[211] By October, the McCain-Palin website included a splash page with a

video of Palin asking users to sign up as volunteers and to recruit friends.[212]

Instead of focusing on her political experience, the description of Palin on the

campaign website read: "In many ways, she was just your average 'hockey mom.' She

was active in her family's pursuits—including serving as a sports team mom, coaching

basketball and volunteering on the PTA."[213] As will be discussed in the next chapter,

much of the campaign-generated content on Palin did not resonate with Clinton supporters.

In these ways, the Obama campaign appeared to be more successful in wooing Clinton supporters, and women in general, despite Palin as McCain's vice-presidential candidate.

4.3.1.2: Campaign Theme 2: Campaign Emphasis of the Candidates' Spouses

The 2008 election included four diverse spouses of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates: Michelle Obama, a former executive for the City of Chicago and University of Chicago who earned a law degree from Harvard University and practiced law;[214] Cindy McCain, a former special education teacher and daughter of a wealthy beer distributor;[215] Todd Palin, a high school graduate, former BP employee, and commercial fisherman;[216] and Jill Biden, a professor of English who holds a doctorate.[217*]

On the same night that Clinton spoke at the DNC, Michelle also gave a speech:

> I come here tonight as a sister, blessed with a brother who is my mentor, my protector and my lifelong friend. I come here as a wife who loves my husband and believes he will be an extraordinary president. I come here as a Mom whose girls are the heart of my heart and the center of my world—they're the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning, and the last thing I think about when I go to bed at night. Their future—and all our children's future—is my stake in this election. And I come here as a daughter— raised on the South Side of Chicago by a father who was a blue collar city worker, and a mother who stayed at home with my brother and me. My mother's love has always been a sustaining force for our family, and one of my greatest joys is seeing her integrity, her compassion, and her intelligence reflected in my own daughters. … My piece of the American Dream is a blessing hard won by those who came

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[*] In an effort to refer to the candidates' spouses in a less cumbersome and confusing way, the author chose to use their first names. This is not intended to be sexist toward Michelle Obama, Cindy McCain, and Jill Biden by referring to them as "Michelle," "Cindy," and "Jill;" Todd Palin is also referenced by his first name, "Todd."

before me … people like Hillary Clinton, who put those 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling, so that our daughters— and sons—can dream a little bigger and aim a little higher.[218]
.

While the Obama-Biden campaign highlighted Clinton in this speech and Clinton's own speech in multiple ways, Michelle's speech was emphasized in different ways and to a greater extent than Clinton's. In an e-mail sent to supporters, the campaign described Michelle as "moving the crowd to tears."[219] In this way, the campaign represented her as a potential First Lady who can evoke emotion from the nation, while portraying Clinton as the masculine "coach" rooting on the team.

The campaign also made sure Clinton's speech did not overshadow Michelle's speech; Michelle's speech was the featured video on Obama's Facebook page, where Caroline Kennedy's speech was also posted, but not Clinton's.[220] Michelle's speech was also the featured video on Obama's YouTube page.[221] On the campaign website, the speeches by Michelle and Joe Biden were highlighted in the prominent rotating box on the front page—with Michelle's appearing before Biden's.[222] The video of Michelle's speech even included a link to "Send Her A Personal Message," further emphasizing it by soliciting user involvement.[223]

The day after her speech at the DNC, the campaign posted four blog posts about Michelle on Obama's website: "Michelle's Wednesday Wrap-Up,"[224] "Michelle at DNC's Delegate Service Day,"[225] "Michelle Speaks at EMILY's List Gathering,"[226] and "Michelle at LGBT Luncheon."[227] Obama's Facebook page now included Michelle Obama's page as one of the three favorite pages listed on the site (along with Joe Biden and Students for Obama).[228]

While most content showcased Michelle as a stylish, attractive woman, the campaign also chose to portray Michelle in a more natural way: as the EveryMom. One of the most viewed videos on Obama-Biden's YouTube page was "Michelle Obama's Update," posted on August 27. In the video, shot with one camera, she speaks to viewers in the early morning (text reads 8 a.m.), with puffy eyes, minimal makeup, unstyled hair, and an Obama t-shirt. She shares how the convention has been going from the perspective of a mother: "The girls are a little sleepy. They've been to the zoo, they've been bowling, they had a big sleepover in my room. Can you believe that? There were 15 kids sleeping in my room. It's been nuts here."[229]

As shown at the beginning of this chapter, Michelle Obama was referenced in regard to gender almost seven times more than Cindy McCain by the campaigns. There was an "About Cindy" tab with a small biographical summary on the official McCain site, including her former career as a special education teacher and her four children with McCain, including an adopted child.[230] Early in the campaign, www.johnmccain.com included a "Cindy's Travels" box, with information about her philanthropic work in other countries.[231] However, this was not a feature that remained on the site after the Republican National Convention. While some photographs posted to the official website included Cindy standing next to McCain, an overwhelming number of photographs featured Palin or Palin with McCain. No photographs appeared on the blogs or official campaign homepage of Cindy without McCain. Users commented: "You never see her out on the campaign trail by herself. If she speaks for him at all he has to be standing less than five feet behind her, and if she talks for him it's less than five minutes."[232]

In these ways, she was deemphasized from the image of McCain that the campaign portrayed. Users posted comments like, "How come I don't hear much from McCain's wife? I never see her!"[233] and even referred to her by the wrong name, such as "Sandy."[234]

A small minority of users defended Cindy's small role in the campaign, including an Obama supporter who posted: "We need to stop talking about the McCains' relationship. Couples have different ways of expressing love to one another. We should not put ourselves into the positions of judging anyone else's intimate relationship. Cindy does not campaign by herself. That is that."[235]

Most user impressions of Cindy, however, were more negative. Her Wikipedia page read: "She wore her hair in a fashionable but severe style and was sometimes seen with an unsmiling countenance in her appearances. [Cindy] McCain was compared to former first lady Nancy Reagan, due to both her style and wardrobe as well as her demeanor."[236] In trying to avoid framing McCain as an old candidate (presented later in this chapter), it may be that the campaign downplayed Cindy's role because of her connotation with Nancy Reagan; if Cindy was the Nancy of 2008, then McCain would represent Ronald Reagan, the oldest elected president of the United States. Instead of an older, more "severe" woman in Cindy McCain, the campaign had a young, fresh feminine face: vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. While Palin was only ten years younger than Cindy McCain, she seemed to be perceived as younger; this may have been partly due to focus on her small children, including an infant during the 2008 campaign.

Todd Palin may have also added to Sarah Palin's perceived younger image with his appearance as a physically fit, rugged man, and as a champion snowmobile racer.[237]

He was not highlighted to any degree by the McCain campaign, however. Under

"About" on www.johnmccain.com, tabs were included for John, Cindy, and Sarah—but

no information was included for Todd.[238] All of the photographs posted to McCain's

Facebook page and official website were of Sarah Palin with John McCain, or of Sarah

Palin on her own. Even the photographs of her meeting with both John and Cindy

McCain did not include Todd. The only two gender-related campaign references to Todd

were found in Palin's speeches. First, she described Todd on August 29 in Dayton, Ohio,

when McCain announced her as his running mate:

> … Todd and I are actually celebrating our 20th anniversary today. My
> husband is a lifelong commercial fisherman, lifetime Alaskan … and a
> production operator in the oil fields up on Alaska's North Slope. He's a
> proud member of the United Steelworkers Union, and he's a world
> champion snow machine racer. Todd and I met way back in high school,
> and I can tell you that he is still the man that I admire most in this
> world."[239]

> During her nomination acceptance speech at the RNC on September 3, Palin said:

> … Todd is a story all by himself. He's a lifelong commercial fisherman
> ... a production operator in the oil fields of Alaska's North Slope ... a
> proud member of the United Steelworkers Union ... and world champion
> snow machine racer. Throw in his Yup'ik Eskimo ancestry, and it all
> makes for quite a package. We met in high school, and two decades and
> five children later he's still my guy.[240]

Yet, neither of these passages was included in campaign web content.[*] The

Dayton, Ohio, speech was not posted on the McCain website, Facebook page, or

YouTube page, adhering to the tendency for the campaign to post primarily short, edited

political advertisements. Sarah Palin's RNC speech was posted to McCain's YouTube

page, but as an edited version, condensing the forty-six minute speech to the eight-minute

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[*] Both passages were included in news media videos in the September 10 YouTube search for
Palin in this study.

"Sarah Palin Speech Highlights." This edited speech did not include any reference to Todd.[241]

In contrast, Jill Biden was described on the Obama-Biden website as the committed spouse of vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden, having adopted Biden's two young sons from his first marriage and taking several years off from her career to help raise them, along with their daughter.[242] Further, the Obama campaign used Jill as much as possible to represent the campaign. Many early events featured all four candidates— Barack, Michelle, Joe, and Jill—together. Later, the campaign strategically sent both candidates and their spouses to cover multiple areas of the country to campaign at the same time.

Yet the campaign also emphasized Jill's separate identity from that of her husband, referring to her as "Dr. Jill Biden" and to her education in web content. Her biography on the Obama-Biden website includes an account describing Joe Biden's support of his wife's accomplishments: "When she arrived home from defending her thesis, Joe had placed two signs along the driveway. One said, 'Congratulations Dr. Jacobs-Biden' and the other 'Dr. and Senator Biden live here.'"[243] Her Wikipedia page added that she studied for her doctoral degree under the name Jill Jacobs, and that she taught four days each week during the fall 2008 semester, campaigning for Obama-Biden on weekends and grading papers on the campaign bus.[244]

In these ways, the Obama-Biden campaign accentuated both Michelle Obama and Jill Biden as representatives of the campaign, with greater coverage of Michelle, while the McCain-Palin campaign essentially concealed both Cindy McCain and Todd Palin. By featuring both Michelle Obama and Jill Biden in two ways—as supportive spouses of

their husbands and as committed mothers of their children and as successful, independent

career women, one with a law degree and one with a doctoral degree—the Obama-Biden

campaign was able to appeal to two separate groups of women voters.

4.3.1.3: Campaign Theme 3: Presidential Masculinity

The differences in how the two campaigns portrayed gender was further

emphasized in how McCain and Obama were represented. Through campaign web

content, McCain's persona was as a tough, masculine war hero, while Obama achieved

an interesting balance as a compassionate family man, yet did not come across as weak or

effeminate.

On Facebook, McCain's original, pre-Palin profile picture, also prominently

displayed as a large graphic on the page, was a profile of McCain as he gazed into the

distance. The text "America First" and an American flag were highlighted to the right of

McCain. McCain's veteran status was emphasized with the inclusion that *Letters From

Iwo Jima* was one of his three favorite movies. His interests were listed as sports, hiking,

fishing, boxing, basketball, football, baseball, and history.[245] Of course, the campaign

did not specify whether McCain's interests were in playing these sports or watching

them, possibly trying to sidestep the issue of McCain's age.

The most powerful example of masculine web content posted by the McCain

campaign was the featured video on YouTube during the week of the RNC, the twelve-

minute "Courageous Service" (with almost a quarter of a million views that week). It

opened with an injured McCain laying on a gurney, shot in black and white film,

answering questions of North Vietnamese interrogators and smoking a cigarette. This

segment was followed by a narrator asking, "What is it that defines a great leader? Is it his courage? Is it his courage to do the difficult, and not just the easy, things? Is it the courage to fight? To fight to survive?" The majority of the video described McCain's military and prisoner-of-war experience, as told by his fellow veterans, mother, and himself.[246]

The conclusion of "Courageous Service," however, took a curious turn. The video ended with a sound bite from McCain: "To have the honor of serving after finishing fifth from the bottom of my class at the Naval Academy has been wondrous. I'm the luckiest guy I've ever known. I've never known anyone that's as fortunate as I am, and I'm grateful for it."[247] After twelve minutes of promoting McCain's successes and heroism, it seems odd to leave the audience with a reminder of his record as a poor student. Perhaps the campaign's intent was simply to illustrate that those who not achieve their goals in the classroom are still able to achieve triumphs in the "real world." Or, perhaps highlighting McCain as a poor student heightened the emphasis on his "machoness." After all, a bright student is often pegged as a "bookworm," or viewed as a man who spends too much time with his studies at the expense of sports or girls.

McCain's masculinity was further heightened by his aggressiveness in the presidential debates, featured on both campaign's websites. While the campaign probably intended for him to come across as strong and powerful, McCain's anger was viewed by many as being too assertive. A comment that, "we do not need Rambo in the White House" was echoed by dozens of web users.[248] Self-reporting participant S19 pointed out that, "It was like the McCain campaign let him off his leash."[249]

This masculine representation of McCain can be contrasted with the gendered representation of Obama. The Obama campaign worked to balance Obama's representation as an intelligent and caring, more feminized candidate, yet still represented him as tough, presidential material.

There were very few associations of Obama as "macho" through campaign web content. On Facebook, Obama's favorite television show was listed as "Sportscenter" and one of his interests included basketball.[250] Instead, the campaign emphasized Obama's role as husband and father. On his MySpace profile, his biographical information stated, "Of all my life experiences, I am most proud of my wife Michelle and my daughters Malia and Sasha."[251]

First, Obama's commitment to his wife Michelle was highlighted. His Facebook profile included Michelle Obama as one of his three favorite pages (along with Joe Biden and Students for Barack Obama); Cindy McCain, in contrast, didn't even have a Facebook page to which McCain could link. Blog content also featured the Obama's marriage, including a description of an Obama fundraiser in which supporters bicycled through Hyde Park, where "he enjoyed his first date with Michelle."[252]

Michelle also was used to present Obama as a family man. In her speech to the DNC, she recalled:

> The Barack Obama I know today is the same man I fell in love with 19 years ago. He's the same man who drove me and our new baby daughter home from the hospital ten years ago this summer, inching along at a snail's pace, peering anxiously at us in the rearview mirror, feeling the whole weight of her future in his hands.[253]

The next day, an e-mail sent to supporters read:

I am so lucky to be married to the woman who delivered that speech last

night. Michelle was electrifying, inspiring, and absolutely magnificent. I get a lot of credit for the speech I gave at the 2004 convention—but I think she may have me beat. You have to see it to believe it.

And make sure to forward this email to your friends and family—they'll want to see it too.

You really don't want to miss this. And I'm not just saying that because she's my wife—I truly believe it was the best speech of the campaign so far.

Barack[254]

The Obamas' two daughters were not specifically featured by the campaign, but on Facebook, one of his favorite interests listed was "loafing with [the] kids."[255] Users picked up on this emphasis on Obama and family. An Obama blogger posted, "Moms everywhere will sleep better with Obama in the White House!"[256] Interviewee S10 agreed that, "Obama was projecting himself more as [being] family-oriented.[257]

The Obama-Biden campaign did face how to respond to attacks on Obama for his much-publicized comment: "You know, you can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig."[258] Reframing this statement, many accused Obama of calling Palin a pig, based on the notorious line from her RNC speech, "What's the difference between a hockey mom and pit bull? Lipstick."[259]

In response to criticism, the Obama-Biden campaign posted a video speech on the campaign blog and on Obama's YouTube page. In the video, Obama stated the comment was made in reference to McCain's economic policies and was taken out of context as a "diversion" and "manipulation." His speaking style was forceful and assertive, demanding, "Enough is enough! Spare me the phony outrage."[260] In this way, the campaign emphasized Obama's masculinity while defending him against allegations of making a sexist remark.

This is a departure from Obama's usual calm demeanor as typically the more masculine side of the Democratic ticket was represented by vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden. Biden complimented Obama's role with Biden's persona as a reliable family man, but also enhanced the Democratic ticket as the more masculine, "tough guy" candidate. In his DNC speech, when paying homage to his mother, Biden shared, "And when I got knocked down by guys bigger than me—and this is the God's truth—she sent me back out and said, 'Bloody their nose so you can walk down the street the next day.' And that's what I did."[261]

Web users picked up on this way of framing the candidate, posting comments like, "Joe Biden is tough!!!"[262] and "Biden, you are the man!"[263] Biden's Wikipedia entry described his "willingness to aggressively challenge McCain in a way that Obama seemed uncomfortable doing at times."[264]

The campaign also highlighted Biden's role as a family man, similar to Obama. Biden's one-minute "Kitchen Table" advertisement[*] narrated:

> When, as a young father, Joe Biden decided to commute home every day, it was a decision that tells us a lot. Not just about the kind of man Joe Biden is, but also the kind of leader he's become. … And is it any wonder that when home and family matter most to someone, the decisions they make, the stands they take, are about commitment?[265]

Biden's Wikipedia entry added, "As a single father for five years, Biden left standing orders that he be interrupted in the Senate at any time if his sons called. In remembrance of the accident [in which his first wife and daughter were killed], Biden does not work on December 18."[266]

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[*] Accessible via a YouTube search for "Biden" in this study.

The Obama-Biden campaign also highlighted Biden's role as a grandfather. A popular blog with users included photographs of Biden eating burgers and fries in a casual diner with his granddaughter.[267] Another blog described: "After the conclusion of the speech, Joe spoke with a young girl who was running for class president and was looking for advice. Joe hugged her and said, 'You look too smart for politics,' followed by, 'no boys 'til you're thirty.'" An accompanying photograph showed a girl of about 12 years old looking up at Biden as his hand cupped her face, as if she was his granddaughter.[268] Users responded positively to this kind of content: "I love when he is tender, speaking of his granddaughters."[269]

In addition, Biden emphasized that both he and Obama were the spouses of strong women, alluding to the old adage, "Behind every great man is a great woman." In one speech, he introduced himself as "Jill's husband" and described Michelle as being more important than Barack, to the delight of Barack, who cheered and applauded enthusiastically in response:

> Hello, folks! My name's Joe Biden. I'm from Scranton, Pennsylvania. …
> This is my wife, Jill. Or actually, I'm her husband. And want to introduce
> the next two people in their order of importance. The first and most
> important person, Michelle Obama. Did you hear her speech at the
> convention? I tell ya, man, I always liked Barack, but I LOVE her![270]

A connection between respect for women and political actions were shown in the "Joe Biden Introduction" video, posted to the campaign's YouTube channel, in which Biden talked about his accomplishments during his tenure as senator, stating, "… Most proudly, I wrote the Violence Against Women Act."[271]

The campaign also emphasized the issue of equal pay for women with multiple blog posts on Lilly Ledbetter,* including a video of Ledbetter's speech at the DNC, a video of Ledbetter joining Michelle Obama for a "roundtable with working women,"[272] and a post highlighting Ledbetter's endorsement of Obama, stating: "There is only one candidate who has stood up for women like me. Who has consistently fought to help women who are working hard every day for our families and aren't being paid fairly."[273]

Further, the campaign highlighted Obama's track record on the issue of equal pay:

> Barack has been a strong advocate for women receiving equal pay for equal work throughout his career. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama cosponsored and voted for the Illinois Equal Pay Act, which provided 330,000 more women protection from pay discrimination. In the U.S. Senate, Obama joined a bipartisan group of Senators to introduce the Fair Pay Restoration Act, a bill to overturn the Supreme Court's recent 5-4 decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. … Obama is also a cosponsor of Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA) Fair Pay Act.[274]

The Obama-Biden campaign even emphasized the candidates' commitment to women with a "Women for the Change We Need" week, with "support of hundreds of national women leaders in fields ranging from business to women's rights, from astronauts to athletes, from former governors to cabinet secretaries."[275] The campaign added on its blog, "On Tuesday, Senator Obama received the endorsement from National Organization of Women Political Action Committee (NOW PAC) and the Feminist Majority PAC—the first Feminist Majority presidential endorsement of a presidential campaign without a woman on the ticket."[276] In contrast, users focused on the McCain campaign's lack of commitment to this issue, posting his response to the female pay-rate

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* Lilly Ledbetter was the plantiff in the 1998 Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. suit, suing her former employer for paying her significantly less than her male counterparts, and since then has been a women's equality activist.

differential of women making 77 cents on the dollar as, "Women need to catch up with their education."[277]

The Obama campaign furthered its focus on women with profiles of women who supported the campaign, such as "Women for Obama: Teresa in Pennsylvania" on its blog.[278] An official "Women for Obama" group existed on MySpace. Live videos were streamed on the official website and advertised through tweets that would appeal to women, such as, "In New Philadelphia, OH. Holding a discussion on 'Women And The Economy.' Watch it live at http://origin.barackobama.com/live."[279]

With the campaign's emphasis on Obama's love and respect for his wife, identity as a father, and politician committed to equality for women—along with Biden's supporting role—Obama was thus framed as a presidential candidate who, unlike McCain's emphasis on Country First, put family first.

4.3.2: User Themes

4.3.2.1: User Theme 1: Unrestrained Sexism

While in many presidential elections the vice-presidential candidates are all but ignored by the general public, the 2008 election was important in part because of the significant attention paid to Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants referenced Palin in terms of race, gender, or age nearly as much as they referenced McCain: 23 percent of total comments for Palin and 24 percent for McCain. An overwhelming majority of these comments were sexist in nature, addressing Palin's appearance, sexuality, and role as a mother, while a minority of supportive comments focused on the historic importance of a

female vice-presidential candidate.

Most common were references to Palin's appearance and, in particular, her participation in beauty pageants during her 20s, winning the Miss Wasilla Pageant and the "Miss Congeniality" award in the Miss Alaska Pageant. Facebook users tended to focus on this part of Palin's background, posting, "Congratulations, Palin, you won second prize in a beauty contest. Collect vice-presidency."[280] Interviewee S13 explained his lack of respect for Palin based on "the whole beauty pageant thing. I mean, can you ever see [Hillary] Clinton playing the flute on stage?"[281]

The most common reference to Palin's appearance was referencing her as "Caribou Barbie."[282] She was also referred to as "Little Miss Sarah,"[283] a "bimbo,"[284] and a "toy."[285] Even supporters visiting Palin's Facebook page associated the candidate with a doll: "They need to make an American Girl doll outta you. Seriously. It would be amazing and come with your motorcycle as an accessory. I'd buy it!"[286]

Very few defended her appearance, arguing, as self-reporting participant S20 did, "Why ridicule her for wearing skirts and feminine clothing? Obviously, she's a woman and she's going to dress like one."[287]

Attention to Palin's clothing was prevalent when news broke in late October that the campaign had spent $150,000 on Palin's wardrobe.[288] Brought up by participants in several interviews and all three focus groups, S21 said of the sexist news coverage: "There were a million different articles about how much was spent on Sarah Palin's wardrobe when it has never been brought up about any other candidate. If she was a man, they never would have brought anything like that up."[289]

Many web users—particularly men—labeled Palin as sexy. Her sexuality was heightened throughout most user-created or uploaded YouTube videos; in fact, a search for "Sarah Palin" on September 3, the day of her speech to the Republican National Convention, did not return a single McCain campaign produced video. Several of the most popular were "Sarah Palin is a VPILF!!!"[290*] and "I Masturbated to Sarah Palin," each with more than half a million views on YouTube. The latter included men of different races in their 20s and 30s stating, "I'm votin' for her 'cause she's kinda cute and I think she has a fat ass" and "Finally, a candidate we can masturbate to."[291]

Web users also drew attention to photoshopped images of Palin on the Internet, alerting fellow users on Obama's Wall, "There are supposed to be a lot of hot steamy pictures on the internet of Palin."[292] A Google search for "Sarah Palin" during the week of the RNC included image results in the top five hits, including a mock *Vogue* magazine cover with Palin's face imposed on a model's body with long, dark hair blowing in the wind and a skimpy white, sleeveless top; and a studious looking brunette in glasses, wearing her hair pulled back and a gray suit, adhering to the "sexy librarian" representation. Interview participants noticed these, too, commenting, "You'd see [photographs] of Sarah Palin in a swimsuit, or her head cut off and put on a hot model's body."[293] S8 shared, "I've heard a lot of my friends say that she's pretty good-looking,"[294] a mild description of her appearance, compared to web users' descriptions, such as, "smoking hot."[295] Web users representing themselves as men posted the most vulgar remarks about Palin's sexuality, from "DRILL DRILL DRILL, I say!"[296] to "She wants you to taste her wild Alaskan salmon,"[297] to "All the energy Palin needs is between

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[*] VPILF was a common acronym used in Web content during the campaign, abbreviating, "Vice President I'd Like [to] Fuck."

her legs."[298] Facebook comments included a wide array of references to Palin's anatomy, from her "excellent bristols"[299] to "John McCain loves Bush so much, he picked one for Vice President."[300] Palin was frequently called a "whore"[301] and a "skank."[302] Users fantasized, "How do you think Governor Palin looks with just heels on and nothing more?"[303] and interviewee S5 brought up, "Did you know they're making a Sarah Palin porn?"[304]

Interestingly, while Palin was framed in this sexist, sexual manner by many web users, she was also represented as a masculine outdoorswoman. Her Wikipedia profile read: "As a child, she would sometimes go moose hunting with her father before school. … Among her common activities are hunting, ice fishing and riding snowmobiles."[305] Some users represented her as a strong, resilient woman, calling her a, "21st century pioneer,"[306] while others represented her as being a "yahoo," asking about the photograph of Palin with a moose that she had shot, "What does she do, get the mail and shoot the moose in her front yard?"[307]

Users also represented Palin as a tough Alaskan and a mother with the turn of phrase "hockey mom," echoing campaign rhetoric. The number one search result for Palin on YouTube in mid-September was "Hockey Moms Against Sarah Palin," a parody of hockey moms, one of whom is wearing a Christmas sweater, lamenting: "Sarah Palin claims she's an average hockey mom. But only one of her kids even played hockey;" and "I heard a child ask her what's the difference between icing and off-sides. She didn't know!"[308]

Users focused on Palin being a mother of five, calling her a "breeder"[309] and nicknames like, "Preggers Palin."[310] Specifically, users discussed Palin's pregnant

teenage daughter and youngest son, an infant during the 2008 campaign. Comments posted live during the RNC included, "Is she going to breast feed onstage now?"[311] "Look she's exploiting her baby"[312] and "Who would bring a newborn baby to a rowdy crowd like that?"[313] More crass posts, referencing the fact that Palin's youngest son was born with Down Syndrome, included: "Q: What's the difference between Sarah Palin's mouth and her vagina? A: Only some of the stuff that comes out of her vagina is retarded."[314]

A majority of comments relating to Palin's motherhood focused on her pregnant teenage daughter, Bristol. Palin's Wikipedia entry read: "Palin announced on September 1, 2008, that her daughter Bristol was five months pregnant and intended to keep the baby and marry the father of her child, 17-year-old Levi Johnston. The McCain-Palin campaign stated that John McCain was aware of her daughter's pregnancy, but that it did not affect his choice."[315] Users discussed Palin's "knocked up teenage daughter"[316] with coarse comments such as, "Sarah Palin is truly a hockey mom. She taught her daughter to pull the goalie."[317]

Very few comments addressed Levi Johnston, the father of Bristol's baby. The only mention of him made by web users was referencing his famous MySpace page, which was quickly removed by the campaign. The *New York Post* reported:

> On his MySpace page, Johnston boasts, "I'm a f - - -in' redneck' who likes to snowboard and ride dirt bikes. But I live to play hockey. I like to go camping and hang out with the boys, do some fishing, shoot some s- - - and just f - - -in' chillin' I guess."
>
> "Ya f - - - with me I'll kick [your] ass," he added.
>
> He also claims to be "in a relationship," but states, "I don't want kids."[318]

A typical synopsis posted to Facebook was, "That was a great post by the boyfriend of

Palin's daughter on Myspace. I hope everyone saw and read it. He says no way he wants

a baby, likes to party too much and play hockey and get stoned."[319] But with nonexistent

dialogue surrounding Levi's—and Bristol's—responsibility toward sexual behavior, user

blame instead fell to Bristol's mother: the vice-presidential nominee. Some users

expanded on the use of the VPILF acronym, stating, "Palin is such a MILF! And soon

she's gonna become a GILF!"[320]* Palin as a grandmother being perceived as sexy is an

interesting example of the intersection of gender and age, discussed in the next chapter.

Despite many vulgar and disrespectful comments pertaining to Palin as a woman,

there was a community of support for Palin. As the campaign progressed, Palin's

Facebook fans swelled from 45,564 during the week of her nomination as vice-president,

to 431,532 just over a month later. Palin was described by web users as a modern-day

"Rosie the Riveter"[321] and "Queen Esther of our time,"[322] a prophet in Judaism,

considered by some to be a post-feminist icon.[323] Palin supporters posted comments

associating Palin with the women's rights movement, such as, "I can see the suffragettes

smiling in heaven today."[324]

The historic nature of Palin's nomination as a vice-presidential candidate for the

Republican Party was not lost on web users. Even some Obama supporters applauded the

historic nature of Palin's nomination. One user wrote on the day of Palin's speech to the

RNC: "Sarah Palin is about to make history as the first woman on a GOP ticket. I think

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* MILF stands for "Mother I'd Like [to] Fuck" and GILF stands for "Grandmother I'd Like [to] Fuck."

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this is a great moment for them and we should be proud that either way, America is going to make history in November."[325]

But many users made comparisons between Obama and Palin as if Palin was running for president and not as McCain's running mate. As one user asked, "Didn't Palin say she intends to break the highest glass ceiling for women? So does she think VP is the highest glass ceiling, or is she going to kill McCain?"[326] On Obama's Facebook Wall, a user representing himself as a man complained, "I honestly don't know what to do this election. If I vote McCain/Palin I'll be called a racist and if I vote for Obama/Biden I'll be called sexist."[327]

More often, however, Palin was framed in a sexist way instead of as paving the way for women. Web users called her a "chick,"[328] "pig,"[329] "Winky the Dog,"[330] and, frequently, "bitch," such as, "can we plz [sic] euthanize this bitch."[331] She was described as "snarky"[332] and "too aggressive,"[333] with a "whiny"[334] and "shrill"[335] voice. Users posted, "She looks like she's going to cry"[336] and "Republican women are more annoying than the men—sounds sexist but it is true."[337]

Palin was not the only woman in the 2008 election with sexism levied against her. Cindy McCain was also the frequent target of sexist remarks, albeit not as often as a result of the small number of web comments about her. She was often referred to as "fake"[338] and a "Stepford wife."[339] She was described as cold, such as "Cindy the Ice Queen McCain,"[340] and compared to an alien, such as: "Cindy McCain needs a new host body."[341] She was also represented by users as evil, with comparisons to "Cruella Deville from *101 Dalmatians*"[342] and the Biblical Eve: "Cindy ate from the tree and McCain allowed it."[343]

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Finally, several references were made to Cindy McCain's age by referring to her as "Barbie's mother,"[344] therefore portraying Cindy as old, and even as Palin's mother since one of the most popular nicknames for Palin was "Barbie."

While a majority of users contributed sexist jokes, a vocal minority spoke against the use of such nicknames, including an Obama supporter who chastised, "You know better than that. Perhaps someone could liken you to a doll, doll's mother, or fictitious character for a 'laugh.' How would you like that? We don't like the personal smears that Palin has taken up. Let's rise above that sort of behavior ourselves."[345]

4.3.2.2: User Theme 2: "Camelot" in 2008

A second theme pertaining to gender that emerged from user web content in the 2008 presidential election was the comparison of an Obama White House to Americans' idealized Kennedy White House, commonly referred to as "Camelot."[*] Users gushed about the Obamas' loving marriage and compared Michelle Obama to Jacqueline ("Jackie") Kennedy and Barack Obama to John F. Kennedy (JFK). As described earlier in this chapter, the campaign depicted Obama as a family man. User content echoed this depiction, such as a slideshow of the Obamas' "Greatest PDA[*] Moments" illustrating the couple hugging, kissing, dancing, holding hands, and smiling and gazing at each other with affection.[346]

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[*] While Kennedy's marital affairs are public knowledge today, in the 1960s, much of Kennedy's private life was kept secret from the general public. I would suggest that many Americans still have a romanticized view of the Kennedy marriage with continued use of the term "Camelot."

[*] PDA is a common acronym for "Public Display [of] Affection."

This representation resonated with web users. Many posted comments such as, "Ah, would you listen to Obama all smitten with his wife and her speech and telling everyone how great she is. Aren't they great together?"[347] Users noticed such small details as, "Senator Obama fiddling with his wedding ring while Michelle was speaking"[348] and described them as "touching."[349] Some users showed exaggerated levels of enthusiasm: "Is it wrong to be in love with a married couple? Because I'm sure I am in LOOOOVE with the Obamas. I swear I'd have Michelle's babies if I could."[350]

The portrayal of the Obamas' happy marriage was contrasted with the relationship between John and Cindy McCain. Web users commented on happenings such as, "the awkward hug between the McCains"[351] and described their lack of visible affection toward each other as "Weird!"[352] Web users indicated John McCain had married his wife for her money, with comments such as, "McCain's Economic Plan: Everyone Marry a Beer Heiress."[353] Others referred to Cindy as a "trophy wife," suggesting:

> You can see the love shared between Michelle and Barack. … You never see [the McCains] show any kind of true affection for one another. [McCain] really treats her like she's the trophy wife she is. It's truly a revealing difference between the two, Cindy would be just like Laura Bush as a first lady, with the "stay in your place" attitudes' of their egotistical husbands. [354]

With the Obamas romanticized as the 2008 Camelot couple, Michelle Obama was described as a "modern day Jackie O."[355] The characteristics admired in Jacqueline Kennedy were paralleled with descriptions of Michelle. She was complimented as "stylish, graceful,"[356] "classy, charming, and gorgeous."[357] Users described her as, "beautiful and brilliant" [358] and assured each other that she would "make a lovely First

Lady."[359] Some users representing themselves as men admitted to an outright crush on the wife of the Democratic presidential nominee.[360]

Michelle was further described as First Lady material: "a wonderful role model for Moms and daughters."[361] Users added, "[She is] going to inspire a generation of women; watch, you'll see."[362]

A surprising number of comments—surprising in that Michelle was widely admired for her own strength and successes—addressed Michelle's ability to "stand by her man," much as Jackie in the 1960s Kennedy White House. Users suggested, "A woman of virtue is a crown to her husband. For her price is much higher than jewels"[363] and "[Michelle's] a mother and a wife, and she hasn't compromised those roles."[364] Users mostly agreed, "she really believes in her husband."[365]

Like Jackie Kennedy, Michelle was viewed as someone with whom users could be friends. She was described as "very down to earth;"[366] as a user suggested, "I feel like they're [the Obamas] my neighbors."[367] Another posted: "She's Oprah, just cuter and more maternal."[368]

A more updated, 21st Century impression of the future First Lady emerged with such comments as, "Are we running the right Obama for President?"[369] and, "Screw Barack! Let's vote Michelle as president!"[370]

Web users' adoration for Michelle Obama was further shown through describing Barack Obama as "one lucky husband."[371] As one user posted: "It is said behind every great man is an even greater woman. I can't wait to see what they do."[372]

Just as Michelle was likened to Jackie Kennedy, some web users likened "Obama to JFK."[373] The comparison also addressed race, "from all those who fought the fight

[for civil rights] to Obama supporters."[374] One user posted: "My 80 year old Mom said that Barack seemed to look like JFK when he sat on the stool sideways and watched McCain from the background."[375]

Like Kennedy, Obama was described as "cute"[376] and "good looking."[377] Women focus group participants exuberantly described Obama as "hot."[378] One woman blogger admitted: "It doesn't matter how serious the subject, if I am watching Senator Obama's lips, I can't really think about anything else (he has a very pretty mouth)."[379]

By far the most popular user-generated content on the web accentuating Obama's sexiness was the "ObamaGirl" music video, which had garnered 11,000,284 views by the end of the campaign.[380] In the video, a young white woman in scantily clad, pro-Obama attire croons:

> … I never wanted anybody more than I want you. … [I] knew I had to make you mine. So black and sexy, you're so fine. … Baby, you're the best candidate. I like it when you get hard on Hillary in debate. Why don't you pick up your phone? … Universal healthcare reform makes me warm. You can Barack me tonight.[381]

Interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants overwhelmingly were familiar with the video. The students' reactions ranged from describing the video as "funny and creative"[382] to "just wrong to sell a candidate through sex."[383] All, however, agreed that it would appeal to and influence young voters in the election, a finding further explored in chapter five.

4.3.2.3: User Theme 3: "Macho Man"

As much as "Obama Girl" was popular with web users, the "McCain Girls," comparatively, were not. In early September of the campaign, "I've Got a Crush on

Obama" had received nearly 10 million views to only 2 million for "It's Raining

McCain." The "McCain Girls" were three women—one of whom was older and one of

whom was overweight—singing off-key lyrics such as, "In the 2008 election, the forecast

calls for rain; the first time in history, it's gonna start raining McCain," to the 1980s song,

"It's Raining Men."[384] With this parody, McCain's sex appeal was lessened more than

heightened. The only one who didn't seem to get the joke was the Republican

presidential candidate himself, who reportedly said, "I think they're wonderful. … I have

watched that video several times."[385]

Although users linked Obama to a sultry, rapping twenty-something with Obama

Girl and referred to him as a modern-day JFK, they focused on McCain's unfaithfulness

to his first wife. McCain's Wikipedia entry read: "His wife Carol had suffered her own

crippling ordeal during his captivity, due to an automobile accident. … [Upon his return

home,] McCain had extramarital affairs, and the McCains' marriage began to falter, for

which he later would accept blame."[386] The entry later included the description of his

second marriage to Cindy (Hensley): "McCain's children did not attend, and several

years would pass before they reconciled."[387] This is a significant departure from users'

commentary on Obama's commitment to his wife and children. Several participants in

the all-women focus group described John McCain as a "womanizer."[388]

User-created videos suggested that McCain was cheating on Cindy, his wife of

twenty-eight years, with Sarah Palin. Multiple videos were created focusing on a video

image of the August 29, 2008 announcement of Palin as the V.P. choice in which McCain

appears to be "ogling" her. The most popular of these, "John McCain's Wandering

Eyes," had, within a week, received over 300,000 views.[389] The video included the

accompanying chorus of Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On" and many viewers enthusiastically responded with comments such as, "McCain is thinking, 'Damn nice ass. I made the right choice.'"[390]

Facebook comments also highlighted McCain's interest in Palin, such as, "He picked her after seeing the headshot. He wants a Monica Lewinsky,"[391] and a description of McCain's thoughts as, "Palin, you have nice legs, keep wearing those skirts."[392]

More damning to McCain was user-posted content attributing sexist remarks to him. Comments on both Obama's and McCain's Facebook Walls referenced McCain's 1998 remark: "Why is Chelsea Clinton so ugly? Because her father is Janet Reno."[393] A user on the Obama Wall added, "McCain's a misogynist too. Heard his rape joke?"[394]*

One of the twenty most popular videos for a McCain search on YouTube in September of the general election was "How Do We Beat the Bitch," a clip of a woman supporter asking McCain, "How do we beat the bitch?" The question was asked during the primary when many thought Hillary Clinton would be the presumptive Democratic nominee. In the clip, the crowd to which McCain was speaking erupted into laughter; one man shouted out, "I thought she was talking about my ex-wife;" and McCain laughed and responded, "That's an excellent question," before describing poll results that compared his supporters to Clinton's. Over a million users had viewed this video in less than a year, and thousands had posted comments.[395]

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* Despite widespread belief among many women's groups that McCain made the remark, he denied allegations that in 1986 he said, "Have you heard the one about the woman who is attacked on the street by a gorilla, beaten senseless, raped repeatedly and left to die? When she finally regains consciousness and tries to speak, her doctor leans over to hear her sigh contently and to feebly ask, 'Where is that marvelous ape?'"

A majority of YouTube users felt, "this is absolutely disgusting."[396] Many voiced

concern that the question itself was sexist: "I'm so embarrassed that a woman referred to

another woman this way. It's the equivalent of calling an African-American person

'nigger.'"[397] One asked, "Can you imagine the reaction if some man in the audience

asked McCain in regard to one of his male opponents, 'How do we beat the

ba****d?'"[398] Others voiced the opinion: "Clearly his answer implies that he recognizes

Hillary Clinton by the name used: The Bitch. This is deeply insulting and highly

unpresidential."[399] However, some web users did not recognize a problem in the clip,

such as one who asked, "What's the big deal?"[400] One McCain supporter even posted:

"How do we beat the bitch? With a baseball bat."[401]

Along with showing disrespect to women like Chelsea Clinton, Janet Reno, and

Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Party, web users also frequently referenced McCain's

disrespect toward his own wife by calling her a "cunt."[402] Dozens of references were

made to reports that while campaigning in 1992, "Cindy playfully twirled McCain's hair

and said, 'You're getting a little thin up there.' McCain's face reddened, and he

responded, 'At least I don't plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you cunt.' McCain's

excuse was that it had been a long day."[403]

User attention to this example also highlighted McCain's masculinity as a volatile

person. His Wikipedia page provides more detail than campaign web content of his

experiences as a P.O.W.:

> McCain fractured both arms and a leg, and then nearly drowned, when
> [his plane was shot down and] … he parachuted into Hanoi. After he
> regained consciousness, a crowd attacked … and bayoneted him. …
> Although McCain was badly wounded, his captors refused to treat his
> injuries, instead beating and interrogating him to get information. …

McCain spent six weeks in the hospital while receiving marginal care. Now having lost 50 pounds, in a chest cast, and with his hair turned white, McCain was sent to a different camp … in a cell with two other Americans who did not expect him to live a week. … [He was put into] solitary confinement for two years.

… A program of severe torture began on McCain. He was subjected to rope bindings and repeated beatings every two hours … [and suffered] from dysentery. … His injuries left him permanently incapable of raising his arms above his head. … Altogether, McCain was held as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for five and a half years.[404]

A Wikipedia reader can easily comprehend why McCain experienced anger issues. This was a common concern shared by web users: "This man scares the hell out of me. Just watch him real closely. His eyes and his facial expressions [show] something is wrong, very wrong. I really worry. … [Is it] PTSD?"[405]* Another user posted: "I would never attack McCain's courage or patriotism, but being a POW could have lingering mental effects."[406] Web users further emphasized this concern with the video post, "Former POW says McCain is 'not cut out to be President,'" in which McCain was described as "a very volatile guy [who] would blow up and go off like a roman candle at any possible time."[407]

One user-posted video that received a considerable amount of attention among web users was "McCain Sings Bomb Iran, Laughs," in which McCain, speaking to a group of supporters in South Carolina, changed the lyrics of the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann."[408] The clip generated thousands of user comments by the end of the campaign, ranging from "[That] is what we need, he showed some balls"[409] to "McCain should resign from his senate seat."[410]

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* PTSD is the commonly used acronym for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In these ways, web users overwhelmingly represented McCain as an unfaithful, sexist, angry man. While some users found this "macho" persona appealing, most viewed these characteristics as negative.

4.4: Age

4.4.1: Campaign Themes

4.4.1.1: Campaign Theme 1: Age vs. Experience

As the McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent McCain as a masculine war hero, highlighting McCain's military experience was difficult to accomplish without also highlighting his age.

His Facebook profile described his career as, "United States Navy, Captain, Squadron Commander, Pilot, 1958 - 1981,"[411] drawing attention to his experience but also showing that he served 50 years ago. His service in the 1960s and 1970s was emphasized in the "Love" campaign advertisement, which played automatically on the splash page for the official campaign website in early September.[412] This was an advertisement that focus group participants were familiar with; "I do have a vivid memory of a Republican ad on the side [of Facebook] that said, 'Tired of hippies?' and had people dancing,"[413] stated focus group participant S28.

"Love" showcased McCain's military service as a righteous contrast to stereotyped hippies, thereby strengthening the representation of the candidate as a strait-laced member of a past generation. Further, the indirect attack on Obama as a "hippie" was not successful since users did not characterize Obama as part of the Baby Boom generation.

Along with "Love," the "Ready to Lead" advertisement posted on McCain's Facebook page emphasized his political experience at the cost of also emphasizing his age. "Ready to Lead" describes McCain's experience as a P.O.W., Navy officer, Congressman, and Senator, but while doing so shows a visual progression of him as he ages, from black and white photographs to 1970s grainy video footage to hair and clothing styles from the 1980s.[414]

A minority of users did, however, view the content highlighting McCain's experience as just that: experience. "I think the website portrays his sense of leadership. I mean, just look at McCain, he looks like a typical politician,"[415] stated interviewee S2.

In contrast, the Obama campaign featured web content describing the military experience of Obama's grandfather during WWII: "When I talk to those young veterans who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan, I see my grandfather, who signed up after Pearl Harbor [and] marched in Patton's Army."[416] Many young users could likely relate better to a candidate whose grandfather was a veteran, as opposed to a candidate who was a veteran himself. As interviewee S4 explained, "[My roommate] said that it's time that the World War II generation stopped running the country. He said, 'It's time for politicians to get young.'"[417]

The campaign highlighted McCain's age in more implicit ways. His Facebook profile listed his favorite movies as *Viva Zapata* and *Some Like It Hot,* films with which Facebook users were likely unfamiliar. His favorite television show was listed as "Seinfeld,"[418] that, while having some devout fans, is not a recent comedy hit. By citing older films and television programs as favorites, the campaign indirectly labeled its candidate as also being older.

The use of language by the McCain-Palin campaign emphasized McCain's age, such as use of the word "folks."[419] Other uses of language by the McCain campaign mimicked a Disneyesque return to the early 20th century with events listed as "McCain Street USA in Cedarburg, Wisconsin."[420] References to Main Streets and Town Halls provided an association between the candidate and a return to an older, simpler time, in turn suggesting the candidate was an older, simpler candidate.

His use of language during the presidential debates was also noticed. One user tweeted, "Did McCain just say, 'cockamamie?' OMG,* my grandpa used to say that."[421]

Joe Biden, in contrast, was represented and interpreted as experienced. Once Biden was announced as Obama's running mate, photographs of the two candidates together appeared on the official campaign website and social media sites. The image that appeared as their Facebook profile pictures was of Obama looking forward, Biden looking toward Obama, and Obama's hand on Biden's shoulder, as if holding on to the more experienced politician for guidance and support.[422] The notes section of Biden's Facebook page read: "Meet Joe Biden: A leader who has worked for decades in Washington. … An expert on foreign policy…; one who has stared down dictators. He is uniquely suited to serve as Barack's partner in the urgent mission to bring about the change America needs to put our country back on track."[423]

While Biden was highlighted as bringing experience to the Democratic ticket, the campaign also focused on the fact that he started, like Obama, as a young political candidate: "In 1970, Biden—at age 27—ran for New Castle County Council and won in a Republican district. At age 29, he launched an improbable bid to unseat two-term

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* OMG is a popular web acronym for "Oh My God."

Republican US Sen. J. Caleb Boggs. With very little help from the state establishment, and, with his sister as his campaign manager, Biden defeated Boggs by 3,162 votes."[424]

Just as comparisons were made between Obama and President John F. Kennedy regarding gender, so too were comparisons made of the two men with regard to age. Obama was quoted from a campaign speech: "I wouldn't be here if, time and again, the torch had not been passed to a new generation.'"[425] A significant difference stressed in this analogy is that while JFK was the youngest elected US president at the age of 43, today he is regarded by many Americans as one of our great presidents, therefore exhibiting both youth and experience from a retrospective view. The comparison to Kennedy related to both issues of gender and age as interviewee S1 suggested, "I'm sure a lot of young girls my age will vote for Obama over an older guy."[426]

This intersection of gender and age can also be seen with the representation of Palin as inexperienced. The McCain-Palin campaign unintentionally represented Palin in this way through her televised interviews, posted and viewed extensively on the web. First, Palin's interview with Charles Gibson of ABC News aired on September 11. Part of that interview included discussion of national security:

Palin:	… That's why we have to keep an eye on Russia. And, Charlie, you're in Alaska. We have that very narrow maritime border between the United States … the 49th state, Alaska, and Russia. They are our next-door neighbors. We need to have a good relationship with them. They're very, very important to us and they are our next-door neighbor.
Gibson:	What insight into Russian actions, particularly in the last couple of weeks, does the proximity of the state give you?
Palin:	They're our next-door neighbors and you can actually see Russia from land here in Alaska, from an island in Alaska.[427]

On September 24, a second interview, this time with Katie Couric, aired on CBS News,

and included discussion of her response in the Gibson interview:

Couric: You've cited Alaska's proximity to Russia as part of your
             foreign policy experience. What did you mean by that?

Palin: That Alaska has a very narrow maritime border between a
             foreign country, Russia, and on our other side, the land
             boundary that we have with Canada. …

Couric: Explain to me why that enhances your foreign policy
             credentials.

Palin: Well it certainly does, because our next-door neighbors are
             foreign countries …

Couric: Have you ever been involved in any negotiations, for
             example, with the Russians?

Palin: We have trade missions back and forth. It's very important
             when you consider even national security issues with
             Russia as Putin rears his head and comes into the airspace
             of the United States of America. Where do they go? It's
             Alaska. It's just right over the border. It is from Alaska
             that we send those out to make sure that an eye is being
             kept on this very powerful nation, Russia, because they are
             right there, they are right next to our state.[428]

Videos of these interview excerpts received more than 10 million views on

YouTube[429] and resulted in user-created content highlighting Palin's lack of foreign

policy experience, such as the music video "Song for Sarah." In this video, a user

portrayed himself as a Russian man named Vlad, singing:

As soon as I wake up in the morning, I go to my window. I made this
telescope myself out of duct tape and the thing that holds the wrapping
paper so I can see if you are there. I fix it on your house in Alaska. …
You say you can see me and my country from your state. Well, I'm
looking at you every day. … We share a small maritime border, but the
borders of our hearts is [sic] thick. … Misses Palin, I want to rear my little
head.[430]

Even more popular was a viral "Saturday Night Live" skit featuring Tina Fey as Palin. Fey quipped, "I can see Alaska from my house!" which resulted in many Americans actually attributing this quotation to Palin.[431]

In these ways, while McCain struggled with highlighting his experience at the expense of also highlighting his age—with Palin only enhancing McCain's age because of the popular user question, "Is she qualified to be president if something happens to McCain?"—the Obama-Biden ticket benefited from an experienced politician in Biden and an appealingly young candidate in Obama.

4.4.1.2: Campaign Theme 2: The "Cool" Candidate

The Obama campaign worked to present its presidential candidate as young and hip. The campaign referenced the presidential and vice-presidential candidates by their first names on a regular basis, such as, "Barack and Joe can't win this without you."[432] Both still images and videos of Obama that appeared on the campaign website and social media sites usually showed Obama sans jacket, and often sans tie; if he wore a tie, odds are his white shirtsleeves were rolled up.

On his Facebook page, Obama emphasized his connection to youth. The three favorite pages listed on his Facebook profile were running mate Joe Biden, wife Michelle Obama, and the user-created Facebook group "Students for Barack Obama."[433] His favorite music included the hip-hop group, The Fugees,[434] which resonated with Facebook users. As one user posted, "People, we pretty much have to have a president who listens to The Fugees. Vote Obama!"[435]

Campaign blog content further highlighted Obama's connection with youth, such as an embedded video of Obama speaking to a high school class with the description, "Obama spoke about his college choices … and the moment he first realized he was not going to make it to the NBA."[436]

Obama's youthful appearance was especially showcased with video posts of the DNC. Users viewed Obama in a packed stadium with screaming fans amid a rock concert-like atmosphere; this was the featured video on the official site, the video that automatically played when a user logged onto Obama's YouTube page; and the video featured on Obama's Facebook page.[437]

In contrast, interview participant S4 noted: "I didn't even see any rally videos on McCain's website. It seemed like it was just him in a room talking. … It doesn't make you feel like so many people are on his side 'cause he doesn't have the rally videos."[438]

Most of all, the Obama campaign's slogan of "Change" highlighted the candidate as a young politician who was not committed to the status quo or the way things had always been done. This slogan, which resonated with young voters, was used extensively in campaign rhetoric, through web text, graphics, and multimedia, such as the YouTube featured video, "Signs of Hope & Change," that included supporters holding handmade signs reading "Change."[439] This directly opposed the perception users had of the McCain-Palin campaign. "McCain was going to kind of keep things the same, finish what was started type of thing. Older people like that, I think," stated interviewee S1.[440] In these ways, Obama appealed to young users, particularly students, and accentuated his commitment to this group.

4.4.2: User Themes

4.4.2.1: User Theme 1: "Rock Star" Appeal

A common theme among interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants was that "the cool thing to do [was] be for Obama."[441] This even extended to the 2008 election described by the Millennial participants as "the first election where it's actually cool to follow it."[442]

Interviewee S14 stated, "It just seems he would know more about our age group and what's going on."[443] A popular example of user-created content that showed Obama's connection to young people was the "I inhaled frequently" YouTube video. The clip uploaded from the *Chris Mathews Show* featured Obama, clearly responding to a question about marijuana use, replying, "I inhaled frequently. That was the point." The video continued with a statement from Howard Fineman of *The Huffington Post*:

> I think it's an accepted part of the culture now. One of the reasons Barack
> Obama is so popular, especially among younger people, is that he seems
> so real. He seems to acknowledge the reality of things. It's almost like a
> dog whistle type of thing. Older people can't hear it. Younger people
> hear it. And that's one of the things that they hear. He seems to be
> willing to be honest.[444]

The user who posted the video reflected this analysis, commenting, "Nice to see some honesty from politicians."[445]

Facebook web users added to Obama's "coolness" factor by uploading images of Obama's face or name as their profile pictures. This was rarely done with McCain. A McCain supporter asked, "Dude, why do you people have pictures of your candidate as your pic? It's creepy and stalkerish."[446] The representation of oneself as someone or something else—such as one's dog, or one's child—is an interesting Facebook

phenomenon, and profile pictures of Obama showed support for a user's candidate in a very visible way to other Facebook users.

The "Obama Girl" video was described earlier in this chapter to illustrate user content relating to gender, and it also highlighted Obama's age. Interview participants suggested: "I feel like [Obama Girl's] making it seem like he's younger"[447] and "The video highlighted his youth, it highlighted his appeal because he's, you know, a handsome, young politician."[448] In contrast, "how McCain had [a video] with girls who couldn't sing, that just makes it seem like, 'Wow, what a loser.'"[449]

Members of the Millennial Generation felt that user-created content like "Obama Girl" helped the Obama campaign because "it push[ed] the candidate as more of a hipper, younger, more in-touch person. Like my roommate said that Obama would be a great figurehead president for the country, like, 'Here's our country and here's our hip new president.'"[450] Interview participant S7 elaborated:

> I just think it makes [the election] more about celebrities than anything. I mean, obviously if you're running for president you're going to be in the spotlight a lot. But it just seems like they're becoming more and more like rock stars almost. As opposed to just, 'I'm a presidential candidate and I'm here to change the world.' Like, if Obama came out with a clothing style, that wouldn't surprise me. That's not a bad idea, right? [Laughs][451]

In contrast to Obama's Rock Star status, one web user quipped, "The only thing McCain rocks is his rocking chair."[452] Another compared the contest between Obama and McCain as "gold vs. rust."[453] Findings of users' perceptions of McCain and age are described in the next theme.

4.4.2.2: User Theme 2: The "Grumpy Old Man"

Interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants wholeheartedly agreed that Obama was viewed as a cool, young man; and, in contrast, McCain was overwhelmingly perceived as a "Grumpy old man."[454] Interviewee S9 offered, "You hear a LOT about how old he is, from kids,"[455] and S12 agreed, "Talking to my friends and family, it definitely comes up. Like, 'Wow, he's so old.'"[456]

McCain's Wikipedia profile read: "If inaugurated in 2009 at age 72 years and 144 days, he would be the oldest U.S. president upon ascension to the presidency, and the second-oldest president to be inaugurated,"[457] and "When campaigning, he quips, 'I am older than dirt and have more scars than Frankenstein.'"[458]

Myriad of nicknames were given by web users that focused on his age. "Grandpa McCain"[459] was by far the most popular. Variations of McCain's name included, "McCane,"[460] "McSenile,"[461] "McOld,"[462] "McLoser,"[463] "McCrusty,"[464] "McFossil,"[465] and "McBotox."[466] He was called "Old Man Winter,"[467] "the corpse,"[468] "the Crypt Keeper,"[469] a "dinosaur,"[470] a "curmudgeon,"[471] an "old fart,"[472] and an "old geezer"[473] (with Palin as a "teaser").[474] Nicknames stemming from popular culture included, "Tim Conway's old man character"[475] (from "The Carol Burnett Show"), "one of the Dwarfs from Disney's *Snow White,*"[476] "[a character] in *Cocoon*,"[477] "Mr. Burns"[478] (from "The Simpsons"), Elmer Fudd ("Oh, I'm gonna get that darn pesky wabbit [sic] this time!"[479]), and "crazy old Mr. Wilson"[480] (from "Dennis the Menace"). Like Mr. Wilson, a common description of McCain by web users was that of a cranky old neighbor, from "Get off my grass and turn down your music, you wally-scrabbled whippersnappers!"[481] to "You wanna see the real McCain? Throw a baseball into his yard."[482]

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He was described as the stereotyped elderly. One user posted as the presidential candidates were debating, "Who am I? Why am I here? Can you repeat the question? I didn't have my hearing aid turned on."[483] Another asked, "Does anyone think that maybe John McCain wouldn't have suggested postponing the debate if 9:00 wasn't past his bed time? Maybe he would be more inclined to debate after dinner time, say around 4:30 p.m.?"[484] while a user responded, "No, because at that time of day he is spending his social security check on an early bird special at Perkins."[485] Other examples of stereotyped user content included McCain drinking "Metamucil and prune juice,"[486] "playing shuffle board,"[487] "walking to school 10 miles in snow with no shoes [when] Arizona wasn't even a state yet,"[488] and "wandering on the floor like a retired old guy looking for somewhere to sit."[489] He was described as being "past his prime,"[490] and one user posted, "I can see John handing out smiley face stickers at Wal-Mart instead of being our president. Seriously."[491]

McCain's age was highlighted by users' descriptions of his physical characteristics, from "dentures,"[492] to skin that looked like "yellowed wax paper wrapped around bologna,"[493] to being "lame and crippled."[494]

Comments relating to prescription treatment for erectile dysfunction were common, such as, "It takes a combination of Viagra and Sarah Palin to bring some color to his cheeks."[495]

Historic comparisons included, "He knew Teddy Roosevelt personally,"[496] was "going down like the Hindenburg,"[497] "worked on Hoover's reelection campaign,"[498] and "was a senator during the depression era."[499]

He was described as "bewildered,"[500] "belligerent,"[501] and "bumbling,"[502] and dozens of comments were made along the lines of, "McSame needs to change his Depends,"[503] "somebody missed his nap today,"[504] and "back to the old folks home, McCain."[505]

Several of the most popular user-generated videos highlighted McCain's old age. "John McCain Gets BarackRoll'd" received half a million hits in three days.[506] The video mashed McCain's speech at the RNC with Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" 1987 music video, a YouTube phenomenon known as being "Rick rolled." The video presented McCain as the butt of a popular joke as Obama danced on the screen behind him and McCain, clearly frustrated, was not able to continue his speech. Another user-created video was "John McCain's Age Card":

Senior woman sound bite:	No one likes getting old. You forget things. … You easily get confused.
McCain sound bite:	President Putin of Germany.
Woman sound bite with b-roll of McCain sleeping in senate chair:	You fall asleep at inappropriate places. … That's why you need the Age Card. … It tells people you're slow, crotchety, and get frustrated easily. … The age card is available wherever things for old people are sold, so stop by your local drug store or Bob Evans restaurant and pick up yours today.[507]

The user-created video, "John McCain: Is the YouTube on The Google?" juxtaposed sound bites from seniors, such as "I play games online with my grandchildren" to a sound bite of McCain stating, "I'm a [computer] illiterate who has to rely on my wife for all the assistance I can get."[508]

Users further highlighted age through comments about McCain's lack of computer skills and knowledge of new media. Posts described McCain as "out of touch, outdated, and obsolete."[509] Users joked, "Obama stays in constant touch with his Hill colleagues by Blackberry, whereas McCain's telegraph messages make it much tougher to keep current,"[510] and, "at least he stopped using the carrier pigeon!"[511] On MyBarackObama.com, a blog comment read: "When I first started to drive, gas was 35 cents a gallon. You could go in and ask for $2 worth and it would fill up your car! Wow, I'm old!"[512] A fellow user responded: "Look on the bright side, Lynn. You know how to use a google and surf the internets. You're already smarter than some running for office. But we won't name names."[513]

While users poked fun at McCain's computer illiteracy, more serious concerns were shared about his health. McCain's Wikipedia entry read: "McCain has addressed concerns about his age and past health concerns. … He has been treated for a type of skin cancer called melanoma, and an operation in 2000 for that condition left a noticeable mark on the left side of his face."[514] Many users expressed unease that McCain was, "72 years old and has a room full of medical problems"[515] and asked themselves, "Will he last until the election?"[516] Users compared McCain with their own older family members, such as, "my dad is 72 and is asleep most of the day."[517] A minority of users defended McCain, such as S5 who stated, "I don't think he's gonna die soon. I mean, how old is he? 70-something? But he doesn't look like he's on his death bed."[518] But an overwhelming majority of comments hinted at—or even explicitly referenced—McCain's death, such as "Time is running out, old-timer! TICK TOCK."[519] During the third presidential debate, web users posted health-related comments in real time as the debate

became more heated, such as, "I think McCain needs an oxygen mask,"[520] "did McCain just stroke?"[521] "is that a heart monitor on McCain's wrist?"[522] "15 minutes 'til Ole' Yeller is put down for good,"[523]and, "I think McCain will die of old age by the end of this debate."[524] A controversial PAC-produced advertisement posted to YouTube, "One Heartbeat Away," showed McCain as a heart-rate monitor graphic flatlines.[525] Some web user comments mimicked this theme: "Beep-beep-beep-beep-beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep. 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Palin, he's gone.'"[526]

Although only seven years younger than McCain, Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden was rarely represented by users as old. Instead, supporters focused on his experience—exactly what the McCain campaign had tried to accomplish with its candidate, as shown earlier in this chapter—with such comments as, "what a history he has."[527] Others referred to him in a positive way as a "legend."[528]

Also relating to gender, Biden was characterized as more attractive than McCain. A Facebook group, "Joe Biden's smile is hot"[529] was created. Facebook users posted comments such as, "Joe Biden is a SEXXXY man!"[530] Chapter five further addresses how these two candidates were viewed.

A web user posted to Facebook, "Thomas Jefferson once said, 'Do not judge a president by his age, but by his works.'"[531] Unfortunately for McCain, as users joked, "The [Strait Talk] Express lost a wheel"[532] and "tomorrow's headline for the papers about McCain: Old Man Yells at Cloud,"[533] his age became the most prominent association users had with the candidate.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As the findings of this study show, it is impossible to completely separate the entwined issues of race, gender, and age in the 2008 presidential election between Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin. All three issues of race, gender, and age should be explored in conjunction with each other to address the three research questions posed in this study:

- How and in what ways did the candidates work to represent themselves in terms of race, gender, and age through their campaign websites, social networking websites, and campaign-generated e-mails?

- How and in what ways did users interpret the candidates' identity in terms of race, gender, and age through the candidates' campaign websites, social networking websites, and campaign-generated e-mails?

- How and in what ways did users represent the candidates' identity in terms of race, gender, and age through blog comments on the candidates' campaign websites and through social networking websites?

Framing, with an emphasis on Erving Goffman's Impression Management, was used as a theoretical framework to discuss findings in light of these three questions. The issue of age was further explored in conjunction with the technological foundation of participatory websites, using the additional theoretical framework of James Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics.

5.1: Framing of the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Candidates

The 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns presented the unique opportunity to study how a black man, a white woman, and candidates of different ages and generations were represented and interpreted in web content.

While one might have expected presidential candidate Barack Obama to be most represented in terms of race, this was not the case. He was most represented, both by the Obama-Biden campaign and by users, in terms of age. The prevalent logo proclaiming "Change" and the title of the campaign website—"Change We Can Believe In" during the early weeks of the general election campaign and later, "The Change We Need"— could have been interpreted by web users as racial change, but were interpreted to a much greater extent as generational change. Obama was also framed with an emphasis on gender, through the idealized juxtaposition of a trustworthy family man (as presented by the campaign and by users) who had sex appeal (as presented by users).

Vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, as might have been expected, was framed most prevalently in terms of gender. Her candidacy was particularly interesting because of the multifaceted gendered ways in which the McCain-Palin campaign and web users chose to represent her. Her femininity was heightened through her representation as a sex object, while her masculinity was emphasized through images and references of Palin as a moose hunter and rugged outdoorsperson. "Caribou Barbie," the nickname most used by web users in reference to Palin, in fact captured the plurality of her gendered representation.

Presidential candidate John McCain was represented most significantly in terms of age, both unintentionally, in all likeliness, by the McCain-Palin campaign through

political strategy—the suspension of his campaign in September as one example—and campaign website and social media choices, including a belated Twitter presence and rudimentary blogs. McCain was also represented in interesting ways in terms of gender. Historically—as suggested by such unsuccessful presidential bids as Al Gore and John Kerry, both of who were feminized—presidential candidates who exhibit dominance tend to be more successfully elected. Yet, the representation of McCain as a dominant, aggressive, and assertive man was viewed by a majority of web users as having negative qualities.

In contrast, the dominance of vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden was interpreted positively by web users. Moreover, Biden was also framed in gendered ways that were more feminine, as a committed single father and advocate for women. In terms of age, Biden provided an interesting contrast to McCain. While both candidates were close in age, Biden was viewed as "experienced" whereas McCain was considered "old." In these ways, Biden is an important component of how the candidates were framed, despite less web content specifically devoted to him as a candidate.

In these ways, all four candidates are important to compare and contrast how race, gender, and age were viewed in the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns. To that end, Obama, McCain, Biden, and Palin will be discussed separately within this chapter.

5.1.1: Barack Obama

In regard to race, gender, and age, the Obama-Biden campaign worked to represent presidential candidate Barack Obama as a "less black, black" candidate, as a

caring husband and father, and as "cool." Web users interpreted all three of these

representations of race, gender, and age in similar ways. Web users represented Obama

in two additional ways pertaining to race and gender: as a black candidate and as a

candidate with sex appeal. The overlap of these representations of race, gender, and age

are illustrated in figure 8.
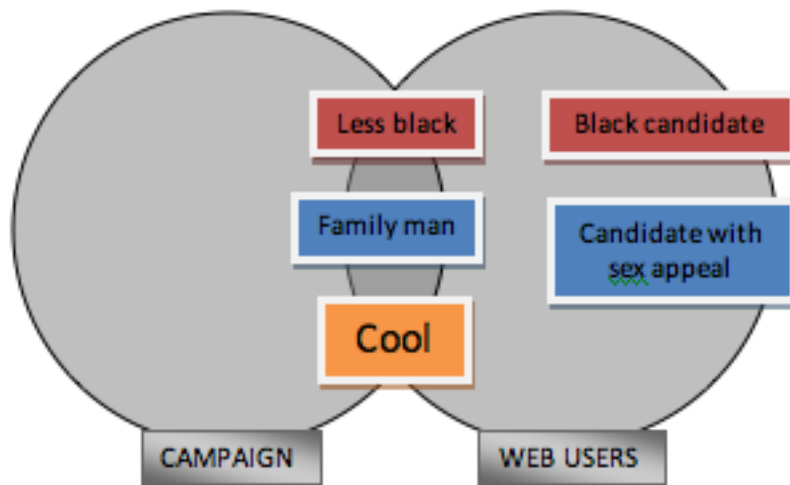
Figure 8. Overlapping Representations of Obama in Terms of Race, Gender, and Age
by the Obama-Biden Campaign and Web Users in the 2008 Presidential Campaign

The parallelism of campaign representations and user interpretations for Obama

suggests partial evidence in Obama attaining nearly 53 percent of the popular vote.[534]

Dan Nimmo and Robert Savage asserted that "what is essential to candidate imagery [is]

interpretation, or the ways people construct a subjectively meaningful reality (or image)

from the transactions of their predispositions with the campaign stimuli that bombard

them."[535] The overlap of campaign and representation and user interpretation was a

fundamental framing success of the Obama-Biden campaign.

The most discrepant framing of Obama between the campaign and web users dealt with race, with racist comments made toward Obama that were hateful and ugly. Antiracist author Tim Wise defined racism as part ideology: "The belief that population groups, defined as distinct 'races,' generally possess traits, characteristics or abilities, which distinguish them as either superior or inferior to other groups in certain ways."[536] By this definition, "jokes" posted by users that characterized black people as "eat[ing] chicken, peas and watermelon"[537] and having "a fat lip"[538] were dangerous weapons of racism, as were such overt racist comments as "Keep the White House white."[539]* Users also stereotyped blacks as living in "ghettos," for example, "Can you name me one nice black neighborhood?"[540] Moreover, whether the use of the term "nigger" and other racist posts were made in earnest or, as one user posted on the McCain Facebook page, made "just to stir everyone up,"[541] both overt and "joking" remarks are weapons of racism.

Many users addressed racist comments, through responding to the individual who posted them, such as, "You think coming on a board calling Obama a nigger is going to hurt us? You're the one looking ignorant"[542] and "You almost make me cry how racist you are."[543] Some posted a call to action for bloggers to monitor the sites: "[In response to] anybody who is incredibly rude or disrespectful, press the Report option and report them to Facebook. We don't need this kind of behavior, anywhere."[544] Racist remarks further spurred users to tell personal stories about racism in the offline world, such as a

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* Tim Wise describes the consequential effects of assigning racial characteristics in his post-2008 essay, "No innocence left to kill: Racism, injustice, and explaining America to my daughter," in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin: "George Zimmerman can't differentiate—and didn't see the need to— between criminal and non-criminal black people" (July 14, 2013, http://www.timwise.org/2013/07/no-innocence-left-to-kill-racism-injustice-and-explaining-america-to-my-daughter/).

user who stated that he spoke up to a cashier and shopper at a local convenience store who were referring to Obama as "that man."[545]

Not all online racist remarks were made with malice, such as a discussion on the term "nigger": "When you use an a at the end, it is a different term with different meaning. Blacks use it all the time, and if you use it with a smile, the connotation is a lot different."[546] In this way, the condoning of "nigga with a smile" perpetuated racism through a white user (or a user pretending to be white) attempting to use the racist term in an acceptable way. Other web users attempted to criticize racism while, in doing so, actually perpetuated racist categories, such as one blogger's admiration of black athletes: "It absolutely disgusts me that white guys (like me) can go to a sports event and watch physically talented black superstars perform and entertain us (and we approve) but we can't approve of an intellectually talented black superstar to lead our country."[547] These nonmalicious remarks can be considered a form of covert racism.

Specifically, Wise describes the covert use of racism through "enlightened exceptionalism" in the 2008 election:

> …The ability of whites to support and vote for Obama says little about our larger views regarding people of color generally, or black folks in particular. Indeed, many white liberal Obama supporters openly admitted that what they liked about the candidate was his ability to "transcend race" (which implicitly meant to transcend his own blackness), to "make white people feel good about ourselves," and the fact that he "didn't come with the baggage of the civil rights movement." In other words, many whites liked Obama precisely because they were able to view him as fundamentally different than other black folks. He was an exception. His blackness wasn't problematic. It didn't make white people uncomfortable.
>
> But to view Barack Obama as different from the black norm—and to view this difference as a positive thing—is to suggest that "normal" blackness is tainted, negative, to be avoided, and certainly not supported politically. It is to re-stigmatize blackness and the black community writ

large, even as one praises and identifies with one black individual writ small. It is to turn Barack Obama into the political equivalent of Cliff Huxtable, from "The Cosby Show:" a black man with whom, despite his blackness, white America is able to identify.

… Nearly all of us continue to harbor certain anti-black stereotypes and biases, it is safe to say that millions of otherwise liberal white folks are practitioners of racism, albeit a 2.0 variety, as opposed to the old school, 1.0 type, to which we have cast most of our attention.[548]

This analysis explains why the campaign worked to represent Obama in a "less black" way. If "normal blackness" was not supported politically, then the Obama-Biden campaign needed to present a "fundamentally different" black man. The campaign did this in two major ways: by emphasizing aspects of Obama that would connect with white America, and by using surrogate black supporters, such as Queen Latifah, Chris Rock, and Jay-Z.[*] As Goffman suggested, part of framing is "to reveal and conceal,"[549] and the Obama-Biden campaign chose carefully how to reveal and conceal Obama's racial identity.

This interpretation of how the candidate was framed as "less black" resonated with users. Participants of interviews, focus groups, and self-reports in this study loudly voiced that Obama's campaign did not focus on his race. "He tries to make it seem like he's not black,"[550] said S3. S10 added, "On the home page, … they had a picture of him on the front, but it wasn't a color picture. It was a picture whitewashed and then covered with blue. So I don't know if that's a racial kind of tactic or just coincidence, [but] you couldn't actually tell that he was a black man."[551] "I don't think he's emphasized it nearly as much as he could. I mean, it could be huge. Like, he could say in every

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[*] Interestingly, although Oprah Winfrey supported the candidacy of Obama, content specifically mentioning or including her was not posted in the extensive sample of this study.

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speech: 'This could be historical. Let's elect a black man.' But he doesn't,"[552] stated

S13. S5 added, "I think in the beginning there was more talk about how he was going to

be assassinated, because some crazy backwoods guy is gonna go nuts or something. But

I don't really hear that anymore."[553] S15 suggested, "I feel like race has played a very

small, very small aspect in this campaign."[554]

Users also engaged in what Tim Wise referred to as "colorblind racism." Wise

drew on the work of Eduardo Bonilla Silva to describe colorblind racism as: "the

dominant white racial ideology of the modern era, in which whites, under the guise of

being colorblind, refuse to acknowledge the reality of racism."[555] A McCain supporter

posted, "This is not about skin color, it's about who's more qualified,"[556] while Obama

supporters posted, "I don't care one bit about his race, gender, sexual orientation, religion

or any other criteria other than ability to get the job done,"[557] and, "This is a race about

issues, not an issue about race."[558] Some users drew attention to colorblind racism with

responses such as, "If you don't see color then you are avoiding the problem"[559] and "If

you want everyone to look past race, no one can look at it."[560] As one user asked of this

covert form of racism, "Can something really be 'a little' racist?"[561]

The Obama-Biden campaign's careful balance between presenting their candidate

in black and white was successfully viewed by users as not playing the "race card." In

addition, according to the Pew Research Center, based on exit poll data Obama received

43 percent of the white vote and 95 percent of the black vote.[562] For the Obama

campaign, the strategy was a win-win approach: not alienating potential white voters,

while securing support of black voters.

Examples of Obama's favorite author and quotation on Facebook are other pertinent examples. The campaign chose to include Toni Morrison and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., blacks who can also be considered part of Wise's "enlightened exceptionalism." White students across the US watch King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech in history class; the campaign intentionally did not feature a Malcolm X quotation. Likewise, Morrison is often read by white students in high school English, and is known for her reference to President Bill Clinton as "the first black president."[*]

Moreover, web content posted by the Obama-Biden campaign that highlighted Obama's blackness, such as the "A More Perfect Union" speech and "Voter Registration: The Struggle in Mississippi" video, were associated with the civil rights movement. The cultural history of the civil rights movement can be considered a minor narrative form in Impression Management. Further, this movement is also palatable to whites, particularly since—as highlighted in the "Voter Registration" video—so many white Americans were part of the civil rights movement. In fact, web users fancied themselves as part of a new movement in racial history, with such posts as "For the fierce urgency of now!"[563] This historic importance of Obama's candidacy was also a common theme among interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants. "I am proud of my generation for being a significant part of tearing down a racial barrier,"[564] wrote self-reporting participant S24. "I will be able to tell my children and grandchildren how I was sitting up with my

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[*] Morrison explained in *Time* magazine that "People misunderstood that phrase. I was deploring the way in which President Clinton was being treated, vis-à-vis the sex scandal that was surrounding him. I said he was being treated like a black on the street, already guilty, already a perp. I have no idea what his real instincts are, in terms of race" (Toni Morrison, "10 questions for Toni Morrison," *Time*, May 7, 2008, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1738507,00.html).

roommates in my dorm at Ohio University the night that the first black president was elected into office,"[565] offered S30.

Obama's race was highlighted by users as some emphasized their generational role in making racial history, while others made racist comments. Further, Wise's suggestion of 2.0 racism explains why references to Obama's race were not prevalent in campaign-posted content, and why both the campaign worked to represent Obama and users, in turn, interpreted Obama as a "less black" candidate. In fact, many users focused on representation of Obama in terms of gender as a way to avoid discussing race or appearing racist. "I think Obama definitely tries to say, 'I'm not just black, you know, I'm also a father. I'm also a husband. I'm also a man,"[566] stated interviewee S7.

With regard to gender, Barack Obama was represented in two interesting ways. The campaign worked to represent its candidate as a caring husband and father. For instance, the description of Obama slowly and carefully driving his infant daughter home from the hospital certainly resonated with many mothers and fathers who recalled their own drive home, providing a tangible link between Obama the candidate and Obama as a father and husband. Users interpreted this same frame of Obama as a family man, as suggested by interviewee S10 who stated, "Obama was projecting himself more as [being] family-oriented,"[567] and such web user comments as "You see him act affectionately to his wife and children."[568] Users bolstered this image with their own user-posted content, such as the slideshow of the Obamas' "Greatest PDA Moments." Users, however, also represented Obama as an attractive candidate with sex appeal, with comparisons to JFK and lyrics such as, "You can Barack me tonight"[569] in the Obama Girl music video. The campaign worked to reinforce the family frame for Obama

following the popularity of the viral video. To clarify that "Obama Girl" was not campaign-generated and endorsed, Obama told the Associated Press that the video had upset his daughters and stated, "You do wish people would think about what impact their actions have on kids and families."[570]

The comparison of Obama to JFK framed him with intersecting representations of both age and gender. Americans know Kennedy as our youngest elected president, and, women particularly, describe him as having been handsome. Duerst-Lahti pointed out that, in addition, "a comparison to a former male president introduces masculinity without needing to do so explicitly. We naturally tend to compare a woman to other women and a man to other men. In doing so for the presidency, we inadvertently and invisibly introduce gender."[571]

While the campaign was careful to distance itself from the Obama Girl video, it did not try to avoid the comparison to JFK; in fact, the campaign emphasized this representation by quoting Kennedy on Obama's Facebook page and posting video of Obama's July 2008 Berlin speech to his YouTube page. In that speech, Obama referred to himself as a "fellow citizen of the world," referencing Kennedy's famous Inaugural address.[572] Kennedy's speechwriter, Theodore Sorensen, who helped draft the famous 1963 "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech, stated, "Of course there are parallels between two, young, aggressive internationalist-minded Democrats speaking in that historic place."[573]

Both Obama and JFK were fathers to two young children at the time of their candidacy, and, like Obama, Kennedy was viewed by many in 1960 as a committed husband (although he is framed differently as a spouse today). The allure of electing a candidate with a happy, young family to office was likely even stronger in 2008, with a

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divorce rate of 36 percent.[*] Unlike the McCains' marriage, the Obamas' marriage was a

first marriage, highlighted by users with an anniversary "money bomb" to raise online

donations on MyBarackObama.com and a blog post describing a user-generated

fundraiser in Hyde Park where the Obamas had their first date. Both Obama and JFK

were viewed as attractive candidates for president, also highlighted by web users who

described Obama as "good looking."[574]

Unlike the Camelot of the 1960s, the Obama campaign further emphasized his

commitment to women and families through political web content. This included a

"Women for the Change We Need" week on the Obama campaign website, featuring

blogs with endorsements from and video of Lilly Ledbetter and Nancy Pelosi. Of course,

web content featuring Hillary Clinton also solidified the frame of Obama as an advocate

for women. In the live video of a conversation between Clinton and Biden, Biden told

Clinton, "If there is any ultimate validator in the United States of America for whether or

not we care about the plight and circumstances of women in America, it's you."[575]

Goffman suggested that there exists a "tendency for performers to offer their

observers an impression that is idealized."[576] The juxtaposition of a devoted, committed

spouse and father who is also handsome is an idealized man for many women, which may

help to explain Obama's appeal to women voters—receiving 56 percent of votes from

women—even after the contentious Democratic primary between Obama and Hillary

Clinton and after the nomination of Sarah Palin on the Republican ticket. In these ways,

users interpreted campaign-generated content in tandem with how the campaign worked

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[*] In contrast, the divorce rate in 1960 was 22% (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Marriages and divorces," in *Vital Statistics of the United States: 1960, Volume III*, p. 4, accessed October 14, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsus/mgdv60_3.pdf).

to represent Obama as a family man, and their representation of him as sexy coincides with how Obama was framed in terms of age.

Obama and JFK were viewed similarly with regard to gender, and they were also similar in age. While JFK was the youngest US president elected to office at 43 years old, Obama was the fourth youngest (behind Bill Clinton and Ulysses S. Grant) at 47 years old. This was a striking contrast to McCain's 72 years of age. Moreover, Patricia Lee Sykes noted the importance of Obama as the first black candidate for president who did not participate in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, intertwining the issues of age and race.[577] Web users interpreted Obama's candidacy as different from Baby Boomers Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, born on the cusp of the Silent and Baby Boom generations, such as with the comment "I am not a fan of Sharpton or Jesse [Jackson], they focus too much on race."[578]

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: "In America, each generation is a new people."[579] The impact of generational differences can be seen in the 2008 election. While Obama is technically a member of the Baby Boom generation, Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais suggested in *Millennial Makeover* that many associated him with GenerationX: "… [Obama] distanced himself from the rest of the candidates in a crucial way that demonstrated his awareness of generational differences and his sensitivity to the concerns and political style of the Millennial Generation."[580]

According to Neil Howe and William Strauss, originators of generational theory, a generation can be defined as "a society-wide peer group, born over a period roughly the same length as the passage from youth to adulthood (in today's America, around twenty or twenty-one years), who collectively possess a common persona."[581] This makes the

representation of Obama as a GenXer important. Howe and Strauss' survey research found that Millennials described Baby Boomers as "strict, hypocritical, intolerant, and argumentative,"[582] much like teenagers might describe their parents. A member of Generation X, born in the 1960s and 1970s, in the generation immediately preceding the Millennial Generation, could therefore be viewed by a Millennial as the "cool young uncle" in a family. This impression of Obama was fostered by the campaign through working to represent him as "cool," from his favorite music listed as the hip-hop group the Fugees on Facebook to campaign-posted video of him dancing on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

In "Barack Obama on Ellen," which received almost 4 million views and 30,000 "likes" by the end of the campaign, Obama danced to Beyone's "Crazy in Love" as he walked onstage. As DeGeneres stood up to greet him, they danced together to a hip-hop beat. DeGeneres complimented him: "You've got some moves!"[583] A follow-up video, "Ellen decides to call Barack Obama 10/22/08," featured DeGeneres telephoning Obama in a video call: "Michelle was on the show and she was talking some smack about your moves. You have 20 seconds to respond." Obama then grooved to James Brown's "Get Up Offa That Thing," and joked, "Michelle may be a better dancer than me, but I'm convinced I'm a better dancer than John McCain."[584] Through these video appearances, the campaign worked to represent Obama as a young, hip candidate who knew how to dance. Moreover, both songs featured were by well-known black artists, Beyonce and James Brown, also highlighting Obama's race.

As with race and age, gender and age are also interlaced issues. Obama never gave his position on gay marriage or talked about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

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(LGBT) issues with DeGeneres, who is openly gay and an advocate for gay marriage, yet their friendly banter and affectionate hug provided the impression that they were friends, indirectly suggesting that they shared similar views since we are often friends with those who are similar to us. The Pew Research Center reported that Millennials are more accepting of gay marriage,[585] reinforcing support of Obama among young people through his appearances on "Ellen." In these ways, race, gender, and age all intersect in how the candidates came across on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" to millions of web users.

Users interpreted this frame in an identical way, describing Obama as, "our hip new president."[586] This image was enhanced through the viral "Yes We Can" music video, which received over 12 million views on YouTube by the end of the 2008 election. "Yes We Can" was produced by black musician will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas and directed by Jesse Dylan (a son of Bob Dylan), who is white. It featured over 30 celebrities singing "lyrics" from one of Obama's speeches during the Democratic primary, mixed with black and white video of Obama giving the speech.[587*] The Obama-Biden campaign posted the celebrity-produced video to its Facebook, YouTube, website, and blog pages; on YouTube, the campaign highlighted it as a "favorite" video.

Many of the celebrities featured in the music video are black, including: basketball player Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; rappers Common, Fonzworth Bentley, and Nick Cannon (married to Mariah Carey); actors Tracee Ellis Ross (daughter of Diana Ross), Aisha Tyler, Harold Perrineau and Hill Harper; and singers will.i.am, John Legend and

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[*] Obama's speech, with its notable repetition of "yes we can," can be associated with the repetition of "I have a dream" in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous 1963 speech. Further, the phrase "yes we can" comes from Ceasar Chavez's slogan (in Spanish, "Sí, se puede") for organizing farm workers into Unions in the 1970s, and is still used as the motto of the United Farm Workers of America (United Farm Workers of America, Front page, accessed October 15, 2013, http://www.ufw.org).

Nicole Scherzinger. Legend and will.i.am performed the song at the Democratic

National Convention.[588] White celebrities, such as actresses Scarlett Johansson and Kate

Walsh, were included in the video, but were not featured as prominently, especially in

comparison to the strong presence of will.i.am in the video. The music in the video was

hip-hop.[589]

"Yes We Can" targeted young people, as a collage-style music video that was

short in length (four minutes) featuring an array of rappers, singers, a professional athlete,

and actors who appeared in television programs such as "Grey's Anatomy," "Lost," and

"CSI" that were popular with focus group participants.[590]

In another music video reference, an Obama supporter suggested, "Right now, in

pop culture terms, Barack Obama is Michael Jackson circa 'Thriller.' He's got that across

the board appeal—men like his coolness and game, women like that he seems empathetic

and levelheaded, young folks like his swagger and hopefulness. He's liked across races

and cultures and when that happens in America you become a phenomenon. And it's

really freakin' hard to run a race against a phenomenon."[591] In this way, issues of race,

gender, and age intersected in the representation of Obama.

Goffman wrote that, "a performer often engenders in his audience the belief that

he is related to them in a more ideal way than is always the case."[592] This can clearly be

seen in regard to Obama, particularly in regard to age. Many web users were young

Millennials who were less than half the age of Obama. Yet, his representation as only

one generation away, a GenXer, instead of two generations away, as a Baby Boomer,

helped them to connect with this candidate in what may be viewed as an unprecedented

way,[*] and in a way that significantly contrasted with Silent Generation candidate John McCain.

5.1.2: John McCain

In terms of race, gender, and age, the McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent presidential candidate John McCain as an "All-American boy," covertly describing McCain's whiteness; as a masculine war hero; and as experienced. While some web users interpreted McCain in these same frames, a majority of web users both interpreted and represented McCain as racist, as sexist and volatile, and as old. Unlike Obama, who users framed in almost the same ways as did the campaign, McCain was framed by web users in opposing, negative distortions of the campaign's frames.
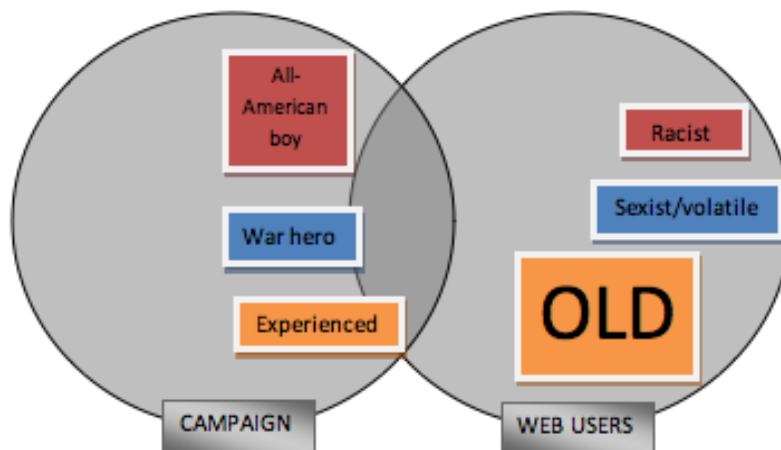
Figure 9. Overlapping Representations of McCain in Terms of Race, Gender, and Age by the McCain-Palin Campaign and Web Users in the 2008 Presidential Campaign

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[*] Bill Clinton appealed to young voters in 1992 with, for example, his saxophone performance on "The Arsenio Hall Show." However, the Pew Research Center reported that Clinton received 53% of votes from those under the age of 30 while Obama received 66% of votes under the age of 30 (http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/13/young-voters-in-the-2008-election/).

While McCain was described by the McCain-Palin campaign as an "All-American boy," with a connotation of whiteness, the campaign worked to avoid representation of McCain as racist. Goffman wrote, "When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society."[593] Certainly, McCain's campaign wanted to be credited with racial acceptance.

However, an interesting example, in which the issues of race and age intersect, occurred during the October 7 "Town Hall" debate, the second of three presidential debates in 2008. While discussing energy policy, McCain stated: "By the way, my friends, I know you grow a little weary of this back and forth. It was an energy bill on the floor of the Senate, loaded down with goodies, billions for the oil companies. It was sponsored by Bush and Cheney and you know who voted for it? You might never know. That one." McCain pointed to Obama sitting on stage next to him. [594]

McCain's controversial statement was covered extensively in the news media—as well as on programs like "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," "The Late Show with David Letterman," and "Saturday Night Live"—and was heavily discussed among web users. The statement occurred during the same week in the campaign when controversy surrounded racist supporters attending McCain and Palin rallies, described later in this chapter, thus enhancing the suggested racist undertone of McCain's comment. Most users agreed, "Well he's a racist, plain and simple!"[595] asking, "What else could it mean?"[596]

Responses included, "I think it was contempt and dismissiveness, but not racism. Let's not play that card,"[597] and, "I believe him using 'that one' [means] he thinks he is better than Obama."[598] Others argued that, "It could be construed as racist, or it could be because McCain went daffy and forgot the name of his opponent for a second."[599] Many web users agreed that "he was having a 'senior moment.'"[600] With this controversial remark, McCain was viewed as both racist and old.

Interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants further highlighted this intersection of race and age. S18 suggested:

> I think with this election in particular, I'm not going to say it would be stupid to listen to your family, but you have to remember they grew up in a completely different time period when there was a lot of racism, even in our parents' age and our grandparents' age, and personally my great-grandma was like, "If we have a black man as president, then I'm moving," … just because that's how she grew up. She grew up in southern Ohio, and that's just how she is. And she influenced my grandmother. I mean, my mom and dad, they're not like that. But with this election, with a woman and an African American male running as well, I think there's more biases you could find from your family, just because of the big age difference and how they were raised.[601]

S10 added:

> It's different, especially for older people, I think, because they grew up in the time period when there was that transition from segregation through the civil rights movement to equality. I feel like, for them, it is difficult to see how Obama could be a legitimate candidate, because for them, growing up, they were always taught, "Black people aren't as good as you" and stuff like that.[602]

With attention drawn to whether "that one" was attributed to racism or old age, and participants' thoughts on the intersection of race and age, the issues of race and age are not wholly separate issues, but entwined together.

McCain's identity in terms of gender was further intertwined with age. The campaign attempted to represent McCain as a masculine war hero; instead, users interpreted this frame as being old. Further, users represented McCain as sexist and volatile, both characteristics that can be stereotyped in a "grumpy old man."

A specific use of gender intersecting with age is the YouTube clip posted by users, "Ellen DeGeneres vs. John McCain: Gay Marriage." In it, McCain responded as a guest on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" to DeGeneres' prodding of his position on the issue of gay marriage: "I believe in maintaining the status of marriage between men and women."[603]

The user-posted clip on YouTube received thousands of comments. A minority of users supported McCain's position, but an overwhelming majority sided against McCain, noting, "He looks pretty damn uncomfortable. He can't even look her in the eyes … and he definitely seems to be afraid to say what he really thinks about it,"[604] and suggesting, "Ellen made a political monkey out of McCain."[605] One YouTube user offered:

> Unfortunately, saying they should have the same rights while not being recognized as being married is equal to saying they can be equal, but separate. The American Psychologists Association agrees that sexuality is not a choice. I personally do not recall a time I chose to like the opposite sex, but I do. I imagine that homosexuals never choose which gender to be attracted to, either.[606]

This example underscores some of the powerful dialogue that web content offered for discussion of presidential campaign issues relating to gender, not just discussion of presidential candidates' comments in the context of gender, but it also highlights the visceral reaction to an issue of gender equality. In contrast to Obama's appearances on "Ellen" that represented him as a cool friend of DeGeneres who "had some moves," the

negative reactions of users to McCain's response to a current issue like gay marriage highlighted McCain's age by portraying him as a politician who was behind the times and old-fashioned.

McCain was born in 1936 and is therefore, like Dick Cheney, a member of the Silent Generation, sandwiched between the G.I. Generation (also referred to as "The Greatest Generation") and the Baby Boom Generation.[607] However, in contrast to Obama who was viewed by users as being one generation younger than he actually is, McCain was perceived as being one generation older than he actually is. Users interpreted McCain as being a part of the G.I. Generation, such as interviewee S9 who quoted his roommate as saying, "It's time that the World War II generation stopped running the country.'"[608]

Howe and Strauss suggest that young people think of the G.I. Generation as "a synonym for grandparent."[609] In 2008, an 18-year-old could have certainly viewed the 72-year-old McCain as a great-grandparent. Although the campaign tried to project its desired image of McCain as experienced, the audience attributed a discordant image of old age.

Goffman described a central concept in frame analysis as "the key," using a musical analogy,[610] and keying as "the process of transcription."[611] He wrote: "…a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else."[612] The McCain-Palin campaign's response to the collapse of financial systems in September 2008 is an illustrative example of web users transcribing experience into old age.

Two days before the first presidential debate, McCain announced in a text-only—not video—email: "Tomorrow morning, I will suspend my campaign and return to Washington,"[613] calling for a postponement of the debate. Web users immediately ridiculed McCain in several ways. First, they highlighted modern methods of travel, with such comments as "Thanks to airplanes Oxford, Mississippi, to DC is no longer a three week horse and buggy ride"[614] and "people don't have to ride covered wagons back to Washington to know what's going on.[615] They also pointed to modern methods of communication, with such posts as "McCain should realize that we are in the 21st Century and [have] this thing called the Internet"[616] and "got a laptop McCain? Ever hear of a video conference?"[617] Further, users prided themselves on being able to multitask, posting "Working and blogging at the same time"[618] and "I think McSame [sic] is on to something here. I've been paying too much attention to this election, and not devoting enough time to my class work. Tomorrow, I will tell my professors that I plan to postpone all tests, quizzes, and exams until this financial crisis has been resolved! *cynical snicker*"[619]

The campaign did reverse its approach with McCain's participation in the scheduled September 26 debate, but the damage had been done. The "key," to use Goffman's analogy, that the McCain campaign had attempted to play was one of the experienced politician who prioritized his role as a standing senator to address the financial collapse. This key, however, was one used in a big band standards tune that did not resonate with users of the Millennial generation. Goffman suggested that, "…observers actively project their frames of reference into the world … around them."[620] Millennials are multitaskers who rely on new media that erases the necessity of

geographic proximity; therefore, the suspension of McCain's campaign did not fit within their frame of reference.

John Palfrey and Urs Gasser suggested in *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* that, "unlike most Digital Immigrants, Digital Natives live much of their lives online, without distinguishing between the online and the offline. Instead of thinking of their digital identity and their real-space identity as two separate things, they just have an identity."[621] From this perspective, McCain should not have had to suspend his candidacy for president in order to attend to pressing business as a senator. His separation of roles and identity only accentuated the impression of old age to Millennials.

Goffman suggested that a discrepancy in impressions is further presented through "unmeant gestures." Again using the analogy of a musical key, he wrote: "A single note off-key can disrupt the tone of an entire performance."[622] Off-key notes for McCain included language choices, such as the misspeak of "my fellow prisoners" in an October 8 speech that web users linked to dementia. "The impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps,"[623] wrote Goffman; and, in the age of new media, these minor mishaps become exaggerated as users revisit and share them with others through web content, as users did with their descriptions of McCain "wandering the floor" during the second presidential debate.

The viral nature of user opinion was depicted in the parody of Obama's "Yes We Can" video, "John.he.is." This music video received more than two million views on YouTube by the end of the election, and was consistently one of the top ten most popular videos in a YouTube search for John McCain. The spoof of "Yes We Can" featured a

will.i.am lookalike, and mimicked black and white video and McCain's speeches mixed with actors singing "lyrics" from those speeches. Early in the video, they quoted McCain, singing, "I'm sorry to tell you, there are gonna be other wars." A singer asked, "What?" and looked at his script in confusion. When the lyrics continued with "If you think things are bad now, if we withdrawal [from Iraq], you ain't seen nothin' yet," a Scarlett Johannson look-alike stared with wide eyes at her microphone, and a woman signed in American Sign Language, "we're fucked." Near the end of the video, McCain was quoted stating, "I don't think Americans are concerned if we're there [in Iraq] for 100 years, or 1,000 years, or 10,000 years." At this, an actor blew into a paper bag, as if hyperventilating, and the guitarist stopped playing and walked out of the camera shot.[624]

The contrast between "Yes We Can" and "John.he.is" could not have been more pronounced: Obama's speech was turned into a popular music video featuring dozens of cool celebrities, while users parodied McCain as having celebrity-look-alikes who deserted him mid-song. While the context of the video criticized McCain's political position on the war in Iraq, it sent a powerful message about how Millennials viewed McCain as a candidate in terms of age. Unlike Obama, McCain was too old and insufficiently hip to have his own authentic user-created viral video.

Goffman wrote: "…If our special interest is the study of impression management, of the contingencies which arise in fostering an impression, and of the techniques for meeting these contingencies, then the team and the team-performance may well be the best units to take as the fundamental point of reference."[625] The representation of McCain, then, should be considered in conjunction with his vice-presidential running mate, Sarah Palin and his spouse, Cindy McCain.

Cindy McCain enhanced users' interpretation of McCain as old, in terms of age, and as unfaithful, in terms of gender. First, users' impression of her as dependent suggested that the couple's marriage was an old-fashioned one, with a dominant husband and subservient wife. Users noticed and commented on the campaign's unwillingness to send Cindy out alone on the campaign trail, such as the observation that they had to be "less than 5 feet" apart. Goffman suggested that for all members of a performance team, "…official word ought to be made available to him so he can play his part on the team and feel a part of it."[626] Without providing Cindy with the independence and resources to campaign for the McCain-Palin campaign, she was used more as an "accessory" than a member of the team.

Michelle Obama, in contrast, assisted the Obama-Biden campaign by giving speeches all across the country which, in turn, also helped to represent Obama as a man with a more modern marriage, in which both partners are more equal. While Michelle was still campaigning for her husband, and not herself, she was perceived as intelligent and independent, and interpreted by users as a strong woman.

Further, users responded negatively to McCain's second marriage to a younger woman, as a divorcee, but responded positively to Biden's second marriage to a younger woman, as a widower. McCain's first wife, Carol McCain, raised their children alone and suffered debilitating injuries from a car accident during the years that McCain was a P.O.W. As Jonathan Alter reported in *Newsweek*, Ross Perot, who helped to finance Carol's recovery, stated: "After he [McCain] came home, she [Carol McCain] walked with a limp. So he threw her over for a poster girl with big money from Arizona and the rest is history."[627]

Users interpreted and represented this image of Cindy as a "trophy wife, with her bleach blonde hair, bleached teeth, and expensive outfits,"[628] and McCain as a "womanizer."[629] User-created videos portrayed McCain "ogling" Sarah Palin, and comments reflected this impression of McCain as an unfaithful husband. This kind of user-generated content illustrates the intersection of gender and age, since McCain was not described as a suave, attractive older man seducing a younger woman, but more as a creepy old man undressing her with his eyes.

Goffman offered that "… an integral part of [one's impression] … is fostered and sustained by the intimate cooperation of more than one participant."[630] While Michelle Obama helped represent Obama in a positive way as a 21st century version of the young, attractive Kennedys of "Camelot," Cindy McCain reinforced McCain's negative impression as an old, unfaithful womanizer.

5.1.3: Joe Biden

In regard to race, gender, and age, the Obama-Biden campaign worked to represent vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden as a white Irish-Catholic; as a man who could be a "tough guy," committed single father and advocate for women; and as experienced. In regard to race, a very small minority interpreted and represented Biden as racist, but most did not comment directly on Biden and race. In regard to gender and age, web users interpreted and represented Biden in the same frames presented by the campaign: as a tough guy, family man, advocate for women, and experienced politician.
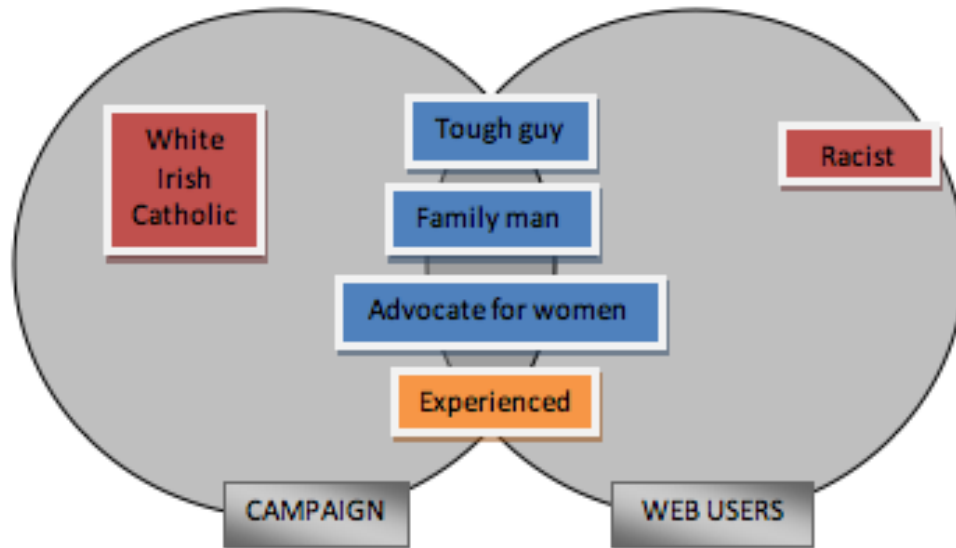
Figure 10. Overlapping Representations of Biden in Terms of Race, Gender, and Age by the Obama-Biden Campaign and Web Users in the 2008 Vice-Presidential Campaign

Goffman used the term "gaffe" to describe a faux pas that may affect how we manage the impression of ourselves to others.[631] Before the 2008 campaign, Joe Biden received significant media attention for two very racist gaffes.

A YouTube video that appeared in search results for "Joe Biden" in this study showed Biden shaking hands and talking with an Indian-American, stating: "I've had a great relationship. In Delaware, the largest growth in population is Indian-Americans moving from India. You cannot go to a 7-Eleven or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent."[632] Biden claimed the statement was taken out of context, and a spokesperson for his presidential campaign released the statement: "The point Senator Biden was making is that there has been a vibrant Indian-American community in Delaware for decades. It has primarily been made up of engineers, scientists and physicians, but more recently, middle-class families are moving into Delaware and

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purchasing family-run small businesses."[633] In the sample for this study, only one user

comment addressed this racist gaffe: "Well Joe Biden said racist remarks about people

from India."[634] This user comment, posted to McCain's Facebook page, did not receive

any response from other users.

In 2007, Biden made another racist remark, this time about his fellow Democratic

candidate during the presidential primary, Barack Obama: "I mean, you got the first

mainstream African-American, who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking

guy, I mean, that's a storybook, man."[635] According to *Time* magazine, which included

the statement in its "Top Ten Campaign Gaffes" of 2007, "he later apologized and said he

should have used the word 'fresh' instead of 'clean.'"[636] In the sample of this study, no

user comments appeared on the candidate websites or social networking sites addressing

Biden's racist perception of his future running mate. Both gaffes were referenced by web

users on Joe Biden's Wikipedia page throughout the campaign, and still appeared on the

day after the election, November 5, 2008.[637] But why didn't this content generate further

discussion among users? It seems truly remarkable that Biden almost entirely avoided

being framed as racist.

Certainly, the fact that Biden's comment about Obama was not returned in any

videos with a search of "Joe Biden" or "Barack Obama" helped to conceal this gaffe.

And, comments were disabled for the "Dunkin' Donuts" video on YouTube;[638] had

comments been enabled, certainly we would expect more user discussion.

The partnership of Biden and Obama in the general election can further help to

explain the lack of dialogue regarding Biden's racist remarks. By standing side-by-side

with Obama, both figuratively and through the Facebook profile picture used for both

candidates, the very fact that Biden was Obama's vice-presidential running mate communicated that Biden, in turn, was not racist. In this way, both candidates won: Obama was interpreted as being "less black" with a white man as his running mate, and Biden was let "off the hook" for his racist gaffes in 2006 and 2007.

Biden also was framed in a win-win situation through his impression as both tough as well as a committed single father and advocate for women. Goffman suggested that an important part of framing is the inclusion of human interest stories, and, specifically, "which ones will be selected and how they will be told."[639] The Obama-Biden campaign excelled in choosing and presenting these stories, with descriptions of Biden's mother urging her son to confront bullies and "bloody their nose" emphasizing his toughness and narratives of his role as a single father. The campaign further highlighted his role as an advocate for women with repeated references to the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, drafted by the office of Senator Biden. This complex, multifaceted impression of Biden in terms of gender was an extraordinary accomplishment for the Obama-Biden campaign. Even the official campaign website introduced Biden's biography with the first sentence: "Joe Biden is a rare mix."[640]

The idea of actions speaking louder than words—or, more accurately to describe campaign rhetoric, actions supporting words—may in part explain the successful pairing of gender characteristics that are seemingly contradictory. Biden's reputation as an assertive, dominant Senator provided evidence for his representation as "tough." In his biography on the campaign website, Biden was described as an expert on foreign policy who "stared down dictators."[641] This was important to work as a foil to Obama's compromising and calm persona. While the campaign might have worried about public

perception of Obama possibly being a "wimp" due to his outspokenness against the Iraq War, Biden presented the opportunity to balance Obama. Biden was the kind of leader with whom political opponents, and even other countries, would not want to fight. In this way, R.W. Connell's two forms of masculinity, technical expertise and dominance, were both exhibited by the ticket of Obama-Biden, with Obama representing technical expertise through his web-savviness and social media presence, and Biden representing dominance.

Biden's actions also, however, illustrated his commitment to family. The campaign accentuated the narrative and imagery of Biden commuting by train back to Delaware every night from Washington, DC. The key life event of the death of Biden's first wife and baby daughter and Biden's emerging role as a single father was used, in the framework of Impression Management, as a life narrative.

In the fascinating live web video featuring a conversation between Biden and Hillary Clinton, Biden referenced attending his kids' parent-teacher meetings and games.[642] Clinton further served to provide evidence for Biden's representation as a family man, stating, "Your family obviously came first in every respect."[643] This live video conversation also provided evidence for Biden's commitment to women's issues, as Clinton complimented Biden on the Violence Against Women Act, described on the campaign website as "the strongest legislation to date that criminalizes domestic violence and holds batterers accountable."[644] In the video, Biden addressed his pro-choice stance and the issue of equal pay through his role as a father, telling Clinton: "You and I have daughters. Our daughters are facing the prospect that these guys will change the

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Supreme Court, taking away not only their right to choose but their right to redress the discrimination against them when they don't get equal pay for equal work."[645]

Biden's representation as an advocate for women was further shown in his actions as the "boss" in his senate office: "The women as well as the men in my office are allowed to tell me what the best time is for them to work and still care for their families. A first-rate lawyer, Jane ... when her son was in the last couple years of high school she wanted to be home for breakfast and get the child to school, so she said I'm going to come in later but what I'll do is I'll be able to stay a little bit later because he plays after-school sports."[646] His campaign website biography further heralded Biden as "a strong supporter of the Family and Medical Leave Act, [who] cracked down on deadbeat dads, and has been a consistent champion for equal pay."[647]

By emphasizing these actions, Biden was successfully framed as both a man who could be tough and, at the same time, tender with regard to caring for his family and supporting women's issues. Biden's personality and speaking ability certainly further enhanced these duel frames, since he could easily transition from a charming gentleman to a passionate, outspoken speaker.

How Biden was represented in terms of age is most interesting when compared to how McCain was represented in terms of age. At 65 years old, Biden was only seven years younger than McCain, yet he was framed as experienced instead of old. How were two candidates, both older, white men with white hair, framed so differently?

One explanation may link to how the campaigns portrayed "experience." The Obama-Biden campaign referenced Biden's political achievements, such as the Violence Against Women Act, and web users further referenced Biden's tenure in the Senate,

describing him on Wikipedia as a long-time member of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and as the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.[648] On Facebook, Biden was described as a "legend."

The McCain-Palin, campaign, in contrast, focused more on McCain's service as a veteran than as a Senator. Black-and-white photographs of McCain as a young P.O.W. emphasized his age and added to misrepresentation of McCain as a member of the G.I. Generation, a generation Millennials associated with their grandparents.

Appearance may also have played a part in how the two candidates were perceived so differently. Goffman called the importance of individual appearance and gestures "body symbolism."[649] While both men shared some characteristics, a comparison of photographs posted by the campaigns to the candidates' websites and social networking sites showed a tanned, smiling Biden and a pale, serious McCain. Moreover, in video footage, McCain's "lifelong physical limitations"[650] that left him "permanently incapable of raising his arms above his head,"[651] as posted by users on Wikipedia, resulted in less movement and less energetic gestures, especially when compared to Biden's enthusiastic speaking style. User-posted clips of Biden's speeches included titles such as, "Joe Biden on Fire!"[652]

In addition to appearance and gestures, Goffman suggested that, "through demeanor the individual creates an image of himself."[653] The contrasting demeanors of Biden and McCain may also help to explain the contrast in how they were perceived in terms of age. Video of Biden could be likened to an excited puppy, a child on Christmas morning, or even an enthusiastic drunk, in the user-posted video, "Has Joe Biden been drinkin'?" which included the description, "hell yeah!"[654] In the latter, Biden, while not

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actually drunk—his Wikipedia profiles stated that "he has never taken a drink in his life because alcoholism is prevalent in his extended family"[655]—exuberantly introduces the Obamas. Although his introduction is no where near a "Dean scream," the lack of composure that led to Howard Dean's downfall in the 2004 presidential election, Biden's high level of energy provided an impression of youthfulness and vigor.

The gaffes discussed in the representation of Biden in terms of race may also have impacted the perception of him as a younger candidate. Biden's Wikipedia page described his "persistent tendency to say silly, offensive, and off-putting things" and his "weak filters make him capable of blurting out pretty much anything." While his off-the-cuff speaking style likely caused great concern among campaign staffers, it possibly made him more likeable to Millennials who are accustomed to instant communication and a lack of editing or self-censorship when it comes to social networking. Biden's unpolished demeanor may have represented him as more of a "maverick," in fact, than the McCain campaign's intentional framing of its candidate in that very way.

Finally, the new media choices made by the campaigns impacted the impressions fostered of Biden and McCain. While campaign-posted videos of McCain were primarily television advertisements, the Obama-Biden campaign posted hundreds of videos of both Obama's and Biden's public speeches, streamed live and also posted to the campaign's YouTube page. In these speeches, the electrified crowd of supporters served to elevate the level of energy and enthusiasm. Biden also may have been perceived as younger by being surrounded by younger supporters. The powerful impact of new media on how the candidates were framed in terms of age is discussed more thoroughly in 5.2.

5.1.4: Sarah Palin

In regard to race and gender, the McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin as a white woman who could function as a replacement to Hillary Clinton. Although a minority of web users interpreted and represented Palin in this same way, a majority of web users instead interpreted and represented her as racist, and as a sex object, with the nickname "Caribou Barbie." In regard to age, the McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent Palin as a "maverick" and foil to McCain's old age; in contrast, most web users interpreted and represented Palin as inexperienced.
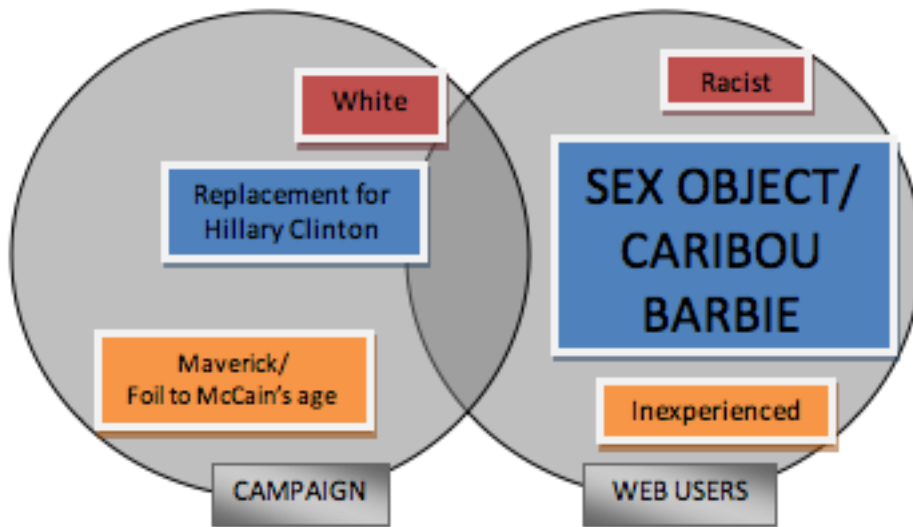
Figure 11. Overlapping Representations of Palin in Terms of Race, Gender, and Age by the McCain-Palin Campaign and Web Users in the 2008 Vice-Presidential Campaign

Unlike Obama, McCain, and Biden, who were well known to a majority of Americans after the Democratic and Republican primary campaigns, Palin entered the general election campaign as a virtual unknown. David Plouffe, Obama's campaign

manager, said: "Palin was a blot of lightning, a true surprise. She was such a long shot, I didn't even have her research file on my computer, as I did for the likely McCain picks. I started Googling her, refreshing my memory while I waited for our research to be sent."[656] Quite likely, many users also first learned about Palin from Googling her. This provides additional importance for how Palin was represented in web content. Both the McCain-Palin campaign and web users had the opportunity of representing a candidate in an original way.

Palin was represented by the campaign as a white woman. In fact, her representation as a hockey mom and as a moose hunter, described in the findings related to gender, can also be viewed from the perspective of race. Wise suggests:

> … The hockey-mom label for Sarah Palin, while seemingly innocent, perfectly primes a white racial frame of 'she's one of us,' even for those whites who don't play hockey. Hockey couldn't be a whiter sport in the eyes of most, and indeed it's even better for this purpose than soccer, which is played by folks of color the world over. … Similarly, the media framing of Governor Palin as an outdoorsy, gritty, moose-hunting pioneer … was almost certain to trigger any number of racial associations in the minds of white voters: the pioneer narrative … is, after all, one in which brave white folks are seen as conquering the wilderness…[657]

While racism levied against the McCain campaign early in the campaign was discussed by users in a joking way, such as describing the Republican National Convention audience as a "White Christmas," as vice-presidential candidate Palin began to hold campaign rallies separately from McCain, the charges of racism increased in seriousness. Specifically, Palin was represented by users as racist following footage released by Al Jazeera, shot by white interviewer Casey Kauffman, of an October 12 rally in St. Clairsville, Ohio. At the rally, Palin worked up the crowd, stating:

"Help me, Ohio, to help put John McCain in the White House," she said.

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"He understands. He understands you. We understand how important it is that this team be elected. For one thing, we know who the bad guys are, OK?"

That statement elicited scattered shouts of "Obama!" throughout the crowd.

"We know that in the war, it's terrorists, terrorists who hate America and her allies and would seek to destroy us, and the bad guys are those who would support and sympathize with the terrorists," she said. "They do not like America because of what we stand for. Liberty. Freedom. Equal rights. Those who sympathize and support those terrorists who would seek to destroy all that it is that we value, those are the bad guys."[658]

Following Palin's speech, the video captured Palin supporters describing Obama and Michelle Obama as "anti-white"[659] and as Muslim: "Just the whole, Muslim thing, and everything, and everybody's still kinda—a lot of people have forgotten about 9/11, but I dunno, it's just kinda a little unnerving."[660] "I'm afraid if he wins, the blacks will take over. He's not a Christian! This is a Christian nation! What is our country gonna end up like?"[661] stated a Palin supporter. The Al Jazeera video went viral on YouTube and received 1.7 million views in less than two weeks.[662]

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman wrote: "There are situations, often called 'scenes,' in which an individual acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of consensus…"[663] Palin's inflammatory remarks and her supporters' racist comments can be viewed as an example of such a scene. Until this rally in the seventh week of the general election campaign, the McCain-Palin campaign had been somewhat successful at being perceived as non-racist. With the viral video, however, comments by Palin and her supporters now affected the entire campaign and its prior "appearance of consensus," in Goffman's terms, of not playing the race card.

In fact, the video may have influenced General Colin Powell to endorse Obama on October 19, a week after the Al Jazeera footage was released. Powell's public support not only crossed party lines, but assisted Obama in countering criticism that Obama lacked military experience, especially in comparison to McCain. In his endorsement, Powell specifically referenced the footage, stating: "… Those kinds of images going out on Al Jazeera are killing us around the world. And we have got to say to the world it doesn't make any difference who you are or what you are. If you're an American you're an American. … Our great strength is in our unity and our diversity."[664]

On "Meet the Press," he described Obama as a "transformational figure"[665] and stated:

> I'm also troubled by … what members of the party say, and what is permitted to be said. Things such as, "Well, you know that Mr. Obama is a Muslim." The correct answer is he is not a Muslim; he's a Christian, he's always been Christian. But the really right answer is: What if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer's no, that's not America. Is there something wrong with some seven-year-old Muslim American kid believing that he or she can be president?[666]

The managing director of the Al Jazeera English network, Tony Burman, asked: "So why has one of our news reports—on a channel that is broadcast in 120 million households worldwide but not throughout most of the US—triggered so much controversy in this country? Perhaps because it was a tough take on at least one issue—race—that is being poorly reported by most of America's mainstream media."[667] With this influential viral YouTube video, Palin's supporters and—by association with her permission of their remarks—Palin herself were interpreted and represented as being

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racist. In turn, the entire McCain-Palin campaign was affected by being perceived as intolerant of both blacks and Muslims.

In his writings on Impression Management, Goffman emphasized the importance of first impressions.[668] Of the four presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2008 election, fostering a positive first impression was most valuable for Palin, since most users would have been familiar with long-time Senators McCain and Biden and would have formed an opinion of Obama during the Democratic primary. Before the McCain campaign's announcement of Palin as McCain's running mate, most Americans had never heard of Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska. To that end, her initial introduction to the mass media and the public-at-large was vitally important. Moreover, the McCain campaign was unprepared for this important first impression. According to Palin in her autobiography, *Going Rogue*, "…The McCain communications team learned the name of John's vice presidential pick at the same time everybody else in the country did. And to make matters a bit more challenging, my family, friends, and political associates were under strict instructions not to talk to the media. So when the avalanche of press inquiries tumbled in, the national media folks had *zero* information."[669]

When McCain announced Palin as his vice-presidential pick, Palin referenced "the day … women of America first gained the right to vote," "the achievements of Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, and, of course, Sen. Hillary Clinton."[670] Palin even quoted Clinton's Democratic National Convention speech, in which Clinton endorsed Obama: "It was rightly noted in Denver this week that Hillary left 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America. But it turns out the women of America aren't finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all."[671] The McCain-Palin

campaign worked to woo Clinton supporters through its choice of Palin as a woman candidate. However, Georgia Duerst-Lahti noted that, "Individuals who share a category or two are not simply interchangeable."[672] Just because Clinton and Palin were both women did not make them similar candidates.

Goffman argued: "… In performing a role the individual must see to it that the impressions of him that are conveyed in the situation are compatible with role-appropriate personal qualities effectively imputed to him. … These personal qualities … provide a basis of self-image for the incumbent and a basis for the image of his role that others will have of him."[673] The impression conveyed of Palin was not compatible with the personal qualities exhibited by Clinton in the Democratic primary, and therefore were not role-appropriate for the basis of Palin as an experienced and viable woman candidate. Moreover, since experience correlates directly with age, the representation of Palin presented an interesting intersection of both gender and age.

First, a common theme among users was that the McCain campaign chose Palin as its vice-presidential candidate solely because she is a woman. The lack of a prior relationship between McCain and Palin was conveyed through campaign web content. After Palin was announced as McCain's vice-presidential pick, photographs were posted to McCain's Facebook page showing Palin talking with the McCains on their Arizona ranch. It appeared as though it was the first time Palin had met the McCains, with her stiff body posture and, using Edward Hall's definition of proxemics, standing across from the McCains with social distance, instead of intimate or even personal distance. Moreover, whereas the McCains were dressed in casual summer wear—McCain in a blue

shirt and khakis and Cindy McCain in a yellow sundress, white cardigan and ponytail—Palin was dressed in a formal black suit as if she was on a job interview.[674]

In fact, Palin had previously met the McCains only once, in February 2008, and talked with McCain only once on the telephone, the day after Obama announced Biden as his running mate.[675] Palin then met with the McCains for an hour on August 28—when photographs of their meeting were taken—before the Dayton, Ohio, rally the next day when McCain introduced her as his vice-presidential pick.[676] Palin stated, "…The whole veep [sic] thing was such a long shot that I hadn't even considered it a real possibility."[677] She added of her and Cindy's contrasting appearance, "I remember her clothes because I was there in my let's-discuss-the-issues suit while she breezed across the lawn like a walking summer day."[678]

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman wrote: "Among team-mates, the privilege of familiarity—which may constitute a kind of intimacy without warmth—need not be something of an organic kind, slowly developing with the passage of time spent together, but rather a formal relationship that is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team."[679] The partnership between McCain and Palin could certainly be described as a "formal relationship;" Palin stated that "the VP half of the ticket … heard the announcement [of McCain suspending his campaign in September] on the news."[680] Web users' reactions to this formal relationship were negative. Interview and self-reporting participants stated, "She was hyped for being a woman"[681] and "Truthfully, I feel like that's the reason why the McCain campaign picked her, because she's female—not because they feel like she would be a good vice president or a good president."[682]

One of Goffman's central ideas is that performers represent themselves in key roles such as "…parent, spouse, national, and so forth…"[683] The role that the McCain-Palin campaign chose to represent Palin was "hockey mom." Palin also made choices as a mother that many women users (likely also mothers) commented on as being out of their realm of understanding, such as exposing her infant to the bright stage lights during speeches,[684] campaigning for national office with a pregnant teenage daughter,[685] and choosing unusual names for her children. Users joked:

> I found a fun site. Want to know what Palin would have named you if she was your mother? Go to this link, scroll down and type in your real name. I am Filter Skate Palin.[686]
>
> OMG—I am Pistol Tanker Palin.[687]
>
> I get Slicer Mission Palin. I call that child abuse.[688]

Going beyond criticizing her role as a mother, some suggested that Palin was not in fact Trig's real mother, but was actually Trig's grandmother, with her pregnant daughter Bristol being Trig's mother. Palin called those who made these accusations "Trig Truthers" who harassed her doctor for confirmation.[689]

In these ways, Goffman's description of strategic interaction, putting oneself in the place of the other to see from her point of view —similar to George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism[690]—was not successful among many users with regard to the "hockey mom" frame and impression of Palin as a mother.

In Goffman's words, "Sometimes when we ask whether a fostered impression is true or false we really mean to ask whether or not the performer is authorized to give the performance in question."[691] Clinton was perceived by her supporters as an experienced and capable senator and presidential candidate; in contrast, Palin was not "authorized" as

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a credible vice-presidential candidate. Focus group and self-reporting participants

suggested, "Where I think Sarah Palin failed was talking about herself as a hockey

mom"[692] and "Being a hockey mom provides no benefits in the White House."[693]

Facebook groups in opposition to Palin blossomed, such as, "My pet rock is more

qualified than Sarah Palin to be Vice President."[694] To use Goffman's analogy of theater,

Palin was not interpreted as Clinton's understudy to take up the role of woman candidate.

As interview participant S10 explained:

> I think that was probably one of the worst mistakes they've made thus far
> is underestimating the Hillary Clinton supporters, as one of them. I don't
> see how anyone who supports Hillary Clinton, and, for example, supports
> Roe v. Wade, would switch their position to someone who is against Roe
> v. Wade, which, for me, is a fundamental female issue…it's feminism,
> women's rights 101. For them to pick a woman, and think that people are
> going to vote for her just because she's a woman, to me is a little bit
> ridiculous. That's how I personally feel.

Palin's appearance, mannerisms, and use of language—dubbed "Palinisms," in a

similar vein to the "Bushisms" of President George W. Bush—further affected the

impression web users held of her. Goffman suggested that dress is a component of

demeanor that can display attributes such as sincerity.[695] After the news media reported

on Palin's $150,000 wardrobe, self-reporting participant S24 wrote: "I understand the

criticism of … Palin's projection of a 'hockey mom' image [when she] buys expensive

clothing." S10 directly compared Palin's clothes to Clinton's: "[The McCain campaign]

spent [$150,000] on her wardrobe for the campaign to make her look better and

accessorize her better. I mean, everyone's having a tough time with money and she's

spending $74,000 at Nieman-Marcus? Like, really? And I feel like it's just a gimmick to

make her look presentable. Which I mean, that's smart, but Hillary probably didn't

spend $74,000."[696] Palin also dressed in revealing clothing, such as the inappropriate

choice of a short skirt while talking with Asif Ali Zardari, the president of Pakistan. In

the McCain-Palin campaign's September 24 "Photos of the Week," featured on the front

page of the website, Palin revealed a fair amount of leg as she sat on a couch talking to

Zardari,[697] who referred to her as "gorgeous" during the meeting.[698] A Facebook post

criticized, "Palin is turning meetings with foreign leaders into fashion shows."[699]

Mannerisms also detracted from Palin's credibility as a serious candidate, as self-

reporting participant S25 noted while watching the vice-presidential debate: "What was

with that never-ending winking at the camera?"[700] A nickname coined by web users on

the Obama websites was "Winky." [701] The mannerism of winking can convey flirtation,

and when used excessively by Palin in conjunction with smiling, may have been

interpreted by users in this way.

Palin's use of language was also emphasized by web users to represent her as

unqualified for the vice-presidency. In the user-created music video "Song for Sarah,"

web users Vlad and Boris portrayed themselves as Palin's "next door neighbors" in

Moscow, incorporating Palin quotations such as "You betcha," "Doggone it," and "Say it

ain't so, Joe" as part of the song's lyrics. Vlad, who claimed to love Palin, added,

"Neither of us can say or read English."[702]

How Palin was framed in terms of gender was further affected by the McCain-

Palin campaign's representation of Todd Palin as masculine, but only in several limited

instances. The omission of Todd from campaign web content suggested a general

strategy to exclude him from the McCain-Palin campaign. This could have been because

of Cindy McCain's obscurity in the campaign; it would have called attention to her

inconspicuous role if Todd, as the spouse of the vice-presidential candidate, played a prominent role. Another possibility was the desire to suppress attention to Todd's employment with British Petroleum (BP). Sarah Palin stated in her speech to the RNC: "I took on the old politics as usual in Juneau ... when I stood up to the special interests, the lobbyists, big oil companies, and the good ol' boys network." Campaign emphasis on Todd would have, in turn, emphasized the Palin family's connections to a big oil company.

Todd Palin's role could have also been downplayed in part because of his rugged masculinity, which might have taken away from framing Palin as a feminist who could appeal to Hillary Clinton supporters. In both speeches in which Palin mentions her husband, Todd Palin's masculinity was enhanced with references to his work as a fisherman, membership in the US Steel Workers' Union, and achievements as a snowmobile racer. While Todd was in attendance during both speeches, showing support for his spouse, he was not holding the Palins' infant son; this was relegated to Palin's oldest daughter, Bristol, and Cindy McCain. In this way, Todd did not show feminine characteristics of being a nurturing father, cradling a baby in his arms. In addition, Palin's speeches did not include any accolades to her husband for being a devoted father or allude to his assistance in caring for the children with her full-time job as Governor of Alaska.

This avoidance of framing Todd as a family man contrasted starkly to the Obama-Biden campaign's emphasis on Joe Biden's role as a single father. Further, because Jill Biden was framed in two important ways, as a supportive spouse and mother of Biden's

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children and as a college professor with a doctoral degree, she complimented the impression of Biden as both masculine and as an advocate for women.

In these ways—the impression that Palin was chosen as McCain's running mate solely because she is a woman, the "hockey mom" frame, her appearance and manner, and how Todd Palin was represented—Palin was not interpreted by a majority of web users in a positive way related to gender. The question asked by interview participant S5 was reflected by many users: "Who wouldn't want a woman as a vice president? But not her."[703] In fact, the Pew Research Center reported that Obama won 56 percent of women voters, while McCain won 43 percent of women voters.[704] CNN's National Exit Poll found that only 38 percent of voters thought Palin was qualified to be president if necessary, compared to 66 percent of voters who thought Biden was qualified to be president if necessary.[705]

The representation of Palin as inexperienced relates to both gender and age. Users' interpretation of Palin as inexperienced was further heightened through the campaign framing her as a "maverick" and a "Washington outsider." The McCain campaign likely hoped that Palin, as a younger running mate, would refresh and energize the Republican ticket. Governor Palin was the youngest person to hold the office and, in fact, was "the first Alaskan governor born after Alaska achieved US statehood."[706] Focus group participant S22 suggested, "I think [McCain] did pick [Palin] because she is so young, with Obama being younger."[707] Instead, Palin's inexperience only served to draw further attention to McCain's age. Focus group participants brought up that age "wouldn't have come up so much if they wouldn't have had such a completely, out of left field pick [for vice-president]"[708] and that "until [then] McCain's age was never a target

weakness, yet the more and more people learned about Palin's downfalls the more they began to think about who they would really vote for."[709] Interview participant S10 agreed: "I feel like that the big issue with both candidates, really, is their age. People's issue with Obama is that he's young and inexperienced, and people's issue with McCain is that he's old and could possibly die. And then that would leave us with Sarah Palin."[710]

In contrast, the inclusion of Biden on the Democratic ticket was perceived by users as adding experience to the Obama campaign in a positive way. Interviewee S4 stated:

> They obviously both consider themselves leaders. So I'd say McCain kind of portrays the "I'm older, I'm more experienced, I have so much going on, and I've had so much going on in my life that I think I deserve this, and I think I'm qualified." Obama, I feel, is more [like], "I'm something different, I'm more you can change from the norm of government." And I think since he is younger he doesn't have as much experience as McCain does. I feel he portrays himself very well because…for not having as much experience as he does, he picked a vice president who is good at international relations and stuff. So I think he's smart in that perspective.[711]

In his study of gender advertisements, Goffman discussed the concept of symmetrical and asymmetrical pairs.[712] While it may seem that the McCain-Palin ticket with McCain being 72 years old and Palin being 44 years old would be a successful asymmetrical pairing of youth and experience, similar to the Obama-Biden ticket with Obama being 47 years old and Biden being 65 years old, this was not the case. Biden, as a vice-presidential candidate, worked as a positive foil to Obama's youth, but Palin's youth only served to negatively reinforce the age of presidential candidate McCain.

New media with its user-created content provided the opportunity for audience members to simultaneously engage in two roles: both as audience member and as part of the team performance. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman discussed the importance of high team solidarity[713] in maintaining the reality of impression management. [714] If the use of team in political campaigning is extended to users in 2008, then the Obama-Biden campaign succeeded in achieving high solidarity, with both the campaign and users representing the candidates in similar ways pertaining to race, gender, and age. The McCain-Palin campaign, in contrast, experienced disparities among members of its team, with the campaign working to represent McCain as "experienced" and Palin as a "feminist" alternative to Hillary Clinton, whereas web users worked to represent McCain as "old" and Palin as "Caribou Barbie." Web users, therefore, significantly impacted the framing of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates in online content. The impact of new media is important to this study in how it affected how the presidential and vice-presidential candidates were framed in the 2008 elections, and therefore is explored more fully in the next section, discussing specific effects of the representation and interpretation of the candidates.

5.2: The Effects of New Media on Representation and Interpretation of the Candidates

While it may not have been a surprise that the older presidential candidate struggled with representing himself as anything but old, and the younger presidential candidate succeeded in representing himself as young, looking more closely at the use of new media and technology suggests specific ways that social media influenced the representations of the candidates in terms of age.

As will be discussed, the Obama-Biden campaign was much more successful than the McCain-Palin campaign in its use of new media, specifically through engaging user involvement. The web users supporting each campaign also exhibited some noteworthy differences, particularly in linking age to the degree of web-savviness and showing how each group built and made use of its online communities.

5.2.1: Comparing Campaign Content

In applying the Situational Theory of Publics, James Grunig asked, "Which publics are the most important—and, given limited resources, which deserve first priority when you decide on the possible public relations programs you will implement?"[715]

David Burstein, the Millennial author of *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaping Our World*, argued: "The Obama campaign's decision to invest in new media and to hire young tech innovators … was a bold stroke. The conventional wisdom long-dispensed by political consultants about how to run a campaign … was changing with the … Millennials."[716]

Change, a key component of Obama's messaging, was, in fact, built in to the title of the campaign website. Whereas the McCain website was titled, "John McCain 2008," the Obama website was, "Change We Can Believe In" for the first couple weeks of the campaign and, after mid-September, "The Change We Need." Both titles emphasized the strategic vision of change, highlighting a vision narrative in Goffman's use of Impression Management.

Part of change, certainly, is adapting to new technology. David Plouffe, campaign manager for the Obama-Biden campaign, asserted, "Technology was core to

our campaign from Day One."[717] He further explained in his book, *The Audacity to Win:*

The Inside Story and Lessons of Barack Obama's Historic Victory:

> The new media group (online communications, Web-page development
> and maintenance, texting) in most campaigns reports to the
> communications department, and its department head is not considered an
> equal of other senior staff. But I saw how important the burgeoning online
> world was to our overall success; new media would touch just about every
> aspect of our campaign. So I had that department report directly to me. …
> Though the rest of the world was zooming forward at a rapid digital clip,
> for some reason political campaigns were in many respects stuck in the
> Dark Ages technologically. … We dramatically improved our digital
> strategy and execution, and I'd say we were competitive digitally with any
> business-world start-up.[718]

Of course, growing pains inevitably accompany digital innovation, and users of

Obama's official campaign website were at times frustrated with technical difficulties,

lamenting, "No sound and now I am pissed off!!!"[719] and "Why the heck do we have to

refresh 10 times before we see anything new [on the blogs], geesh!"[720] Still, the Obama-

Biden campaign website was much more technologically sophisticated than the McCain-

Palin campaign website. One can even glean this from the campaign user names

authoring blog posts. On the Obama site, a variety of campaign staff names and

departments appeared, including blog director, Sam Graham-Felsen; members of the New

Media team, Christopher Hass, Amanda Scott, Molly Clafin, and others; and the Obama

Road Blog team. The only author listed for the McCain-Palin campaign blog posts was

Matt Lira, but he was listed on every blog as "matt_lira," as if the campaign was not

familiar with how to change the formatting of his user name. This also alludes to the

McCain-Palin campaign investing less time and resources in new media campaigning,

illustrating a significant difference in the top-down messaging of the Republican

campaign to the more "bottom-up" organizational network[721] of the Democratic

campaign. Bernstein suggested that Millennial-run networks "adapt, open up the process, increase transparency, and listen to a broader circle of people inside and outside of our companies."[722]

The Obama-Biden campaign content prioritized new media publics with its cutting-edge social networking platform designed by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes. Hughes, a Millennial himself at 23 years of age, told Mark Zuckerberg in early 2007 that he was leaving the company to work for the Obama campaign.[723] MyBarackObama.com intentionally mimicked Facebook, attracting young Facebook users to the campaign website and perhaps encouraging older users of the campaign website who were new to Facebook to give it a try. Plouffe described MyBarackObama.com as, "heavy on video and tools for our supporters to organize and raise money and have discussions and find each other—our own social networking site."[724]

Inclusion of Facebook support within the campaign further heightened emphasis on these publics. In 2006, 20-year-old Meredith Segal started the Facebook group "Students for Barack Obama," which led to a grassroots movement encouraging Obama to run for president. After he officially declared his candidacy, the campaign adopted the Facebook group and made Segal a national co-chair of the campaign.[725]

Even the name chosen for the McCain-Palin campaign's social networking platform within the official campaign website, "McCain Space," signaled the disparity between the two campaigns; as the fall 2008 campaign charged forward, the social networking site MySpace was losing steam, while Facebook was gaining in popularity.

In a user-posted video on YouTube, Matt Bai, author of *Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics*, suggested, "The heart of Obama's

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argument … is, '[McCain,] you're from another era.' … We need an Internet president, we need someone who gets what's going on, somebody who knows the language, someone who can identify with the way people are living their lives. This is going to be his strongest case, in a sense. We've never had an age difference this pronounced in a presidential election in America."[726]

The differences between the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns' web content were explored in this study through comparing the amount and frequency of content and the type of new media utilized, specifically multimedia content.

5.2.1.1: Amount and Frequency of Content

Comparison of the web content published by the Obama-Biden and McCain Palin campaigns showed that the Obama-Biden campaign prioritized online publics by putting more time and resources into connecting with users through relatively new[*] social networking platforms.

First, the amount of web content posted by the campaigns was considered, as shown in table 7 (see Appendix) and figure 12. The quantitative data clearly showed that the Obama-Biden campaign was more successful than the McCain-Palin campaign in reaching web users with substantially more content.

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[*] As mentioned in chapter two, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were not accessible to the general public in the 2004 presidential election.
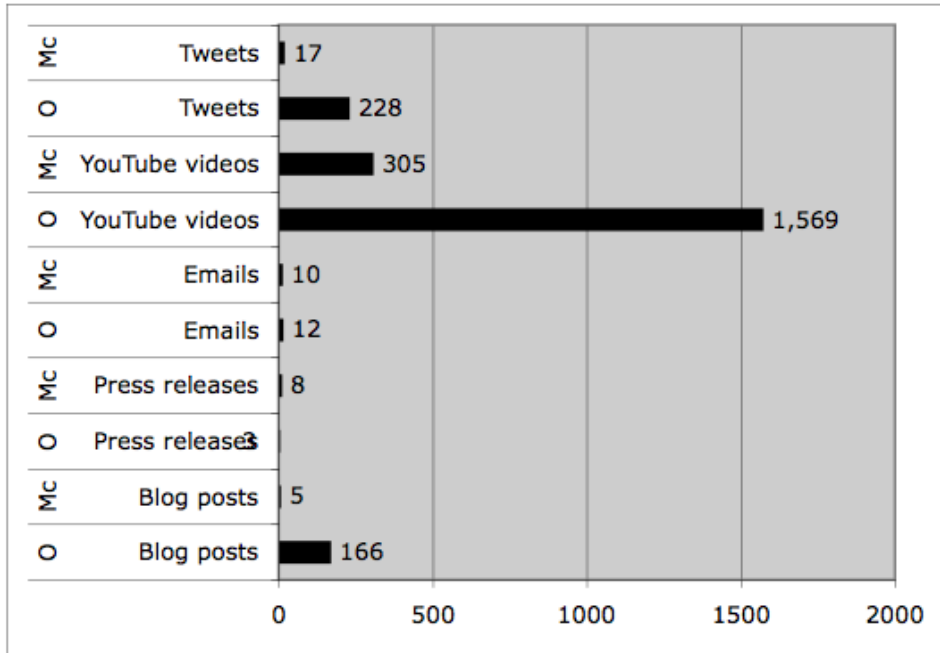
Figure 12. Web Content, Including Blog Posts, Press Releases, E-mails, YouTube Videos, and Tweets, Posted by the Obama-Biden (O) and McCain-Palin (Mc) 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

In addition to a greater amount of content, the Obama campaign updated social media content more frequently; for instance, on September 3, 2008, McCain's Facebook page included the last posted item of the "Love" advertisement from July 8, the last note on education policy from August 21, and the last event of the GOP Convention from September 1.[727] On its social media sites, the Obama campaign logged in every day, whereas in the early part of the campaign, the McCain campaign would log in a few times a week (on September 3, 2008, the last login on the McCain YouTube page was August 27,[728] and on September 10, the last login on the McCain MySpace page was Sept 8).[729]

Analysis of qualitative user comments in conjunction with the quantitative findings, however, showed that in order to be most successful in connecting with online

publics, future political campaigns should aim for a balance between the amount of content posted by Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns. While the McCain-Palin campaign did not take full advantage of new media opportunities in 2008, the Obama-Biden campaign sent such an extensive number of e-mails and notifications that users made complaints such as, "Barack, you really abuse the notification function on Facebook. Use it sparingly. Also, you probably send too many emails. I get excited when I see new notifications and emails, and then I'm immediately disappointed that they're from you. … Have a heart, and quit abusing your dearest supporters."[730] Interview participants agreed, such as S13 who suggested, "I think if I weren't as interested in politics, it may be too much."[731]

Moreover, Obama-Biden supporters had a difficult time continuing conversations and keeping up with new blogs being constantly posted, complaining, "New Thread up. Can't keep up!"[732] and "I have a theory Biden starts late on purpose because he knows we spend half the time hunting for feeds."[733] They also recognized that some of their comments may have been ignored due to the fast and steady stream of new blogs that appeared: "I know no one will see this because like Pavlov's dogs, everyone chases the new blog."[734]

Goffman discussed this phenomenon as "over-involvement:"[735] "What is one man's overeagerness will become another's alienation."[736] This was clearly a disconnect between the campaign and many users. Plouffe suggested, "People wanted information, and a lot of it. We could send more e-mail than we originally thought advisable, which spoke to the heightened interest in the race and the commitment of our supporters."[737] He added, "There were dozens of e-mails a day from the campaign going out in the last sixty

days—some high-impact, heavily scrutinized national e-mails, and some very regional ones to a county or two in a battleground state."[738]

Grunig offered that the Situational Theory of Publics looks at "when … people communicate and when communications aimed at people are most likely to be effective."[739] "When" can be applied in several ways to the 2008 campaign. One way is the 3 a.m. text message sent out by the Obama campaign to supporters to announce the vice-presidential pick of Joe Biden. While this study did not include text messages because of its focus on web content,[740] the 3 a.m. text was brought up by interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants, such as S23:

> As I got ready for bed late Tuesday night I heard my phone ring. While I was not surprised to be receiving a message so late, I was surprised to see that it was [from the] Democratic National Convention. It was an announcement that Joe Biden was going to be Barack Obama's running mate in the election. While I am used to getting contacted on my cell phone at all hours of the day, I am sure most people are not. If my parents were awoken by a ringing phone in the middle of the night, they would probably immediately worry about me and my brother. This event probably made a lot of people regret giving their cell phone number to the Democratic party. When updates become more harmful than helpful, everyone loses.[741]

The Obama-Biden campaign also experienced issues sending multiple texts to the same supporters, as web users posted to Facebook: "There is a problem with the Obama texting. I have received (so far) five text messages exactly the same from the 66262 text number. I hope somebody hasn't hacked into the number."[742]

This excessive texting and the high volume of web content posted by the Obama-Biden campaign also relates to Grunig's emphasis on when communication occurs between an organization and its publics. In the 2008 election, many Obama supporters were frustrated with too many notifications and too much blog-chasing.

5.2.1.2: Type of Media

Grunig asserted that along with *when* communication is initiated, *how* people communicate is vital to the success of an organization.[743] Both campaigns made extensive use of their campaign websites, although in very different ways, as discussed later in this chapter. Both also managed MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube pages. The Obama-Biden campaign was more aware of the newest and up-and-coming forms of social media, with home page links to Flickr, Digg, and LinkedIn, all of which would become more popular in the months and years after the 2008 campaign.

Most notably, the Obama-Biden campaign had an official Twitter page throughout the entire general election campaign, unlike the McCain-Palin campaign, which introduced Twitter five weeks into the campaign, on September 19. Until this official Twitter account was created, users took full advantage of the campaign's missing social media component by creating thirteen fake accounts, including "John McCain News," "johnmccainpr," "McSame," and "Confused John McCain." The fake site "McPalin" featured a Twitter profile picture of a morphed image of McCain with Palin's hair and glasses and the description: "In my day, we didn't have video-games! We just sat around and watched a potata' bake!"[744] Another fake site, "fakejohnmccain," read: "My friends, I have only just begun to tweet."[745] When the official Twitter site was used, it did not alert users to where the candidates were and what they were doing—the typical microblogging use of Twitter in 2008—but was used in an old-fashioned way, similar to posting press release content. For example, of the first thirteen tweets posted to the official McCain Twitter site, six were links to television advertisements and four were

headlines from major newspaper articles. In contrast, Obama's tweets often served a dual function: letting users know what he was up to while also providing a link to a live video feed on the campaign website, such as, "In Norfolk,VA. Holding a discussion on education. Watch it live at http://my.barackobama.com/..."[746]

The types of new media employed by the Obama-Biden campaign influenced users' impressions of the candidates in regard to age. Interviewee S9 explained, "Since Obama does more with Twitter and stuff, it adds to that [message of saying], 'I'm young, I'm in touch with you.'"[747] In this way, the type of new media that was used worked to represent the candidates differently in terms of age. Although campaign website and Twitter content are both classified as new media, the use of each sends a divergent message of each candidate's web-savviness.

Grunig's emphasis on "how people communicate" can specifically be applied to multimedia use in web content posted by the campaigns. A clear comparison is how both candidates provided information about the September financial crisis. On September 24, the date that McCain temporarily suspended his campaign, the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin campaigns posted a front splash page about their joint statement on the economy. Although the information was the same, *how* it was presented was significantly different for each campaign. The Obama-Biden campaign posted a video of Obama explaining his position on the crisis, while the McCain-Palin campaign posted text of the joint statement. Moreover, this text was not in web format, but was posted as a traditional press release, complete with "For immediate release" in the upper left corner; "Contact:" in the upper right corner, with the contact name and telephone number removed; and "ARLINGTON, VA—" before the beginning of the three-paragraph

statement. Clearly, the campaign's press release was literally copied and pasted onto the front splash page of the website, whereas Obama's video statement was an announcement adapted to web format.

An example of multimedia that was particularly popular on the blogs was an embedded video from campaign manager David Plouffe: "Erin—Want a look inside our strategy to win the battleground states? I recorded a video on my laptop yesterday to brief you on the plan—including details that haven't been shared publicly before."[748] Through this blog, the Obama-Biden campaign increased involvement among users, who felt as if they were part of the inner workings of the campaign. The personalization of each e-mail with the user's name, through the use of smart software, enhanced this message of involvement. Users recommended the video to each other and praised the opportunity to view the "secret" briefing. As one user posted, "I love being a part of the Obama team."[749] In addition, these e-mails from the campaign manager directly to users made high-level campaign staffers pseudo-celebrities. "I have a confession to make. I have a small crush on David [Plouffe]," admitted one user.[750]

Plouffe shared that:

This video message was one of the most effective ones we sent; the response factors we could measure—contributions, spike in volunteer hours—unmistakably bore this out, but we also received a lot of anecdotal feedback from our staff in the states and in conversations our supporters were having with Chris Hughes' online organizing team. People felt like they were being leveled with, that we were explaining clearly how their time and money was being utilized. And they felt that we valued and needed them.

Some people questioned the wisdom of such a revealing video. Why would we lay everything out for all to see? From our perspective there wasn't much downside. McCain's campaign already knew fairly well what we were up to when it came to the basics—how much we were

spending, where we were focusing our time and money organizationally. I'm sure they learned a few details from our presentation, but we thought this was a small price to pay for the tradeoff of bolstering our supporters' trust in the organization.[751]

While the Obama-Biden campaign chose this tactic of transparency through blogs on which users could respond, the McCain-Palin campaign used more traditional methods of communication, such as e-mails and posting press releases to its official campaign website. Within this study, the McCain-Palin campaign published only five blogs to the Obama-Biden campaign's 166, an average of almost 21 separate blogs for each of the eight dates sampled in this study. This, in turn, led to more user involvement (further discussed below), with 40,922 user blog posts within this study's sampled Obama blogs, compared to only 1,662 user blog posts on the sampled McCain blogs.

The Obama campaign also made frequent use of posting content in multiple formats, such as a blog post that also appeared as a Facebook note, e-mail and MySpace entry. When the McCain-Palin campaign did post a blog, it was most often text-based. The Obama-Biden campaign posted blogs with embedded photographs, slideshows, and video, including a large number of live videocasts, as shown in table 8 (see Appendix). Plouffe wrote:

Despite a few technical issues, the live stream grabbed a significant number of people, and it became a sharp tool in our arsenal. … [The] new media team increasingly looked for events that lent themselves to the live-streaming option, another way we could try to make barackobama.com a "home," where supporters could find valuable content and comprehensive information about the campaign with one click of the mouse.[752]

Of the 171 sampled blogs in this study, the Obama-Biden campaign posted 69 percent of its content in multimedia format—with almost 10 percent of blogs including live videocasts—while the McCain-Palin campaign posted 40 percent of content in

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multimedia format. The McCain-Palin campaign did receive positive feedback from the video blog posts, posted during later weeks of the campaign, such as, "Loved watching the town hall meeting live videocast here on the McCain/Palin website!"[753]

Overall, the Obama-Biden campaign was much more successful in connecting with young web users by communicating in multimedia formats. Users responded favorably to blog posts featuring photographs, with such comments as "I especially love the pictures of Barack with the little children, he has a way of connecting with the young and old alike!"[754] Web users stated: "I don't want to read his remarks as prepared for delivery. I want to see and hear the speech."[755] Interview participants further emphasized the importance of multimedia content. S3 shared that her favorite part of the campaign websites was "the visual stuff."[756] S4 stated, "I do like the videos. Anything that I don't have to read. [Laughs]"[757] S14 agreed, "If it's long text, I'm not going to be interested in reading it," preferring video clips.[758] Interview, focus group, and self-reporting participants further added that videos and multimedia content appealed more to young people. "Old people don't watch YouTube,"[759] stated S4.

The Obama-Biden campaign targeted young web users by running advertisements in popular XBOX 360 video games, such as the "Madden 09" football game and "Burnout: Paradise," a live racing game.[760] As S23 wrote in his self-report: "Now as people race through the streets there will be game billboards telling them they can now vote early. The ads are literally [sic] embedded in the game further shading the line between entertainment and advertisement."[761] Interviewee S1 suggested, "I think Obama is just doing a better job of catching the eye of younger people."[762] In contrast, the McCain-Palin campaign's appeal to the gaming community was an embedded

multimedia game called "Pork Invaders" on its Facebook page. The game featured

graphics that mimicked a 1980s Atari video game; one user compared it to "Pac Man."[763]

While the campaign may have tried to impress web users with this retro game, in reality

it presented a candidate who was behind the times in terms of multimedia use. This

disparity between the multimedia use of XBOX video games and "Pork Invaders" is

described by Winograd and Hais: "A common mistake of those engaged in the

technology arms race is to assume that the technology is intrinsically of strategic value.

In fact, technology is only useful when its use meshes with the political strategy that a

campaign or party has decided upon."[764] In other words, a video game or use of

multimedia format is not successful in and of itself; political campaigns should ask

themselves: What is the strategic communication this use of new media is trying to

convey, and is this type of media the appropriate format for that message?

In the case of the Obama-Biden campaign, the heavy use of blogs meshed with

the political strategy of user involvement, a strategy that could not be achieved through

the McCain-Palin campaign's use of e-mail and press releases posted to the campaign

website. "Each time the country faced fundamental questions about who it was as a

nation, and what values it stood for, the country was able to harness the newest in

communication technologies to meet the demands of its political discourse,"[765] argued

Winnograd and Hais. In comparing the type of media used by the campaigns, the

Obama-Biden campaign was more successful than the McCain-Palin campaign in

harnessing the newest communication technology in conjunction with the intended

political discourse: user involvement.

5.2.2: Comparing User Content

In *Millennial Makeover*, Winograd and Hais wrote:

Technology serves to enable these changes by creating new ways to reach new generations of voters with messages that relate directly to their concerns. But without the emergence of new generations with new attitudes and beliefs, as well as a passion for using these new technologies, neither the telegraph and telephone of the nineteenth century, nor the broadcast media of radio and television in the twentieth century, nor even this century's Internet and mobile communication capabilities would be able to make any real difference in American politics.[766]

The successful use of new media and multimedia content by the Obama-Biden campaign, then, was co-dependent upon the web users. These users believed in the importance of collaboration and sharing[767] and had an intuitive use of new media 2.0.[768] Burnstein suggested: "We aren't just superusers of this technology; Millennials more intuitively understand its logic, approach, interactions, and possibilities."[769] In fact, other top suggested names for the Millennial Generation, according to an ABC.com poll, included GenerationTech and Generation.com.[770] This generation of new media users was explored through how they built community through the two campaigns, comparison of content produced by users in support of the two candidates, and how users transferred online support of their candidate in the offline world.

5.2.2.1: A Community of New Media Users

A majority of web users, particularly on social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, during the 2008 election were part of the Millennial Generation. Members of this generation were born from 1982 to 2004.[771] The oldest Millennials,

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those born in 1982, would have been 26 during the 2008 election. Those born in 1990

would have been voting in their first presidential election at the age of 18. Howe and

Strauss argued: "As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation living in

memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically

diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social

habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on

teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct."[772] They are described as

"optimists"[773] and "team players"[774] who believe in the importance of community and

helping others. Robert Putnam suggested that 9/11 solidified these values by reinforcing

"a sense of obligation to a cause greater than oneself."[775] And in 2005, Hurricane Katrina

reinforced the prevalence of racism and the necessity of volunteerism. Of course,

Millennials have also been criticized for being selfish and self-centered. Jean Twenge

dubbed the Millennials part of "Generation Me," and described them as entitled, thinking

of themselves first and doing what it will take to make themselves happier, without a

strong sense of duty toward others.[776]

As John Palfrey and Urs Gasser wrote in *Born Digital: Understanding the First*
Generation of Digital Natives: "They often meet each other online before they meet in

person. … They're connected to one another by a common culture. Major aspects of

their lives—social interactions, friendships, civic activities—are mediated by digital

technologies."[777] These heavy users of technologies spent a significant amount of time

each day online. Such comments as "back for another couple of hours of facebooking"[778]

were posted frequently by web users in this study. In 2007, the Pew Research Center

reported that 80 percent of the Millennial generation over the age of 14 had a Facebook or MySpace page.[779]

Digital immigrants, in contrast, are described by Palfrey and Gasser as those who "learned how to e-mail and use social networks late in life. You know them by the lame jokes … that they still forward to large cc: lists."[780] Digital immigrants posted such comments as, "Sorry about the double post. I'm new to this blogging thing"[781] and "Sorry for the multiple post. I swear I only hit ENTER once. I am sooooo ashamed."[782] These users also learned of CMC acronyms and emoticons from digital native users of the campaign websites, asking questions such as, "Lace what does :) mean?"[783] Many young web users were not tolerant of these older web users, exemplified through such posts as "Bruce, you're an old man, get off Facebook"[784] and "…Turn off Caps Lock, too. Typing in all caps makes you seem like a loonball."[785] Perhaps in part because of this, digital immigrants were more prevalent users of the campaign websites, rather than social networking sites like Facebook, where many young users posted. One user asked the MyBarackObama.com community, "I would really like to hear from the youngsters as well,"[786] and received the answer, "You won't find most of them here, they are over at Facebook or MySpace!"[787]

Although most users usually did not specify their age in their posts or user names, profile pictures and comments point to a greater number of younger Obama-Biden supporters and a greater number of older McCain-Palin supporters. User conversations reinforced this perception:

Is everyone napping over at the McCain boards?[788]

No, but it really gets heated up at about 7 a.m. and they go to sleep right after "Wheel of Fortune," so you have to get in the conversation early.[789]

Awesome, I'll have to stop by and visit after "Wheel of Fortune" (lol). I'll be sure not to be rude and take some Fig Newtons and prune juice with me.[790]

Although some Obama-Biden supporters categorized themselves as "old," they in fact made up a majority of Millennials: "I'm old. Turning 22 next month. Yuck."[791] More McCain-Palin supporters than Obama-Biden supporters appeared to be digital immigrants who did not fully understand social media. These supporters more frequently used McCain's and Palin's Facebook and MySpace pages to try to speak directly to the candidates, with such posts as "Happy Birthday, John McCain! I hope you enjoy it the best you can in Dayton, Ohio"[792] and "Sarah, come fishing with us once the campaign winds up and you need a few days to relax before you head to the White House."[793] And, digital immigrants sometimes had difficulty sorting through genuine and parodied web content, as evidenced by such posts as: "I left a message for apparently someone who is using the name and picture of Sarah Palin. Are you allowed to do that? Anyway, imagine my disappointment when I read the response to my very personal message to find out that they are a democrat and not voting for McCain/Palin!"[794] With such a vast amount of political content online, these users must have looked for peripheral cues such as official-looking candidate photographs and patriotic graphics, because reading the content of fake candidate social networking pages clearly communicated that they were user-produced, such as the fake Sarah Palin MySpace profile that read:

Howdy Doody my friends!

Thank you so much for your continuing contributions to John McCain and I throughout this season. I knew I could count on you to do the right thing.

With your help John McCain and I will:
1. Start WWIII
2. Push The Button
3. Hide in a secret bunker under the White House where, once the nuclear radiation wears off, Bristol and her boyfriend will repopulate the entire planet, just like God told me.

Until the rapture, please share my song, "Caribou Barbie" with your conservative friends who can download it for free here: www. myspace. com/cariboubarbi

Yours truly,
Caribou Barbie[795]

While some digital immigrants may not have succeeded in recognizing imitation web content, both older and younger users engaged in what Goffman called "ground rules,"[796] especially on the Obama-Biden campaign website. Goffman explained, "When persons engage in regulated dealings with each other, they come to employ social routines or practices, namely, patterned adaptations to the rules—including conformances, by-passings, secret deviations, excusable infractions, flagrant violations, and the like."[797]

In terms of "tension management,"[798] Obama bloggers reacted to a McCain troll· by posting that the troll's presence on the Obama site had resulted in a user making a financial donation to the Obama campaign in the troll's "honor." These posts were often

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∗ Wikipedia users define a "troll" as: "a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a forum, chat room, or blog), either accidentally or with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion. On the candidates' websites and social networking sites, trolls on the Obama websites were primarily McCain supporters, while trolls on the McCain websites were primarily Obama supporters.

exceeding polite, such as, "Glad you're here! You're helping us raise money for Obama!

I give $25 for each post you make. Thank you so much."[799] The practice of trolling will

be discussed further in this section.

MyBarackObama.com users also raised money through the ground rule that if a

user posted first in a new blog—of which 166 were sampled in this study of eight dates of

the campaign—then that user was expected to make a financial donation to the Obama-

Biden campaign through the fundraising page of the second user to post. The beginning

of each blog therefore looked similar to this:

> 1st |
> By Luis Yesterday at 11:45 am EDT
> 1st
>
> Re: 1st |
> By Rosario Yesterday at 11:46 am EDT
> Congrats, Luis! Care to donate? Any spare change?
> Link[800]

The practice of donating is further discussed in 5.2.3.3.

Obama supporters also engaged in what Goffman called "supportive

interchanges."[801] One such practice involved giving a roll call of who was online based

on the users' home state or city; comments included, "SAN FRANCISCO in da [sic]

house!"[802] "Just peeking in to say Good Morning from Columbus, Ohio!"[803] "Blue Sky

New Mexico,"[804] and, "Virginia—about to turn blue."[805] Just like Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. highlighted states from "the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire" to "the

curvaceous slopes of California" in his famous "I Have A Dream" speech,[806] users

highlighted support of their candidate from all across the US to those reading the blogs.

Obama users initiated "No Blogger Left Behind," a practice of posting the link to a new

blog on the last older blog to help all online users find where the conversation was taking place.[807] Another supportive interchange used by those on the Obama campaign website was the use of "Fistbump!"[808] as a written expression to communicate a celebratory moment or achievement, in a manner similar to how we give someone a "high five" in the offline world. This was a nod to the fist bump between Barack and Michelle Obama on stage after his June 2008 nomination victory speech.[809]

The culture of McCain supporters did not include these kinds of rituals in their web communication, and, without them, did not develop strong collegial relationships in their online community. Clifford Geertz addressed the importance of ritual as a way to articulate the meaning of a group's culture in his famous "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight."[810] He argued that, "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world."[811] In the culture of MyBararckObama.com, users' rituals such as the "Fistbump!" expression signaled collectivism and solidarity among group members. The culture was one of commitment to the campaign and, especially, to Obama. This was further reinforced through two additional ground rules: Do not disagree with campaign strategy, and do not use the public blog as a way to communicate strategy ideas to campaign staff. The negative implications of this are illustrated in the following exchange about a two-minute Obama advertisement:

> I do not feel this ad was effective. You need to show an ad with McCain stating that the economy is good. You need to wrap those words around him. Make him eat those words.[812]

> For all those hating on this ad, you clearly are not hip to the strategy! This was President Obama's first virtual fireside chat with the American people.[813]

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This ad is too long. Edit it to list only the solutions—supplement with graphic headlines, bullet each point of change. Clear, short, succinct, strong messages—Please![814]

Here's my gift to you—it's not too late for you to attend the alternate convention going on this week. It's called the Backseat Driver's Convention. It sounds like you'd fit right in there. The BDC is designed for those who would prefer to direct Obama's campaign (as if he and his handlers don't know how to).[815]

Honestly guys, this is long, boring and uninspiring—and I believe in Barack as much as anyone.[816]

Go away! We discussed this way earlier. Everyone loves it![817]

Kaylee, could you PLEASE STOP jumping down all of our throats for expressing AN OPINION. That is what a democracy is. ENOUGH![818]

You know, back in the day (well, when I started on here in June) this blog used to be so entertaining. Yes, we had our times with FISA and other things like faith based organization plan, but they eventually faded away, and it went back to being peaceful. WHAT HAS HAPPENED????? My, how I miss those days.[819]

Yes, I got my head chewed off twice for asking a valid question. Not that I want to run the campaign :-) because they've done a great job, but when a person can't ask a polite question and get an answer, and then gets called names by other Obama supporters, something's different. So I, too, long for the 'old' days when everyone knew we were on the same side. We've got enough problems with Republicans; we don't need more with each other.[820]

Politics is a hot-blooded thing and we all get caught up in it. With trolls posting and us trying to defend, sometimes the post button is pressed too quickly. I was guilty, and learned a lesson. We need each other. It is like family, sometimes you spat, but still love each other![821]

Clearly, there existed disagreement among Obama users on how much one might question campaign strategy. The rancor expressed in comments such as "Go away! Everyone loves it!" would likely have isolated a supporter who did not think the advertisement was effective. In addition, as the weeks progressed, user reaction to those

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who posted suggestions of articles for Plouffe to read or television advertisement ideas were publicly disparaged: "If you come on this site with ONE MORE 'suggestion' I might punch you through my computer screen. NO ONE from the campaign has time to read this blog. Get that through your head. Call HQ directly at 1-866-675-2008 and press 6 to make all of your strategic suggestions."[822] In fact, the campaign actually did pay attention to the blogs, contacting some users via e-mail and telephone about their posts. But a majority of users on MyBarackObama.com wanted to retain authority over this form of discourse, and keep the content of blog communication public. This is further supported with the practice that most private information was shared and private conversations were conducted via "O-mail," the e-mail function on MyBarackObama.com, as in, "I'll O-mail you my other e-mail address."[823]

There did exist one ritual for McCain users: an interesting adaptation of language in order to work around barriers of the McCain blog platform. As one user explained: "Usually profanities are screened out, words like a.s.s as a word or part of a word, various racial slurs are filtered out. Instead of good n.i.g.h.t we say good nite. I think yesterday I noticed word o.r.g.a.n. is filtered. Things like that. No one really knows for sure, so people try different things to get around filters (a.s.s.ociations)."[824] It seems unbelievable that in the 2008 election users had to find ways to keep words like "night" (with nig- that would also be in the word "nigger") and "association" (with ass- that is the word "ass") from being rejected. This was frustrating for McCain-Palin users, and one might expect that many posts that were rejected were never revised and re-posted, especially if a user was unsure which word had flagged the post. In relying on the technological solution of outdated tight filtering to keep discussion free from obscene or profane language, then,

the McCain-Palin campaign was actually impeding civil user discourse and, therefore, affecting the community of supporters.

The contrast between McCain users and the close-knit Obama community was considerable. Even the names of the blogs themselves underscore the disparity between the two campaigns: the Obama-Biden campaign chose "Community Blogs," whereas the McCain-Palin campaign used "McCain-Palin Blog Post." This illustrates how the Obama-Biden campaign prioritized the blogs as a medium for users to share information and communicate with each other in 2.0 fashion, yet the McCain-Palin campaign viewed the blogs mostly as a space to post official information in which the campaign controls the flow of information.

Users on McCain Space, the social networking platform of the McCain-Palin official campaign website, did not usually recognize each other, despite having fewer users on the site. Users on MyBarackObama.com, in contrast, used the site in three major united ways: to escape to an online refuge from the offline world; to collectively view campaign events; and to cultivate friendships and relationships, especially for women users.

First, the social networking site provided support to Obama supporters before or after engaging in face-to-face communication with offline McCain supporters. In this way, MyBarackObama.com became a place of refuge. One user shared her story: "I got booed at the Cowboys game for having an Obama tank on."[825] Dozens of responses were posted within minutes, such as, "You keep your head high. If anything, be proud that you represented us out there. You go, girl!"[826] and "You are not alone with the Obama crowd to make you welcome."[827] Users responded positively to this supportive feedback,

posting, "I feel so very loved."[828] One user even referred to the official campaign

website as "home": "I needed to come here (home) to calm down after reading the CNN

political ticker."[829] This illustrates the powerful impact of the web in connecting like-

minded users without geographic constraints. In previous elections, supporters would

need to physically come together at a meeting, such as College Democrats or

Republicans, or campaign office. For supporters who lived in rural areas where

opportunities like these were not easily accessible, the online community provided a

convenient meeting place. Moreover, for those Obama supporters who lived in a

conservative community, the online community provided means for an escape and ability

to congregate with fellow supporters.

Secondly, with many Millennials who were comfortable and familiar with

multitasking, MyBarackObama.com members often viewed news together as a collective

event. As one user enthused, "I love these live feeds from the campaign trail; it truly

makes me feel like part of the rally!"[830] There were a handful of digital immigrants who

struggled to blog and watch at the same time, making such complaints as "How can you

keep track of this wall and watch TV? I must be getting old."[831] Many community

members, however, watched video of live speeches, news programs such as "The Rachel

Maddow Show," and, especially, the presidential and vice-presidential debates on their

computers while blogging, as suggested by posts such as, "McBush just said Palin was a

role model for women—red wine all over my keyboard when that whopper came out of

his mouth!"[832] While some McCain supporters also posted live during the debates, most

posted their analysis after the debates had ended or on the blog the next day. Further,

even during important events for the McCain-Palin campaign, such as Palin's acceptance

speech at the RNC, not many McCain supporters were online. One user observed at 8:13

p.m. during Palin's speech: "Where is everyone? It seems slow tonight."[833] Likely they

were watching the speech on television in the offline world and not blogging with an

online community.

The technological foundation of the campaign social networking platforms may

help to explain this disparity. Plouffe explained:

> It's important to note that we encouraged people to watch the live stream
> on our website. We were doing this with greater frequency, and many
> people were watching major events on our site … We were accomplishing
> what we set out to create—a website that could be a real "home" for our
> supporters and a one-stop shopping place for anything campaign-
> related.[834]

However, with more collective viewing and posting occurring on the Obama

Facebook site than the McCain Facebook site, the difference can likely be attributed to

the age of supporters. With more younger Obama supporters and more older McCain

supporters, the Obama digital immigrants were choosing to experience debates, the DNC,

and other campaign events in the online world while multitasking rather than in the

offline world through the medium of television. Moreover, once these younger Obama

supporters had established a practice of collective viewing, older Obama supporters

joined in, since comments indicated that the Obama community included a wide array of

supporters in terms of age, from parents of young children to retirees to "Obama

Grandmama."[835]

As the campaign progressed and registration for MyBarackObama.com increased,

however, some users felt that the Obama community was becoming too big, complaining,

"We were the troopers in January debating here before this group became too big to have

a conversation."[836] In addition, the excessive number of blog posts made discussion

during these events difficult, as users lamented, "Get your running shoes on. We are

going to have a ton of blog spotting to do."[837] Some users even chose to move their

conversations away from MyBarackObama.com and into a private blog, as suggested by

this comment: "Last debate some other folks and I went to Moira's blog (Moira from this

website) and used her chat to talk real-time. I'll post a link when the debate starts."[838]

Besides using BarckObama.com as a refuge and place for collective viewing,

Obama supporters used their online world to develop friendships and relationships and

spend time with other users. The Obama-Biden campaign posted: "As one of our

Pennsylvania organizers, Jorge, says: 'Probably one of the biggest rewards is meeting

friends that, perhaps in no other time of your life, would you either have reason or

opportunity to meet.'"[839] These online friendships flourished with users sharing and

remembering personal information about each other, with comments such as, "How's that

grandbaby, John?"[840] They recognized when users had not logged on in awhile, and

communicated to those individuals that they had been missed: "Antonia, it sure is good to

see you back, we missed you in here!"[841] If they had been away from

MyBarackObama.com or hadn't been on Facebook in the evenings, when most dialogue

took place, they asked, *"Did I miss anything new?"*[842] Through words, punctuation, and

emoticons they expressed nonverbal communication actions that convey friendship such

as "**waves**"[843] and "(((((((Darren)))))))"[844]—hugs—to each other. One

conversation read:

> What a day. I'm going to get a glass of wine. Do you guys need anything
> while I'm up?[845]

{{passing Meta a glass of wine}}[846]

{{{{gratitude}}}}} Cheers![847]

They called each other friends,[848] and as friends in the off-line world, kept each other up late and from getting their schoolwork or housework done; Facebook posts included, "You people are a bad influence!"[849] and "Not getting addicted tonight! :)"[850] Online romances even blossomed, with comments like, "Is there some more match making going on on the Wall?"[851] In these ways, both men and women supporters of the Obama campaign developed relationships. The online friendships that appeared strongest from analysis of blog comments on MyBarackObama.com, however, were between women.

In "The Arrangement Between the Sexes," Goffman suggested: "…One has reason to distinguish two kinds of disadvantaged categories: those that can and tend to be sequestered off into entire families and neighborhoods and those that do not. Blacks are an example of the first. … [Women are] among those disadvantaged categories which are not segregated."[852*] This point that minorities of disadvantaged groups should be considered in a variety of ways relates to how women participated in the Obama-Biden online community. For many women, particularly those who may have a traditional role raising children and those who are empty-nesters but do not work outside the home, MyBarackObama.com provided not only a place for generating friendships with other women, but also a forum for political discourse. As Duerst-Lahti explained, a "normative stance toward appropriate and proper ways of behaving" for women includes the adage, "A woman's place is in the home."[853] The gendering effect of making women invisible

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[*] While Goffman illustrates sexism and focus on the nuclear family of the 1970s by adding that, "women are allocated distributively to households in the form of wives," his general premise of differing disadvantaged categories remains valid.

in the household and in the political realm is part of the historic strong public and private divide in the US.[854]

Many women, including older women, shared that the 2008 election was the first time they had been politically active, such as the comment, "I never thought I'd give money to a campaign, let alone raise money for one!"[855] They spent significant amounts of time on MyBarackObama.com on a regular basis, usually in the evening, when some mothers likely had put their children to bed. "I read for hours and hours each night,"[856] wrote a user in the women-focused blog, "Statement of Senator Obama on Breast Cancer Awareness month." This particular blog generated many personal stories from women who had lost mothers and sisters to breast cancer. Perhaps, as women, some users felt restricted from participating in the political process in the offline world, but through their online community, they were welcomed and encouraged to take part. Further, they may have been drawn to involvement in online politics through the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, and, through Clinton's appeals to support Obama, then became involved in the Obama online community. Many women who used MyBarackObama.com could be considered "alpha moms," a term attributed to marketer Constance Van Fladern to describe Internet-savvy mothers who consume vast amounts of online media, including shopping, blogging, and joining online communities.[857]

Some of the relationships between women were close knit, as they shared recipes[858] and rallied around fellow users' misfortunes, such as the post: "Please send up some prayers for our dear Tina, her dad had heart surgery yesterday. She O-mailed me last night and said he came through it okay, but he has a ways to go. We all love her and send our best to her mother & family."[859]

Online relationships may have even translated into the offline world. One

conversation among women users read:

> In case you ever happen to come to Virginia, do let me know. Would
> love to have you and your family over at my home.[860]
>
> Hey, no fair! Tina and family are coming to our house! LOL!
> You are so popular, Tina, I don't think you will have to pay for a hotel
> room anywhere in this country ever again![861]
>
> Awww, thanks Dr. T and Glad! It is so great to have made friends
> like the 2 of you through the Obama family! How fun it would be to meet
> someday![862]

This description of each other as "family" was common among Obama-Biden supporters,

but was most often used by women. The social networking component of the Obama-

Biden campaign website was, in these ways, particularly useful for women. "It's the

peeps on the blogs that give me so much inspiration in my old age! This blog has been

the glue that has held this movement together,"[863] wrote one woman user. This use of

MyBarackObama.com supports gender scholarship, such as Morra Aarons-Mele's

assertion: "Digital culture is positive for women in many ways. At its heart it is a culture

of sharing and peer-driven advice. Lower barriers to entry mean that the traditional,

male-dominated networks do not rule."[864]

A final consideration of community building should be considered. Goffman

wrote:

> A social group may be defined as a special type of social organization. Its
> elements are individuals: they perceive the organization as a distinct
> collective unit, a social entity, apart from the particular relationships the
> participants may have to one another; they perceive themselves as
> members who belong, identifying with the organization and receiving
> moral support from doing so; they sustain a sense of hostility to outgroups.
> A symbolization of the reality of the group and one's relation to it is also
> involved.[865]

This sense of hostility to outgroups describes the common practice of trolling. There were significantly more Obama supporter trolls on the McCain Facebook page—approximately one in every three posters—compared to McCain supporter trolls on the Obama Facebook page—about one in every ten posters. Similar to how a band of bullies gains strength in numbers, trolling was encouraged by Obama users in packs. Comments referred to going together as if the McCain Wall was a physical place: "I might nip over to the McCain wall in a bit, I've never been. I imagine it's a bit like swimming with sharks, whilst carrying a harpoon—scary, but you can kill them with one shot."[866] A fellow user responded, "Haha, if you go let me know, I'll accompany you."[867] Users on McCain's Facebook page easily recognized these trolls, posting, "Oh, here we go, another phony Republican complaining about Palin."[868] They reacted to the Obama trolls with frustration at the invasion of their space for political discourse: "Okay, all of us conservatives have enough respect to not go over there [on the Obama site] and put up attacks, so leave us alone here. Go spout your venom with your other little buddies and leave us do our own thing over here."[869]

This practice of the majority of web users encroaching on discussion in a place for the minority of web users reminds one of the silencing effect described by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in her Spiral of Silence theory, developed in 1974 based on the media's role in an individual's perception of public opinion in German politics (an election between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats).[870] While the theory does not apply to the offline citizenry as a whole in the 2008 election, it can be considered in conjunction with this practice of trolling in online forums. Noelle-Neumann suggested that, society "threatens those individuals who deviate from the consensus."[871] Because of

our "largely subconscious" fear of isolation and exclusion,[872] we are constantly checking "… which opinions and modes of behavior are approved or disapproved of."[873] Individuals decide whether their opinions are socially acceptable and, if so, are more willing to engage in public debate. If not, they are silent; in turn, individuals with certain opinions become increasingly silent, reinforcing "the impression in public of their side's weakness."[874] Through trespassing in the McCain supporters' territory, Obama supporters impinged on the community building of this group of minority users. It may have dampened debate for users on the McCain site, who were tired of being attacked and having to defend their political opinions, thus silencing them in part. Meanwhile, this bolstered the Obama supporters' impression of being a vocal Facebook majority, with very few McCain trolls on Obama's Facebook page. As Noelle-Neumann described:

> People expressed themselves openly, and self-confidently defending their views. … encouraged people either to proclaim their views or to swallow them and keep quiet until, in a spiraling process, the one view dominated the public scene and the other disappeared from public awareness as its adherents became mute. This is the process that can be called a "spiral of silence."[875]

Unlike these silenced McCain supporters, members of the Obama online community felt that they belonged, identified with the campaign, and found support, both in voicing political opinion and through friendships, on the blogs. The reality of the online group blurred the lines between "online" and "offline" for these users. The McCainSpace users, in contrast, did not build this kind of online community. These users were certainly not given as many opportunities to do so; the eight-day sample of this study included only five total blogs on the McCain website to Obama's 166. This

discrepancy is further discussed in the next section, comparing the amount of user-generated content posted by Obama and McCain supporters.

5.2.2.2: The Popularity of User-Posted Content

"It's kind of hard to take a candidate seriously when there are more supporters for the Jonas Brothers than for McCain,"[876] posted a Facebook user. Other Millennials also commented on the discrepancy between the number of Obama supporters and McCain supporters on Facebook. As shown in table 9 (see Appendix), by the eighth week of the campaign—less than three weeks before election day—McCain had one-fourth the number of Facebook supporters in comparison to Obama. McCain also had one-fourth the number of MySpace fans and YouTube subscribers, and one-tenth of YouTube views. Perhaps to draw less attention to this discrepancy with his opponent, McCain's MySpace page was designed partway through the campaign, removing the number of supporters from the front page; the platforms of Facebook and YouTube did not allow for this kind of user reformatting. The greatest discrepancy in social media was in Twitter followers; because McCain did not publish a Twitter account until September 19, in the middle of the election campaign, he only accrued 3,144 Twitter followers. Obama had more than thirty times that amount, with 99,261 Twitter followers. According to Hitwise, 76 percent of web traffic visited the Obama-Biden website and 24 percent of web traffic visited the McCain-Palin website during the eighth week of the campaign.

These numbers show that Obama was immensely more popular with web users than McCain. While Palin was perceived as being more popular than her presidential running mate, this is not reflected in the web user data. She accrued fewer than

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McCain's 577,041 Facebook fans. She did, however, come close to level of support

from Facebook users' for McCain, with 431,532 Facebook fans. Moreover, a

comparison of Palin and Biden shows she was immensely more popular as a vice-

presidential candidate, as shown in figure 13. Traditionally, not much attention is paid

to vice-presidential candidates, so it is likely the number of Biden's Facebook fans is not

unusually low, but that Palin's support on Facebook was unusually high for a vice-

presidential candidate.

   Obama-Biden supporters posted substantially more web content than McCain-

Palin supporters, also shown in table 9 (see Appendix) and figure 13. Moreover, the

posts for McCain were enlarged by the practice of trolling by Obama supporters.
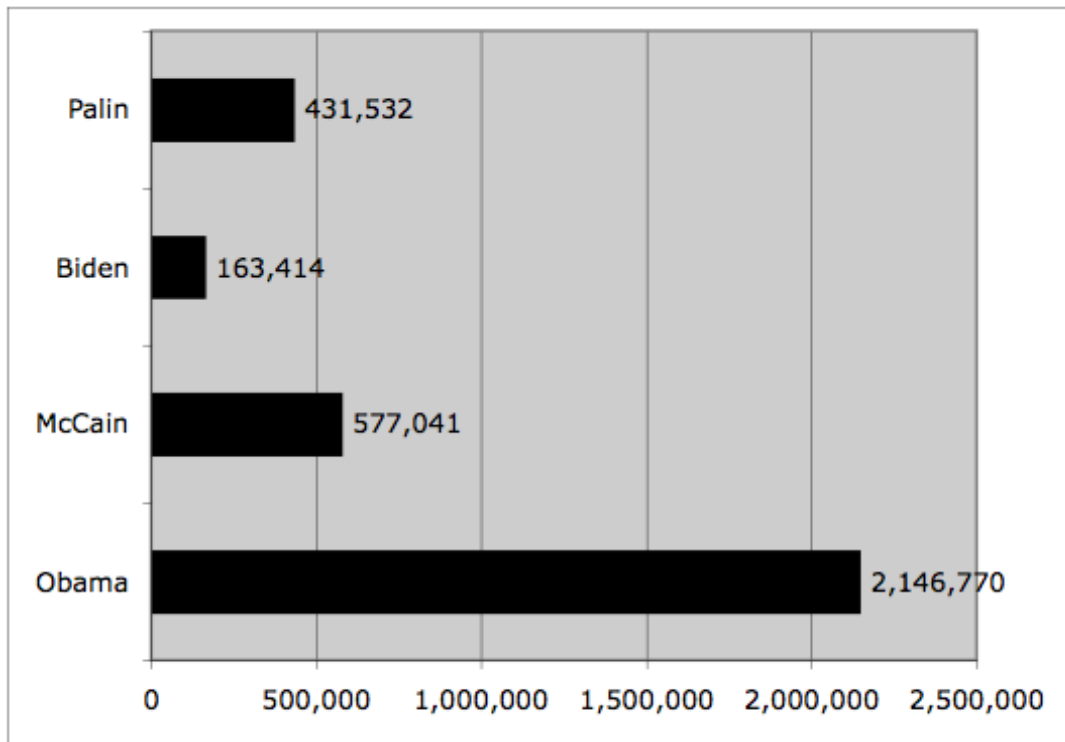
Figure 13. Comparison of Web User Facebook Fans for Obama, McCain, Biden, and
Palin in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

In the Situational Theory of Publics, Grunig emphasized the differences between information processing and information seeking. He described information processing as "passive communication behavior," such as watching a campaign television advertisement. Information seeking is "active communication behavior," and correlates with John Dewey's concept of problem recognition, in which "…people do not stop to think about a situation unless they perceive that something needs to be done to improve the situation."[877]

Grunig asserted: "… An involved public usually will be the most active public."[878] Certainly, more web users were consuming information provided by the Obama-Biden campaigns with more YouTube views, more Twitter followers, and so on. More important, a greater number of Obama supporters were actively creating and publishing their own web content and then sharing this content with other web users.

The larger number of Millennial web users who supported Obama can certainly help to explain a much larger number of Facebook Wall posts, more than twice as many than Facebook Wall posts on the McCain website, as shown in table 10 (see Appendix). One might expect that the ratio of campaign blog posts would be similar. However, there were almost twenty-five times the number of user blog posts on the Obama-Biden campaign website than on the McCain-Palin campaign website. Previous discussion of the prioritization of online content by the Obama-Biden campaign provides understanding of this discrepancy between Facebook Wall posts and campaign blog posts.

Goffman emphasized the importance of setting.[879] The technological

sophistication of MyBarackObama.com (especially compared to the rudimentary

McCainSpace, where users could not even post "association"), with a much larger

number of blogs and the use of multimedia blogs; and the close knit Obama community

that encouraged supporters to frequent the campaign website are all factors that may have

led to such a difference in use of each candidate's campaign website social networking

platform. "When Millennials join the Netroots online, they are disproportionately more

influential than the average citizen, precisely because they are so active in sharing their

ideas and opinions with others,"[880] argued Winograd and Hais. "Each voter can become

his or her own campaign office and flood the nation's political speech,"[881] they added. In

this way, more important than the number of posts submitted by web users to the

candidates' campaign and Facebook sites was how they shared information and political

ideology with other web users.

First, Obama supporters shared their support for the Democratic candidate

through their Facebook profile pictures. As one web user urged, "Represent people! Put

Barack as your profile pic to show your support!"[882] The myriad of Obama-inspired

profile pictures was truly eclectic: from users posing with Obama at a campaign rally to

logos of "Change" or the text "Obama '08" to artist-rendered abstract images of Obama.

These profile pictures contributed to communicating a vocal majority of Obama

supporters on Facebook, since user profile pictures of McCain were few and far between.

Moreover, these profile pictures were seen by a Facebook user's online network of

friends.

MyBarackObama.com users did not have profile pictures, and so many instead showed their support through user names, which included: "No Shock Barack No Drama Obama,"[883] "In Obama & Biden I Trust!,"[884] "obama/mama,"[885] and "Barack or Bust."[886] In an interesting use of identification, many web users showed support for Obama by using "Hussein" as their own middle name in user tags on MyBarackObama.com.

The Obama MySpace page offered users the ability to customize their own MySpace pages with animated or static corners that read "Powered by Hope Obama '08," with the Obama logo. MySpace and Facebook users were also able to add "Meet Barack" and "Obama on Iraq" videos to their profiles.[887]

This use of spreading support for a candidate is similar to the offline practice of wearing campaign clothing or putting a candidate's bumper sticker on one's car. In fact, Obama web content also enhanced this offline practice, with the overwhelming popularity of the Obama store on the campaign website. Focus group participants in this study voiced enthusiasm for the store page of the site, and Plouffe wrote, "I often kidded Barack that at any moment I might step down as manager and open up the Obama Store kiosk at O'Hare."[888]

Most important, Obama supporters created their own campaign web content and shared it with others in a "batonical" way. Will.I.Am, who produced the "Yes We Can" YouTube video, made use of the term "batonical" to describe how young people were passing campaign information to friends, as in passing a baton.[889] In this way, problem recognition and information seeking led to an active level of involvement among publics, as Grunig proposed. Many of the videos produced by these online publics went viral,

such as "Obama Girl," "McCain Sings Bomb Iran, Laughs," and "How Do We Beat the Bitch?"

Mash-ups were also popular, such as "John McCain Gets Barack Roll'd," in which users edited footage of McCain's RNC speech as if it was interrupted by Obama dancing with Ellen DeGeneres and singing the lyrics to Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up," a play on the Internet phenomenon of "Rick rolling." Winograd and Hais argued that new media "places all power in the hands of the users, creating an ethos and a belief system that they are, and ought to be, free to do whatever they wish with any information they can find."[890]

In contrast, user-created videos supporting McCain, such as the "McCain girls," were not popular, or were only popular as the target of jokes. Focus group participant S34 offered, "The older generations who are following McCain don't even know how to make a video or post something or edit something."[891]

In these ways, there existed a majority of Obama supporters dominating user-created content on the web. One viral video, "Les Misbarack," highlighted this groundswell of support by comparing Obama supporters to young French revolutionaries.[892] The video, produced by an improvisational comedy group, portrayed the Broadway musical cast of "Les Miserables" as Obama staffers—and McCain and Palin look-alikes—lip-synching to "One Day More." After its viral success on the web, it was posted to "The Daily Dish" on *The Atlantic* website, described as, "Whatever happens, the McCain campaign could never pull this off."[893]

5.2.2.3: User Involvement

Campaign Manager David Plouffe wrote of the Obama-Biden campaign's view of volunteers:

> We would strive to be a grassroots campaign. That meant volunteers. This was a prime motivation for Obama to run, the belief that the American people needed to reengage in their civic life. He laid out a clear dictate that we needed to build a campaign that had this at its core. As a former community organizer, Obama felt in his gut that if properly motivated, a committed grassroots army could be a powerful force. Over time the volunteers became the pillars that held the whole enterprise aloft.[894]

Grassroots involvement is tied to political leadership, as described by Murray Edelman: "It is recognized in the response of followers to individual acts and speeches. If they respond favorably and follow, there is leadership; if they do not, there is not."[895] Campaigns have relied on volunteers for decades, but what is seminal about the grassroots success of the campaign was its foundation of campaign web content. As Plouffe explained:

> Technology … would be at the core of our campaign from the start. In order to build a grassroots movement, it was clear that the only way to get to scale quickly enough was to use the power of the Internet to sign people up and ask them to get involved. I also made the point that many of our early supporters were likely to be fairly technologically savvy, as was more and more of the general population as well. So many people are living their lives through technology—how can we expect their interaction with politics to be the one exception?[896]

Grunig asserted that not only is it important for publics to feel involved in a campaign, but that they should feel connected to others who are also involved: "The involved person most frequently gets rid of constraints by organizing with others facing the same constraints—that is, by becoming a member of an active public."[897] A more modern take on Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics is crowdsourcing, a term coined

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by Jeff Howe of *WIRED* magazine in 2006, defined as "the process of involving large numbers of people to solve a particular problem or accomplish a specific goal without paying for, or outsourcing, the work."[898] This section discusses how the Obama-Biden campaign, through the social networking component of its campaign website, encouraged user involvement online, particularly with such previously offline volunteer activities as telephone banking, canvassing, and fundraising. The simple and lackluster McCainSpace platform did not offer the potential for such levels of user involvement.

First, the Obama-Biden campaign asked supporters to send in content, such as: "Help us recognize the millions of people in our movement who are working for change by sending your Obama photos to blog@barackobama.com."[899] Another post read: "We want to highlight your creativity, enthusiasm and hard work. … Ready to host your own event? Create an event now, [and] use our flyer templates to help promote it. … After you host an event, make sure to let us know how it went!"[900] As a result, the blogs featured a user's Indian dance party in New York City and another's social justice rock concert in El Paso, Texas.[901] Another user wrote of the party he had held, dubbing it "Obamafest."[902]

Second, the campaign solicited user feedback through a survey e-mailed to all registered MyBarackObama.com users, and even contacted some users personally. As Stanley Deetz wrote: "The fundamental issue, in my analysis, is control and how different groups are represented in decision making. A program is genuinely new and promotes a fundamental change to the extent that it impacts on control and representation."[903] In applying Deetz' Critical Theory of Communication in Organizations to the 2008 campaigns, the involvement of MyBarackObama.com users

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reached the level of participation in which user feedback resulted in actual campaign direction and decisions, albeit a limited form of stakeholder democracy since the campaign chose which suggestions to implement. "The campaign does want our two cents. Yay! I like it that we do own this campaign and that our opinion does matter. Here's the link again just in case someone missed it," posted one user.[904] Another shared, "I was contacted by HQ about one of my posts … talking to friends and family about Obama and his policies. The contact was very positive and we had a great conversation. I just wanted to relay on the blog that they [campaign staffers] do pay attention and they are listening. :) They are trying to make this campaign better at every step. I was impressed."[905]

Third, and with the most impact on the 2008 election, MyBarackObama.com users participated in volunteer efforts with direct support from the campaign. Offline, they sent postcards and wrote op-ed articles, sharing their experiences online. "We had a great turnout [for the postcard party], and we wrote 163 postcards in just one hour. I strongly encourage others to do this fun activity for Barack,"[906] read one report. Another emphasized the assistance from the campaign in writing letters:

> Have you used the Speak Out communication tool provided by HQ yet? It is an incredibly powerful and easy way to widely distribute letters and articles to national, regional, and local newspapers. [Link] To use it, scroll down and pick any state. Enter your zip code and click on "participate." Then you can submit the article to any newspaper on the list by cutting and pasting it into the tool. …The pen (or the PC) is mightier than the sword.[907]

The intensity of their involvement, emphasized by Goffman in *Behavior in Public Places*,[908] was exemplified with telephone banking, canvassing, and fundraising efforts. What was groundbreaking in 2008 for telephone banking and canvassing was the ability

for users to download lists of telephone numbers to call and neighbors' addresses to canvass from the convenience of their own computer. No longer did volunteers need to visit a campaign office and sit in a stuffy room making calls, or arrange to meet up with campaign workers on a Saturday to canvass door-to-door. Now web users could make calls from their home telephones or mobile telephones and canvass on a day and time that suited them. This use of technology converged with a way of life for many web users. Telecommunicating is a widespread way of doing work. Through CMC and the ability to e-mail documents, as well as popularity of conference calls, physical constraints and the necessity of geographic proximity has been removed from many aspects of our lives.

An interview with Chris Hughes, coordinator of online organizing for the Obama-Biden campaign, that appeared in the magazine *Fast Company* provides an insider's perspective of what went into technological ingenuity of these online tools:

> Hughes was working on two breakthrough tools. One was the online calling-and-canvassing tool called Neighbor-to-Neighbor that launched quietly in September 2008. Once a user logged in to MyBO, a list of Neighbor-to-Neighbor campaigns appeared on the left side of the screen; a few clicks produced a list of people, primarily undecided voters or 'leaning Obamas', who needed to be called. It was highly integrated with data sets—geography, age, profession, languages, military service—to match volunteers with undecideds they might relate to. Volunteers used the tool to make some 8 million calls.[909]

With so many Millennials who were involved in their first election, the Obama-Biden campaign posted three-minute video tutorials to the website showing how to volunteer. In the first three hours after they were posted, "Neighbor to Neighbor Phone" and "Neighbor to Neighbor Canvassing" had been viewed over 4,000 times.[910] This shows that the Obama-Biden campaign filled a gap for users who wanted to volunteer, but were not quite sure how to go about it.

Moreover, the blogs provided a forum for users to share their volunteering experiences. For instance, one user posted, "40 doors knocked today. The Neighbor to Neighbor tool on "My Dashboard' is very simple to use,"[911] generating responses such as, "inspiring post, John!"[912] Another shared, "I overcame my fear of phone banking. I know, it is hard to believe, but I did it!"[913] In this way, similar to encouraging participation for an offline blood drive, one user may have encouraged others to volunteer, and she herself may have been encouraged to volunteer after reading positive feedback from fellow users.

On MyBarackObama.com, donations raised by supporters were tracked and displayed in graphs on each user's profile. In this way, users were not just making donations themselves, but were working to earn donations from other users, emphasizing the social in social media. This meant that they encouraged each other in their fundraising efforts.

Richard Petty's and John Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) can provide a lens of persuasive theory from which to view the motivational efforts of users. In ELM, Petty and Cacioppo presented two opposing ways in which we exert mental effort to elaborate a persuasive message. Low mental effort is exerted when peripheral cues are used in a persuasive message. This may include social proof, reciprocation, liking, and scarcity. High mental effort is exerted when central, strong argumentation is used in a persuasive message.[914] "These two routes to persuasion represent the extreme ends of a continuum in which people either engage in a full and complete analysis of evidence before forming an opinion or engage in a simple and cursory evaluation,"[915] suggested the theorists.

This distinction can be compared to Aristotle's description of logos and pathos: logical and emotional appeals.[916] Among MyBarackObama.com users, arguments exclusively used the peripheral route or, in Aristotle's language, the pathos of emotional appeals, and did not present strong argumentation.

The fundraising platform of MyBarackObama.com was in and of itself a form of social proof. Users would have been constantly reminded of fellow users' fundraising totals and progress, with posts like, "I'm only $10 short of raising $250 on my fundraising page,"[917] encouraging them to increase their own productivity.

The peripheral cue of reciprocation also was used through the practice of matching donations, in which users would donate to another's fundraising page in reciprocity for a donation to their own. The appeal, "I will match your donation! I only have about $800 to go before I am maxed out. Please donate to my FR and I will match on your page,"[918] resulted in a donation from a fellow user within six minutes of the post.

Liking as a peripheral cue was used through warmth and humor motivational appeals. Warmth appeals included: "Obama family, each time I get a donation I pick up my little sister and do a 'happy dance.' Even $1 makes us happy to help Barack win! ☺"[919] This post generated the response: "How can I not donate when you put it that way. Dance away!"[920] A popular warmth appeal was: "Please show Barack and Michelle some love" on their 16th Wedding Anniversary with an "Anniversary Money Bomb."[921]

An ongoing humor appeal was between two popular MyBarackObama.com users who conducted their own campaign on the site, soliciting donations instead of votes. The duo's funny persuasive attempts resulted in affection from fellow users, as shown in this conversation:

Ryan Hussein Osama Cheney Castro's recent negative attacks have backfired. … He may be a veteran of this blog, but … I'll raise 725 bucks tonight while my opponent attacks me.[922]

> Superfundraiser and Fat Cat Bob has been monopolizing the fundraising on this blog for too long. It's time to knock him down a peg or two. Today, after exhaustive research, our team discovered Bob's birth certificate and on that document, in plain sight, is his actual middle name, clearly printed as: K A N G A. … It sounds foreign, and I believe Bob is dangerous and … cannot be trusted. Instead of donating to his page, donate instead to the little guy, me, the guy who has only raised $720, not some $20K or more. … I am clearly the UNDERDOG here. Bob is the ESTABLISHMENT. The same old, same old. So, donate to my modest fundraising page –my goal is $1 million dollars and I'm 0.1% of the way there. I know we can do it![923]

> With all this negative campaigning between you two, we're gonna need a fact check site.[924]

> Bob, you have to admit that that was one of the funniest posts you have ever seen on these blogs![925]

> LOL! Definitely![926]

> Well I have given to you both because unlike McSame [sic], I like you both![927]

Scarcity was also used as a peripheral cue with the creation of contests for users to win, with limited prizes such as a handmade Obama quilt,[928] organic cookies,[929] and even "a four-day/three-night stay for two in the guest room at my home inside the Beltway in Arlington, VA during the Obama inauguration in January 2009."[930]

Most of all, manipulative emotional arguments, a form of Aristotle's pathos, were the most common method of encouraging fellow MyBarackObama.com users to volunteer. Daniel O'Keefe has suggested that invoking feelings of guilt can be very persuasive, and "the reactions characteristically associated with guilt make it especially well-suited to exploitation for purposes of social influence."[931] This was supported with

the success of pity and guilt appeals posted by users. These persuasive appeals were made to members of groups already associated with pity and guilt. "I am a young disabled woman who has been doing all she can to elect Barack Obama from my desk here at home. I have raised $878 for the campaign so far, but since we are coming into the home stretch, I know we have to all dig deeper and pull out all the stops,"[932] read one such appeal. A user who shared that he had donated twenty dollars to the campaign from his monthly unemployment check[933] generated the response, "I just contributed a matching donation of $100."[934] A single mother of three children wrote of donating the family's Friday night take-out money to the campaign.[935] Another post read, "I have little to nothing to leave my grandchildren. Won't you please donate to my fundraising page? Love from an Obama grandmamma."[936] "I only had $11 in my checking account a few days ago so this was a stretch for me but I believe so fervently in Barack Obama's leadership and the need to put this country in the right direction that I know it is worth the financial sacrifice,"[937] was offered as an emotional appeal to those with more than $11 in their bank accounts. One user even attempted to guilt fellow users into donating with the post, "I told my husband not to buy me anything for our anniversary because I would rather donate it to this campaign."[938] Guilt and pity appeals also told stories of others: "When I started my fundraiser page my friend in Ohio wanted to donate. Her home is currently in foreclosure and she has filed bankruptcy. I told her to keep her money. She told me, 'Keeping this money will not save my house but maybe it will help save this country and my daughter's future.' Every little bit helps. Please donate along with my friend and help take back America!"[939]

These innovative fund raising methods were, as some users pointed out, historic:

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WOW, I am really just speechless. Ninety people have helped raise $2008 for this campaign on my fundraising page alone. This really is historic. … I thought that [raising money for a campaign] was something only wealthy, powerful people got to do. Well, America—look what happens when the POWER is given back to the average American. We are powerful. In $5, $10, $57 donations, we come through. There are so many of us. And we are motivated like never before.[940]

The McCain campaign, meanwhile, realized the opportunities they were missing and mimicked MyBarackObama.com by initiating its own donor profiles. As with other aspects of McCain's campaign, it was too little too late with minimal support from McCain Space users, resulting in mockery from Obama supporters: "McTrolls are now earning McPoints!! How pathetic is his campaign! ROTFLMAO!"[941]*

MyBarackObama.com, in contrast, had made fundraising a routine for Obama supporters on the web and, much like checking Facebook, became a compulsive habit for some, shown in the comment, "I needed a donation to get my fix!"[942]

Fundraising even extended beyond the campaign website, with users listing their donations to groups like MoveOn.org and Planned Parenthood: "Let's all make a donation to Planned Parenthood in Sarah Palin's name. And here's the good part: when you make a donation to PP in her name, they'll send her a card telling her that the donation has been made in her honor."[943]

Through these peripheral cues and emotional appeals, Obama supporters were persuading each other to use campaign-generated tools and to volunteer, raising $30 million.[944] Moreover, the Facebook-inspired format of MyBarackObama.com provided a wealth of user data for the campaign. As Plouffe explained:

One of the beauties of technology and data is that you can track the contribution history and volunteer performance of people all the way

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* ROTFLMAO is a popular web acronym for "Rolling on the floor laughing my ass off."

through the campaign. On November 4, 2008, we knew … how many
times did they contribute? Did they volunteer? … Are they part of an
online group? This type of data made establishing metrics much easier
and allowed us to track what people responded to and what they didn't.[945]

Further, Web users, with the assistance of the site's sophisticated technological software,

were more productive volunteers than offline supporters. Hughes' innovative Vote for

Change voter-registration platform emphasized this:

> [It] was a hellishly complicated dynamic database loaded with local voter-
> registration rules. There was a sophisticated strategy at work: If registrants
> were students, for instance, they were asked for both the state where they
> went to school and the state they came from. "We'd determine which state
> was most important for us to win," says Hughes, "and assuming that the
> law says that a full-time student can register there, we would suggest it."
> The site registered a million people, with only a handful of staffers working
> on it part time. Registering the same number by knocking on doors took
> some 2,000 paid staffers and volunteers.[946]

"The energy on-line is amazing,"[947] posted a BarackObama.com user. This energy,

fueled by technological capabilities, provided an unprecedented amount of online user

involvement in a political campaign. By the time the campaign was over,

MyBarackObama.com users had created more than two million profiles on the site,

planned 200,000 offline events, formed 35,000 groups, posted 400,000 blogs, and created

70,000 personal fund-raising pages.[948] A comparison of metrics from the McCain-Palin

campaign has not been released, suggesting that the success of its online involvement

among Web users paled in comparison.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1: Innovation of Political Campaigning Via Social Media

In August 2008, a web user posted on Barack Obama's Facebook Wall, "I feel like being involved in politics now,"[949] and received the response from a fellow user, "You already are."[950] The priority given to online publics by the Obama-Biden campaign and the enthusiastic involvement by web users made the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns truly extraordinary.

There are lessons in political campaigning that can be learned from 2008: as the failed McCain-Palin campaign illustrated, to utilize new media opportunities in ways that actually involve web users; and, as the sometimes over-eager Obama-Biden campaign showed, to achieve a balance of providing information without overwhelming supporters. These takeaways are highlighted in the perspectives of MyBarackObama.com users who were interviewed after the elections.[*]

The perspective of a college student and Obama-Biden campaign "Super Volunteer"[**] stresses just how much the campaign gained from web user involvement—and, in turn, how much the McCain-Palin lost through limited user involvement—with his description of the user-created website, www.obamacycle.com: "ObamaCycle was taking used items from the primaries such as signs, banners, and stickers, and sending them to states that held their primaries later. It was really useful. They [other volunteers]

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[*] Three college students were interviewed via online chat by the author in November 2008, after the elections were over. These interviews are not part of the data set of this study, but were conducted to glean an insider's perspective of participation on MyBarackObama.com. Institutional Review Board approval, A 08X159, was granted by the IRB at Ohio University on November 10, 2008 to include these non-Ohio University students in this study.

[**] "Super Volunteer" was the actual term employed by the Obama-Biden campaign, using language to evoke representation of exceptional volunteers as superheroes of the campaign.

sent me about 400 dollars in stuff to use for our area."[951] This innovative way of reusing

campaign materials was completely user-originated and was not managed or maintained

in any way by the Obama-Biden campaign. This exemplifies how web-based user

involvement led to creativity and resourcefulness beyond what was presented by the

campaign, supporting notions of collective potential suggested in James Suroweicki's

The Wisdom of Crowds.[952] It further illustrates the ownership of web content by web

users. In 2008, the Obama-Biden volunteers were not just passive audience members

who were mobilized to participate in prearranged election events. Through their assertive

ingenuity with involvement and fundraising, they exceeded expectations of what

successful online grassroots campaigning can accomplish.

Another college student described how the online blogs first motivated her to

participate in the campaign:

> Back in January after he won Iowa, I decided to take a look at the blogs,
> and everyone on there was getting involved so I decided I might as well
> get moving, too, if I really wanted it [the Democratic nomination of
> Obama] to happen. … Everyone was so enthusiastic and encouraging. …
> It was just all these normal people talking about how there were so many
> ways to get involved, even if you didn't live in a battleground or blue state.
> … I really liked the "Events" feature. It was so awesome to be able to find
> events in my area that I could attend, because it was so much simpler than
> calling around to different places to find out what was going on. … I don't
> think I would've been nearly as involved had it not been for
> encouragement from others online, and prodding from news stories and
> such that they posted. All of it made me want to do more, and I felt like
> when they posted results from a state they'd won or something that went
> right, I had a little piece in it and achieving it.[953]

In this way, online political campaigning opened up the political process to, in her

words, "normal people" who did not have any previous political campaigning experience

or political expertise. Instead of a corps of young volunteers composed of mostly

political science majors and political news junkies, the online campaigning offered by Obama-Biden felt accessible and available to web users who may not have been politically inclined. Further, as she pointed out, it made political campaigning important for those who did not live in a battleground or "blue"[*] state. In traditional political campaigning, geographic distance often limited what volunteers could do to effect change in those states, but in online political campaigning, those barriers of proximity were, in large part, erased. And, most important, online campaigning offered a novel and effective form of motivation. Encouragement from others online was a major incentive for MyBarackObama.com volunteers to do more.

This student volunteer added, "I loved open threads. I liked being part of the community. And sometimes we had really interesting discussions about issues or controversial things going on in the campaign. And it was fun to share with people what I'd been doing and have them thank me for what I was doing and encourage me to keep going."[954] This illuminates the popularity of the "Open Thread" blogs, posted as the last blog on each day of the campaign. Providing an online place where users could carry on conversations without having to relocate to a new blog is an important strategy for future campaigns.

Future campaigns also should respond to users' frustrations with information overload. A college student studying abroad during the 2008 campaigns, shared that "getting e-mails made me feel like I was in the know, and a valued member of the team … [but] honestly the barrage of e-mails, constantly, was pretty tiring. I wish they [had]

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[*] Since the 2000 election in which a narrow margin of victory brought attention to news media coverage of electoral votes by state, particularly Florida, a "blue" state has come to represent a state that voted or will likely vote Democratic, while a "red" state represents a state that voted or will likely vote Republican.

scaled it back a bit."[955] With so many notifications, e-mails, and—now with the popularity of mobile communication—texts as part of daily communication, future campaigns would be better served to communicate non-essential information through a pull model, giving more control to users, and saving only the most pertinent campaign messages to be communicated through the push model of e-mail and texting.

Campaign Manager David Plouffe considered both the benefits and risks of high levels of user involvement with the e-mail sent to supporters that provided a strategy briefing of how the Obama-Biden campaign planned to win battleground states. He stated, "I'm sure they [the McCain-Palin campaign] learned a few details from our presentation, but we thought this was a small price to pay for the tradeoff of bolstering our supporters' trust in the organization."[956] This open communication reinforced one of the main tenants of political campaigning in the Obama-Biden campaign: providing online space for motivation, positive reinforcement, and community-building. Moreover, as Plouffe noted, "People felt like they were being leveled with, that we were explaining clearly how their time and money was being utilized. And they felt that we valued and needed them."[957] Employees who feel valued in an organization tend to be more efficient and loyal employees; this is why many organizations employ a practice of rewarding "employees of the month," and why Stanley Deetz argues for effective participation of employees in the corporate world. In this same way, the "Super Volunteers" and MyBarackObama.com users of the Obama-Biden campaign considered themselves valuable members of the team, and, in turn, exhibited extraordinary commitment. Further, their sense of ownership, through ObamaCycle and the ground rules and rituals that were part of the campaign blogs, enhanced this level of commitment. Just as a

homeowner will likely care for a house more effectively than a renter, having a place and stake in the campaign led to more successful grassroots involvement and online political campaigning.

6.2: Suggestions for Future Study

This study encompassed a broad spectrum of issues with race, gender, and age, and included many forms of social and online media, from Facebook to campaign websites to YouTube. As a result, a limitation is that it did not delve specifically into some areas of importance to future online political campaigning.

First, the issue of race is intertwined with socioeconomic class. Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggested an interdependent power constellation of race, class, and ethnicity in society.[958] To describe race in socio-economic terms, we should think of race as an element of social structure.[959] Cornell West built upon this idea when he suggested that "blackness," to most black people, means "to side with the weak against the strong."[960] In this way, race and class are interwoven, which explains why for many black women—and men—"their membership in an underrepresented racial group plays as much, if not more, of a role in defining their … identity" than does gender.[961] Class was addressed indirectly in this study, such as the discussion of "enlightened exceptionalism," in which Obama's acceptance by whites can be attributed, in part, to his high socioeconomic class as a standing senator, Harvard Law School graduate, best-selling author, and former attorney. Yet, users identified with the middle-class image the campaign worked to represent, with Obama often wearing a white dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, sans tie, and campaign website content that focused on Obama's work

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as a community organizer and commitment to the south-side of Chicago. In these ways, Obama struck a successful balance between both extremes of class. McCain, in contrast, was interpreted as an elite and privileged man who could not remember the number of houses he owned, which the Obama-Biden emphasized and answered in a campaign advertisement entitled, "Seven."[962] Moreover, Palin's image was "low class," with web users interpreting her responses in the Charles Gibson and Katie Couric interviews as lack of knowledge and supporters declaring themselves "Rednecks for Palin" with homemade signs at her rallies. This study did not focus specifically on the representation of class, but future study would be well served to look more closely at the complexity of class in conjunction with race—and gender and age—in online political campaigning.

Future study should also look more closely at the specific intersection of race and gender. In 2008, Michelle Obama included the following in her speech to the Democratic National Convention: "This week, we celebrate two anniversaries: the 88th anniversary of women winning the right to vote, and the 45th anniversary of that hot summer day when Dr. King lifted our sights and our hearts with his dream for our nation. I stand here today at the crosscurrents of that history knowing that my piece of the American Dream is a blessing hard won by those who came before me."[963] Specifically, attention should be paid to black women candidates. In 2008, one such candidate was overlooked: Cynthia McKinney, the black woman Green Party candidate for president. McKinney, a 53-year old former six-term member of Congress in 2008, did not receive much media attention as a third-party candidate. Further, McKinney maintained a low social media profile with only 2,128 MySpace friends.[964] One wonders how prioritization of new media by the McKinney campaign might have increased attention to her candidacy. She received only

161,797 popular votes in the 2008 election,[965] compared to 42,426 write-in votes for Ron Paul, a Republican primary candidate who was not even actively campaigning in the general election but remained popular among some web users.[*]

A third area for future study is to look more closely at online privacy issues in political campaigning. Goffman defined a person's information preserve as "the set of facts about himself to which an individual expects to control access while in the presence of others."[966] In "Ethics, Privacy, and Self-Restraint in Social Networking," Bernhard Debatin describes two areas of concern with regard to privacy:

> The potential risks can actually be plotted on two dimensions: a horizontal axis, which is visible to the user, and an invisible vertical one. The horizontal axis represents social interactions among the users, where people present themselves through their profiles and engage in communicative exchanges. The vertical axis is the systematic collection, aggregation, and use of data by the networking company. The horizontal interactions occur in the visible tip of the iceberg, while the data generated by the users trickle down in the submerged part of the iceberg. For the average user, the vertical invasion of privacy and its potential commercial or criminal exploitation by third parties therefore tend to remain invisible.[967]

For the horizontal axis of privacy risks, did users who made obscene racist and sexist comments use their real names and post with authentic profiles? If so, did they fully understand that the content they posted posed possible academic and professional repercussions for themselves and others? Debatin suggests that a safer, more trustworthy environment for social media users can be achieved if "…users who follow the principle of self-restraint … always ask themselves, when posting information, if they can at the same time will that this information become known not only to their friends but to the whole world."[968]

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[*] The campaign of Ron Paul coined the term "moneybomb," after he raised $5 million in 24 hours through small online donations.

For the vertical axis of privacy risks, issues in political campaigning should also be further explored from the perspective of invasive collection of data and how campaigns are using this data. One particular issue is the management of contact information shared with associated organizations, such as Political Action Committees (PACs), other political candidates, and even related commercial operations. For instance, the relationship between Chris Hughes and the Obama-Biden campaign infers that future relationships may bridge social media and political campaigns. In these ways, future study in the expansive area of online privacy scholarship could more fully explore this niche of political discourse in conjunction with the self-restraint of users and data collection by campaigns.

In addition, future study will need to address a third issue related to privacy: how mobile communication is changing political campaigning with regard to surveillance by users. In 2008, texting was not yet a mainstream form of communication among most users, as shown by the innovative use of texting the vice-presidential candidate pick for the Obama campaign that resulted in a 3 a.m. mishap. Five years later, it seems inconceivable to run a successful presidential campaign without prioritizing mobile platforms. The use of smartphones and tablets are replacing or have replaced the desktops and laptops prevalent in 2008 (as suggested by posts such as the MyBarackObama.com user who almost spilled red wine all over her keyboard). The immediacy of texting and uploaded user photographs and video has changed communication in a dramatic way, and will dramatically affect political campaigning. Interview participant S10 suggested:

[The Internet] just really changed everything, I feel like, because it used to be if you didn't see "Saturday Night Live," you didn't see it. But now you can go back and watch the videos over and over. Like the Katie Couric interview, it's more damaging to their [McCain-Palin] campaign because people can see it over and over again and pick apart what she says. It's getting harder for politicians, I feel, to control the way that they're represented. It's not just, "Oh, you're gonna be on TV. Put on a good face." It's, "You're gonna be watched always. When you're sleeping, people are going to be watching you."[969]

Gaffes such as Biden's "Dunkin' Donuts" comment, viewed as racist toward Indian Americans, and McCain's response to "How do we beat the bitch?" that was viewed as sexist, were examples from 2008 that were digitally documented. By posting these videos to social media, users drew attention to the comments in a watchdog function which, in turn, led to coverage in mainstream media. Political candidates must adjust to the fact that all members of the public with smartphones and tablets are, in essence, potential citizen journalists, and younger political candidates may have an advantage over older candidates in adapting to this constant surveillance.

As the evolution of smartphones and tablets illustrates, the landscape of new media is constantly shifting, and future study should explore forms of communication not included in this study. For example, MySpace was still popular at the beginning of the 2008 campaign, but declined in popularity just a few short months later; and, Twitter was not yet popular at the beginning of the campaign, but grew in popularity (thus spurring the McCain-Palin campaign to add a Twitter page a few weeks before election day). Other new and popular forms of social media since 2008 include Instagram, Google Plus+, Buzzfeed, and CafeMom, the last of which might be an interesting site for exploration of women's commentary of gender issues and women candidates.

Finally, with the growth and widespread use of social media since 2008, future study could explore web-based content in conjunction with conventional media. For instance, what kind of agenda setting function might blog posts, tweets, or YouTube videos serve in influencing the content of late night television shows, such as "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" or "The Colbert Report"? Future study might in this way expand on one of the strengths of this study, its focus on campaign and user-generated web content.

6.3: Reflecting on Issues of Race, Gender, and Age

Looking back on the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential campaigns suggests how race, gender, and age affect the viability of future candidates for higher political office. Findings of the representation and interpretation of Obama and, of course, the election of Obama as president, show that no candidate is impossible when it comes to race. This is especially important, as issues of race in political campaigning will likely be broadened to include the impact of the growing Hispanic population in the US.

Findings of the representation and interpretation of Palin perhaps suggest that women candidates are not as viable, although this is less conclusive because Palin was not viewed by many women as a candidate who represented them in terms of gender. As a candidate who was viewed as inexperienced, she may in fact have added several panes of glass to the glass ceiling that she and Clinton referred to in their speeches. The sexism levied toward Palin may have influenced the Republican party not to run a woman candidate in 2012, and the public's perception of Palin may tarnish the candidacy of a more competent woman candidate, such as Clinton.

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One of the most interesting findings in this study was the vocal and often cruel ageism expressed by Web users and interview, focus group, and self-report participants. This disdain for the elderly was aimed not just at McCain, but also at older people in general, with such comments as "A 72 year old driving can be questionable"[970] and "What 72-year-old do you know that's not somewhat senile?"[971] Moreover, this ageism was expressed by some of the same young people who decried racism and sexism. These individuals could recognize discrimination against skin color and gender, but not when it came to age and, further, engaged in that discrimination against age.

All three issues of race, gender, and age, then, merit reflection of what can be learned from 2008 and applied to future political campaigning.

6.3.1: Race

The Obama-Biden campaign worked to represent Barack Obama as a "less black, black" candidate. Many web users interpreted and represented Obama in a similar way whereas some web users represented him as a black candidate, both positively as a historic milestone and negatively through the tinted glasses of racism. The campaign worked to represent Joe Biden as a white Irish-Catholic. A very small minority interpreted and represented Biden as racist, but most did not comment directly on Biden and race. The McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent both John McCain and Sarah Palin as white, with McCain as an "All-American boy" and Palin as similar to Hillary Clinton. Some web users interpreted McCain and Palin in this same frame, but a majority of web users both interpreted and represented McCain and Palin as racist.

With the election of the first black president in the US, some Americans suggested increased tolerance and acceptance of racial and ethnic diversity in a reformed "colorblind" society. The findings of this study, however, suggest both overt and covert racism exhibited by web users and even by the Republican candidates themselves, such as McCain's use of "that one" to describe Obama. Tim Wise advised that, "…We are far from the post-racial moment that so many saw fit to proclaim after the election of the nation's first president of color."[972]

Moreover, he warned that, "…if Obama's win has the effect of creating a new archetype or model of acceptable blackness—in other words, if whites come to 'need' black folks to be Obama-like in style, affect, erudition, and educational background in order to be considered competent or trustworthy—his singular victory could actually create higher barriers for the bulk of African Americans."[973]

Wise added, however, that the enlightenment of many young people who realized racism does exist may lead to greater efforts on their part toward racial justice: "… That so many of the Obama campaigners witnessed racism up close and personal … can only have served to heighten these folks' sensitivity to the problem of racism in America … having seen and heard so much raw and unexpurgated bigotry on the campaign trail."[974] The exposure and denouncement of racist remarks posted on the web, particularly on Facebook, likely enlightened many web users, both McCain supporters as well as Obama supporters.

A cursory look at web content in the 2012 presidential and vice-presidential elections[*] suggests attention to race by both the Obama-Biden campaign and web users. The Obama-Biden website featured an "African Americans for Obama" page with a photograph of the back of Obama's head and a black man's hands positioned as if to give him a back massage with the caption, "We've got his back."[975] Perhaps with Obama running as an incumbent candidate, the campaign felt more comfortable accentuating Obama's race. A popular user-created video, with 75 million views—more than three times the amount of views for the viral "Yes We Can" music video in 2008, also showcasing the increasing popularity of YouTube—parodied Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney, who is white, as rappers. Lyrics directed at Obama included, "You're from the Windy City where you're looking pretty with your blowhards but come January you'll be left evicted and with no job."[976] This suggests that four years after the election of our first black president, racism still permeated user-created content of the presidential campaign.

In looking forward to the 2016 presidential election, race will likely still be an important issue affecting how the candidates are framed, but—unless Deval Patrick, the first black Governor of Massachusetts decides on a presidential bid—will most likely focus on racial issues affecting the Hispanic population, notably immigration, more than issues affecting the black population. Since 2008, the Hispanic population has increased in the US, with the Census Bureau projecting that this group will double in population between 2012 and 2060.[977] In 2000 and 2004, the state of Florida, with an increasing Hispanic population, voted for Republican candidate George W. Bush, but in 2008 and

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[*] The Republican presidential/vice-presidential ticket in 2012 was Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, who are both white men.

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2012 its electoral votes—27 in 2008 and 29 in 2012—went to Obama.[978] Likewise, the increasing Hispanic population means changing demographics for the state of Texas. In 2012, the population of Texas grew by 20 percent, gaining four electoral votes for a total of 38.[979] The Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project reported that Hispanics voted for Obama over Romney by 71 to 27 percent.[980] As the Hispanic population grows in Texas, Republican presidential candidates will need to appeal to the Hispanic vote to avoid losing an important and influential block of electoral votes.

To this end, the Republican Party may be well suited to cultivate the candidacy of Senator Ted Cruz or Senator Marco Rubio. Cruz is a Cuban American who was the first Hispanic and first minority to be elected US Senator from Texas. Rubio is a Cuban American native of Miami elected US Senator from Florida, and represented the Republican party in his response to President Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address. Moreover, as issues of class are intertwined with issues of race, presidential candidates will need to transcend the representation of being elitist in our multiracial society. Cruz, in particular, has an interesting background with a father who fled Cuba, "knowing no English and with $100 sewn into his underwear … and worked his way through college as a dishwasher, making 50 cents an hour," and a mother who is of Irish and Italian descent and was the first person in her family to attend college."[981] Of course, Cruz himself graduated from Princeton and Harvard Law School and is married to Heidi Cruz, a former investment banker and White House staffer for Condoleeza Rice.[982] The story of Rubio's parents is not as compelling as he has suggested, since they in fact left Cuba in 1959 before Castro came to power, but he graduated from the University of Florida and the University of Miami School of Law with $100,000 in student loans, which he paid off

in 2012, and is married to Jeanette Rubio, a former bank teller and Miami Dolphins cheerleader of Colombian descent,[983] making him an interesting potential candidate in terms of issues of race and class. Whoever emerges as the Republican nominee, certainly race will be an important factor in the framing of the 2016 presidential and vice-presidential elections in our growing multiracial society.

6.3.2: Gender

In 2008, the Obama-Biden campaign worked to represent Obama as a caring husband and father. Web users interpreted this frame in a similar way, but with an additional representation of Obama as a candidate with sex appeal. The campaign worked to represent Biden as a man who could be a "tough guy," committed single father, and advocate for women, and web users interpreted and represented Biden in these same frames. The McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent McCain as a masculine war hero; although some web users interpreted McCain in this same frame, a majority of web users both interpreted and represented McCain as sexist and volatile. The campaign worked to represent Palin as a woman who could function as a replacement to Hillary Clinton. A minority of web users interpreted and represented Palin in this same way, but a majority of web users instead interpreted and represented her as a sex object, with the nickname "Caribou Barbie."

In the 2012 presidential election, Obama's masculinity was most certainly transformed simply by his status as an incumbent candidate. As John Gaventa and Jethro

Pettit asserted, "Leaders are often associated with power."[984] With four years as POTUS[*]

to add to his resume, Obama embodied both forms of masculinity, as described by R.W.

Connell: dominant masculinity (now that he was, as some argue, the leader of the free

world) combined with technical expertise (as he had displayed in 2008). This was

balanced, however, with web content that suggests Obama was again represented as a

committed husband, such as a photograph posted to his Google+ page of the president

intimately whispering in his wife's ear while she laughed.[985]

It seems as though Michelle Obama was represented in a more traditional

gendered way in 2012 than in 2008. The biography of Michelle on the campaign website

in 2012 read, "Michelle Obama describes her most important role as being mom-in-chief

for Malia, 14, and Sasha, 10."[986] Her most publicized advocacy work was "Let's Move!:

America's Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids," encouraging exercise and

eating healthy for kids[987] and planting a kitchen garden at the White House, and she

authored a cookbook, *American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden

and Gardens Across America*.[988] The front cover featured Michelle holding a wicker

basket filled with colorful vegetables, with her hair pulled back and the sleeves of her

button-up blouse rolled up, evoking a connotation of Eleanor Roosevelt's appeal to

American housewives to plant "victory gardens," the phrase used for kitchen gardens

during WWII. In fact, in the book Michelle described her mother's family's victory

garden in Chicago and the obstacles Eleanor Roosevelt encountered in planting a White

House kitchen garden; photographs included a black and white victory garden in 1942[989]

and a WWII era poster urging, "War Gardens for Victory."[990] In these ways, the

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[*] POTUS is the acronym for "President of the United States" that frequently appeared in 2008 web content.

representation of Michelle seemed to be a throwback to a more traditional role for women of gardening, cooking, and caring for children.

Jill Biden, on the other hand, seemed to have been represented in 2012 in a more modern way with emphasis on her full-time career as an English professor. She is considered to be the first Second Lady to hold a paying job while her husband is Vice President.[991] This highlighted her independence from her role as Second Lady, and, in turn, separated her from the work of her husband. As just one example, Jill's biography on the 2012 campaign website featured a photograph of Jill walking in front of Joe Biden, while he carried a 36-pound pumpkin. It is a curious deliberate choice for the one photograph used on the page, since it conveyed Jill as the Biden in charge and Joe as the cooperative spouse following behind her.[992]

This peek into how the Obama-Biden campaign represented the candidates and spouses in 2012 possibly suggests that Michelle Obama and Jill Biden have influenced the role of women in politics in opposing ways, and that the complicated representation and interpretation of Palin discussed in this study left a complex imprint on the issue of gender.

Although Palin seemed to be preparing for a presidential run in 2012 after her resignation as Governor in 2009 and subsequent campaigning for the Tea Party movement, she did not enter the race, and the Republican ticket in 2012 did not include a woman candidate.

Hillary Clinton, however, was chosen to serve as Secretary of State under President Obama from 2009 until 2013, when she announced she did not want to serve a second term. In June 2013, much attention was given to the debut of her Twitter page, in

which she described herself as, "Wife, mom, lawyer, women & kids advocate, FLOAR,

FLOTUS,[*]

US Senator, SecState, author, dog owner, hair icon, pantsuit aficionado, glass ceiling

cracker, TDB…" This rhetoric represented Clinton in a younger, more media-savvy way

through the use of FLOAR and FLOTUS acronyms and the informal, abbreviated

"SecState." With references to "hair icon" and "pantsuit aficionado," she also poked fun

at aspects of her appearance that had been publicly criticized. And, of course, she

emphasized the role of women in political office by referencing her famous "Glass

Ceiling" primary concession speech from 2008.

Early tweets in June and July focused on her role as a mother: "Having so much

fun with Chelsea, taking selfies back stage. MT:@ChelseaClinton

http://bit.ly/11BgawY."[993] This added to her youthful image both through the linked

informal photograph of mother and daughter and through the use of the jargon "selfies."[*]

Early tweets also highlighted issues of equality for women, from "@WPSProject at Bryn

Mawr was so inspiring. Women in public sector jobs: 50% by 2050. That's the goal"[994]

to "Seneca Falls, 165 years ago today, began a movement that remains the unfinished

business of the 21st century."[995]

Moreover, her Twitter profile picture was the black and white photograph of

Clinton texting in sunglasses on a military plane that went viral as a result of the "Texts

from Hillary" Tumblr page, created by Washington, DC communications professionals

Adam Smith and Stacy Lambe, and Clinton's first tweet read, "Thanks for the inspiration

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[*] FLOAR stands for "First Lady of ARkansas" and FLOTUS stands for "First Lady of the United States."

[*] A "selfie" is a self-photograph.

@ASmith83 & @Sllambe—I'll take it from here... #tweetsfromhillary."[996] One of Smith's and Lambe's popular Tumblr posts was a photograph of Biden texting with Obama looking over his shoulder, laughing, with the caption, "She's going to love the new Justin Bieber video!" and the image of Clinton texting in sunglasses with the caption, "Back to work boys."[997] This post represented Clinton as a powerful presence in the Obama administration, and also as someone in tune with current pop culture and music.

Another "Texts from Hillary" Tumblr post showed Palin holding a baby and texting and with caption, "I'm not a regular mom. I'm a cool mom. Right Hillary?" and the image of Clinton texting in sunglasses with the caption, "Please stop talking."[998] This post illustrated Palin being dismissed by Clinton, suggesting that by 2012 web users did not feel Palin was relevant in mainstream politics and that Clinton, in fact, was the "cool mom" better positioned for a presidential run in 2016.

This image of Clinton texting in dark sunglasses that formed the basis of the user-created Tumblr site became its own meme, symbolizing Clinton as up-to-date with mobile communication and even prompting a "Meme Generator" website with which users could write their own captions for the photograph.[999] Clinton's adoption of this image as her profile picture was a strategic representation of herself in a way that appeals to the Millennial Generation and to widespread users of mobile technology. Should she decide to run for president in 2016, her representation will be a fascinating one that intersects the issues of gender and age. In an interview with *New York* magazine in 2013 she stated that she is considering a presidential run, adding, "I think it's a serious decision, not to be made lightly."[1000]

Meanwhile, opponents of Clinton have already engaged in sexist attacks of the potential candidate. The Hillary Project, an anti-Clinton group, posted an online game to its website called "Slap Hillary," in which a user can click on a button that generates a virtual slap across the face of a cartoon image of Clinton, resulting in her eyeballs rolling around as the cartoon shakes from side to side.[1001] Anti-Hillary Clinton buttons that read, "KFC Hillary Special: 2 fat thighs, 2 small breasts, left wing" were reported for sale at the California Republican Party Fall Convention, creating an immediate buzz on Twitter that resulted in removal of the sexist buttons from the convention.[1002]

The post-2008 landscape for gender issues is compelling. The repackaging of Clinton's image since the 2008 primary may make her more appealing, especially to young voters and, in particular, to young women voters. In contrast, strong opposition with hateful sexist content is being directed toward Clinton as a public figure who retired as Secretary of State and is not, as of yet, officially running for political office. Add to this the current controversial issue of gay marriage, which Clinton publicly supports. A video posted to the Human Rights Campaign website in March 2013 featured her stating, "Marriage, after all, is a fundamental building block of our society, a great joy and, yes, a great responsibility. A few years ago Bill and I celebrated as our own daughter married the love of her life, and I wish every parent that same joy. To deny the opportunity to any of our daughters and sons solely on the basis of who they are and who they love is to deny them the chance to live up to their own God-given potential."[1003] While support of gay marriage is viewed by many as a Democratic position, this may evolve by 2016 with support from elected officials like Republican Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, whose commentary in *The Columbus Dispatch* read:

British Prime Minister David Cameron has said he supports allowing gay couples to marry because he is a conservative, not in spite of it. I feel the same way. We conservatives believe in personal liberty and minimal government interference in people's lives. We also consider the family unit to be the fundamental building block of society. We should encourage people to make long-term commitments to each other and build families, so as to foster strong, stable communities and promote personal responsibility. [1004]

This issue of gay marriage will also present an interesting intersection of gender and age. As organizations work to put the issue of gay marriage on the ballot in Ohio in 2014, Republican candidates will need to position themselves on this issue, with consideration that there is greater support of gay marriage by younger voters. Should she decide to run, Clinton will likely be well positioned as a Democratic woman candidate who supports gay marriage. We may even see a shift from emphasis on women candidates to that of gay rights in issues related to gender in political campaigning over the next several elections.

6.3.3: Age

In 2008, the Obama-Biden campaign worked to represent Obama as cool and Biden as experienced, and Web users interpreted and represented the two candidates in the same ways. The McCain-Palin campaign worked to represent McCain as experienced, similar to Biden. Some Web users interpreted McCain in this same frame, but a majority of Web users both interpreted and represented McCain as old, instead of experienced. The campaign worked to represent Palin as a "maverick" and foil to McCain's old age; in contrast, most Web users interpreted and represented Palin as inexperienced.

Moreover, the representation of age intersected with issues of race and gender. The viral "Yes We Can" video was a prime example of connecting Obama's race and age through hip-hop music. Criticism of Palin's gender crisscrossed with criticism of her inexperience. Many users described McCain as an "old white man," combining race, gender, and age into a three-word description, yet Biden was described as a legend who was also sexy.

The intersection of race, gender, and age can also be viewed from the perspective of how users accepted the race and gender of the candidates. Comments from Web users and, particularly, interview, focus group, and self-report participants in this study illustrated that young people are more accepting of electing candidates to higher office who are of different races and in electing women candidates.

In 2012, the Romney-Ryan campaign was more successful in using new media than the McCain-Palin campaign had been in 2008. The Romney-Ryan campaign posted 1,350 tweets during the campaign on Twitter[1005] and made use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Google+, Tumblr, Flickr, and Spotify. The Obama-Biden re-election campaign, however, still paved the way in terms of using up-and-coming media, such as its use of Pinterest in 2012 with the pages: "In his own words" (featuring quotations), "Just the facts," "The First Family," ObamaArt," and even "Snacks of the campaign trail."[1006] This suggests that through using new forms of social media in new ways, the Obama-Biden campaign continued to represent Obama as cool.

A widening generational gap suggests that future candidates need to find a way to "transcend" age. Certainly, Obama's age, 47 years old in 2008, was a key part of his connection with young voters. But he also *seemed* younger, from dancing on "Ellen," to

his usual campaign attire of a white dress shirt, sans tie, with the sleeves rolled up, to, of course, a web-savvy campaign with a strong social media presence. If Clinton does, in fact, run for president, will the transfigured Clinton who texts in sunglasses and likes to take selfies with her smartphone be enough to counter Clinton's age of 68 years (during the primary election) and 69 years (during the general election) in 2016? Further, what role will her grown daughter Chelsea, who will be 36 years of age in 2016, play to appeal to young voters—and women[*]—particularly as Vice Chair of The Bill, Hillary, and Chelsea Clinton Foundation; an advisory board member of the Clinton Global Initiative; and Honorary Chair of the Clinton Foundation Millennium Network, which focuses on the public sector work of young people?[1007] And, how will Bill Clinton, who in 2016 will look substantially older than he did during the presidential primaries in 2008 and who will be further from the end of his presidency in 2000, affect Hillary Clinton's ability to transcend age? Even if Clinton does not choose to run, other potential Democratic candidates, including Vice-president Biden, will need to carefully represent themselves in terms of age, especially if the Republican party nominates Rubio or Cruz, both of whom will be 45 years of age in 2016, or Senator Rand Paul—the son of Ron Paul, who appealed to many young web users in 2008—who will be 53 in 2016.

Additional consideration should be given, however, to projections made by the US Census Bureau that the population age 65 and older is expected to more than double between 2012 and 2060.[1008] Further, members of the Baby Boom generation have proven to be dedicated citizens who regularly vote. Many young web users of 2008 certainly were motivated to get out the vote (GOTV), donate and raise money, and vote

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[*] According to its website, www.clintonfoundation.org, The Clinton Foundation works to accelerate progress for women and girls around the world.

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themselves, but will they be energized by a 2016 candidate in the same way that they were by the candidacy of Obama?

Along with racism, sexism, and ageism, future political campaigning may be affected by another form of discrimination. In the 2012 ABC television special, "10 Most Fascinating People," Barbara Walters said to New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, "There are people that say you couldn't be president because you're so heavy."[1009] Discrimination against overweight or obese people, then, has emerged as a related issue to both gender and age. It relates to gender with our expectations of candidates' appearances that correlate with gender roles. Women political candidates who are overweight or obese, for example, would face an even greater challenge than men who are overweight or obese. This discrimination relates to age with the view that an overweight or obese candidate is unhealthy and physically weak. The callous ageism toward McCain expressed by web users in this study suggests that vicious remarks would appear in computer-mediated-communication if a presidential or vice-presidential candidate was overweight or obese.

6.4: A Critical Election

In the 2008 presidential and vice-presidential elections, Barack Obama and Joe Biden were successfully represented in similar ways by both the campaign and by Web users; John McCain and Sarah Palin, in contrast, were represented by Web users in divergent ways from how the campaign worked to represent the candidates. User-created content was mostly positive toward Obama-Biden, but was overwhelmingly negative toward McCain-Palin, particularly with ageism toward McCain and sexism toward Palin.

Of the three issues of race, gender, and age that were foci in this study, race was used the least in how the candidates were represented. Gender was used the most due to the complicated candidacy of Palin, but age was significant when considered in conjunction with the impact of new media.

Georgia Duerst-Lahti suggested that, "Presidential elections do not exist in a vacuum but grow out of historic practices, social and political power structures, belief systems, and a particular time and space in history."[1010] That time and space in history in 2008 traversed racial tolerance, gendered roles, an increasing generational gap, and the amazing communication capabilities of new technology. Neil Howe and William Strauss presciently wrote in 2000:

> Roughly once every 20 years or so, around the time all living generations start entering new phases of life, the social mood changes direction. … If this rhythm continues, sometime around the middle Oh-Ohs—maybe a few years before or after, but in any case when first-wave Millennials are somewhere in their twenties—a spark of history will ignite a public response quite unlike what it would have touched off in most earlier decades.[1011]

Howe and Strauss suggested that a generation's possession of youth culture attracting maximum attention occurs 25 to 30 years after its first birth year;[1012] 2008 was 26 years after the first Millennials born in 1982. Add to this technological changes—from Facebook to MyBarackObama.com to online fundraising—and the 2008 election can be considered a "critical election," the term political scientist V.O. Key used to describe an election in which electoral patterns change dramatically for several decades.[1013] As Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais put it: "technological + generational change = realignment."[1014]

Winograd and Hais have further suggested that the 2008 election can be viewed as a "fourth turning," a civic realignment in political history[1015] of national and international importance such as the American Revolution, Civil War, and New Deal.[1016] They argued that the collapse of financial systems in September 2008, occurring 80 years after the 1929 stock market crash, was a catalyst in the fourth turning.[1017] And, they asserted that about every 80 years a civic-oriented generation reappears in the US.[1018] While it is yet premature, only five years after Obama's election and still within the second term of his presidency, to know if 2008 is in fact a fourth turning, the "largest disparity between younger and older voters ever recorded in four decades of modern polling"[1019] suggests that the generational effects in the 2008 election were significant. The emphasis in this study on the intertwining issue of age and technological impact of new media may provide a future historic perspective from which to view this monumental campaign. This paradigm further provides support for how the candidates were represented by the campaigns and by users in terms of age.

The Millennial interview participants in Howe and Strauss' study described themselves as "the kids who are going to change things."[1020] That confidence and optimism was reflected by Web users in 2008 as these users took ownership of the campaign. "I think this election really changed perceptions about the power young people can have in this country,"[1021] suggested self-reporting participant S25.

Interview participant S10 stated:

I think the Internet has had a revolutionary aspect on the campaign and even on how politics in general are working. I mean, I paid attention to the last election in 2004, and I was way young, of course, but it just seemed so much different. It seems like this is so new, so much more involved. I feel like the Internet has really offered a way—tons and tons

and tons and tons of new ways—to spread ideas and reach different demographics, especially younger demographics who have always been hard to reach. I feel like the younger generation are the computer tech-savvy people who are on the Internet constantly. … I know I am on the Internet constantly, I have it on my phone, I have it everywhere.[1022]

In 2008, MyBarackObama.com users made an enormous impact on the GOTV effort for the Obama-Biden campaign by registering one million people to vote and making eight million telephone calls using the "Neighbor-to-Neighbor" platform of the campaign website. And, web users raised $30 million through their personal fund-raising pages. The prioritization of online publics by the campaign paid off, and can be viewed as setting the standard for successful online political campaigning.

The 2008 election may or may not, viewed from a historic perspective in the next few decades, be considered a critical election by V.O. Key's definition, but it certainly was critical in the power it gave to Web users. As an Obama supporter proclaimed on Facebook, "This is our movement!"[1023]

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Appendix: Tables

Table 1. Web Content Totals for Race, Gender, & Age by Candidates and Spouses in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	RACE		GENDER		AGE	
	CAMPAIGNS	USERS	CAMPAIGNS	USERS	CAMPAIGNS	USERS
OBAMA	14 (3%)	285 (55%)	37 (7%)	78 (15%)	32 (6%)	69 (13%)
	58%		**22%**		**19%**	
MICHELLE	0 (0%)	10 (10.2%)	20 (20.4%)	68 (69.4%)	0	0
	10%		**90%**		**0%**	
MCCAIN	1 (0.002%)	112 (17%)	11 (2%)	131 (20%)	18 (3%)	378 (58%)
	17%		**22%**		**61%**	
CINDY	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	40 (89%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
	2%		**96%**		**2%**	
BIDEN	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	19 (24%)	35 (44%)	10 (13%)	11 (14%)
	6%		**68%**		**27%**	
JILL	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	0%		**100%**		**0%**	
PALIN	0 (0%)	24 (5%)	26 (6%)	381 (85%)	4 (1%)	12 (3%)
	5%		**91%**		**4%**	
TODD	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	0%		**100%**		**0%**	
GENERAL	0 (0%)	174 (77%)	0 (0%)	35 (15%)	0 (0%)	18 (8%)
	77%		**15%**		**8%**	
TOTALS	**16 (1%)**	**610 (29%)**	**123 (6%)**	**771 (37%)**	**64 (3%)**	**489 (24%)**
	30% RACE		**43% GENDER**		**27% AGE**	

Table 2. Content from Interview, Focus Groups, & Self-Reports on Race, Gender, & Age by Candidate in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections

	RACE	GENDER	AGE	Totals	
Obama	51	13	60	124	**34%**
Michelle	1	1	0	2	**1%**
Biden	0	3	5	8	**2%**
Jill	0	0	0	0	**0%**
McCain	3	8	75	86	**24%**
Cindy	0	0	0	0	**0%**
Palin	0	76	8	84	**23%**
Todd	0	0	0	0	**0%**
General	6	3	50	59	**16%**
	61 (17%)	**104 (28%)**	**198 (55%)**	**N=363 (100%)**	**100%**

Table 3. Campaign (C) and User-Generated (U) Web Content on Race by Candidate and Week in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	AUG. 28	SEPT. 3	SEPT. 10	SEPT. 17	SEPT. 24	OCT. 1	OCT. 8	OCT. 15
OBAMA								
C	5	0	1	0	5	3	0	0
U	20	48	20	42	26	23	42	64
MICHELLE								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	4
MCCAIN								
C	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	5	37	0	1	0	0	35	34
CINDY								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
BIDEN								
C	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
JILL								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PALIN								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	1	0	0	0	0	19	4
TODD								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	3	44	11	17	24	9	23	43
TOTALS								
C	**5**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**5**	**3**	**0**	**0**
U	**30**	**132**	**32**	**62**	**52**	**33**	**119**	**150**

Table 4. Campaign (C) and User-Generated (U) Web Content on Gender by Candidate and Week in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	AUG. 28	SEPT. 3	SEPT. 10	SEPT. 17	SEPT. 24	OCT. 1	OCT. 8	OCT. 15
OBAMA								
C	10	7	3	9	2	2	2	2
U	4	0	6	30	5	12	8	13
MICHELLE								
C	12	3	3	0	2	0	0	0
U	21	0	3	0	1	4	29	10
MCCAIN								
C	6	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
U	2	14	4	8	7	6	3	87
CINDY								
C	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	2	3	3	2	3	5	14	8
BIDEN								
C	0	4	0	1	10	3	1	0
U	1	3	3	9	8	8	0	3
JILL								
C	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
PALIN								
C	0	11	5	0	1	7	1	1
U	0	111	66	46	39	31	34	54
TODD								
C	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
U	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
GENERAL								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	2	1	5	9	6	5	7
TOTALS								
C	**29**	**30**	**17**	**10**	**15**	**15**	**4**	**3**
U	**30**	**133**	**86**	**101**	**72**	**73**	**94**	**172**

Table 5. Campaign (C) and User-Generated (U) Web Content on Age by Candidate and Week in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	AUG. 28	SEPT. 3	SEPT. 10	SEPT. 17	SEPT. 24	OCT. 1	OCT. 8	OCT. 15
OBAMA								
C	8	3	7	0	4	7	1	2
U	3	4	3	8	7	14	7	23
MICHELLE								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MCCAIN								
C	9	3	1	1	4	0	0	0
U	14	38	12	19	53	23	69	150
CINDY								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
BIDEN								
C	1	3	0	0	1	4	1	0
U	1	2	1	1	2	3	0	1
JILL								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PALIN								
C	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
U	0	3	1	6	0	0	2	0
TODD								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL								
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
U	0	0	0	0	4	1	6	7
TOTALS								
C	**18**	**9**	**8**	**2**	**10**	**12**	**3**	**2**
U	**18**	**47**	**17**	**34**	**66**	**41**	**85**	**181**

Table 6. Campaign (C) and User-Generated (U) Web Content on Race, Gender, and Age by Week in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	AUG. 28	SEPT. 3	SEPT. 10	SEPT. 17	SEPT. 24	OCT. 1	OCT. 8	OCT. 15
RACE SUB-TOTALS								
C	5 (4%)	2 (0.005%)	1 (0.006%)	0 (0%)	5 (0.02%)	3 (0.02%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
U	30 (23%)	132 (37%)	32 (20%)	62 (30%)	52 (24%)	33 (19%)	119 (39%)	150 (29%)
	27%	**38%**	**21%**	**30%**	**24%**	**19%**	**39%**	**29%**
GENDER SUB-TOTALS								
C	29 (22%)	30 (8%)	17 (11%)	10 (0.05%)	15 (7%)	15 (0.08%)	4 (0.01%)	3 (0.01%)
U	30 (23%)	133 (38%)	86 (53%)	101 (48%)	72 (33%)	73 (41%)	94 (31%)	172 (33%)
	45%	**46%**	**64%**	**49%**	**40%**	**42%**	**31%**	**33%**
AGE SUB-TOTALS								
C	18 (14%)	9 (3%)	8 (5%)	2 (0.01%)	10 (0.05%)	12 (7%)	3 (0.01%)	2 (0.01%)
U	18 (14%)	47 (13%)	17 (11%)	34 (16%)	66 (30%)	41 (23%)	85 (28%)	181 (35%)
	28%	**16%**	**16%**	**16%**	**31%**	**30%**	**28%**	**35%**
TOTALS	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 7. Weekly Web Content, Including Blog Posts, Press Relesases, E-mails, YouTube Videos, and Tweets, Posted by the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Blog posts[*]								
Obama-Biden	30	11	13	24	19	15	21	33
McCain-Palin	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	2
Press releases[**]								
Obama-Biden	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
McCain-Palin	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0
Emails[***]								
Obama-Biden	1	1	0	1	3	2	3	1
McCain-Palin	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	2
YouTube videos								
Obama-Biden	1,169	1,207	1,254	1,299	1,359	1,416	1,504	1,569
McCain-Palin	253	257	262	269	283	298	303	305
Tweets								
Obama-Biden	180	186	193	198	204	213	222	228
McCain-Palin	0	0	0	0	4	8	13	17

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[*] Blog posts, press releases, and e-mails are shown for the date that data was collected, since these were posted and sent as individual content. YouTube videos and tweets are shown as totals, since visiting the websites for YouTube and Twitter shows all videos and tweets.

[**] Press releases shown here are those posted to the official campaign websites, to correspond with the scope of this study on Web content. It is certainly possible that press releases were sent to media outlets that were not posted by the campaigns to their websites.

[***] E-mails were targeted based on zip code of user accounts. It is likely, then, that this study shows a higher number of e-mails than many Web users received since the author lived in Ohio, a targeted state.

Table 8. Blog Posts in Text and Multimedia (Photographs, Flickr Slideshows, Video, and Live Video) Format Posted by the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin 2008 Presidential and Vice Presidential Campaigns

	Obama-Biden	**McCain-Palin**
Text	51 (31%)	3 (60%)
Photographs	31 (19%)	0 (0%)
Flickr slideshows	10 (6%)	0 (0%)
Video	59 (36%)	1 (20%)
Live video	15 (9%)	1 (20%)
TOTAL	**166 (100%)**	**5 (100%)**

Table 9. Web User Website Traffic, Facebook Fans, MySpace Fans, YouTube Subscribers, YouTube Views, and Twitter Followers for the Obama-Biden and McCain-Palin 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Website traffic[*]								
Obama-Biden	72.06%	56.40%	67.04%	56.40%	67.04%	67.04%	76.28%	76.28%
McCain-Palin	27.94%	43.60%	32.96%	43.60%	32.96%	32.96%	23.72%	23.72%
Facebook fans								
Obama-Biden	1,415,818	1,650,763	1,745,060	1,859,763	1,908,193	1,956,431	2,033,313	**2,146,770**[**]
McCain-Palin	224,001	263,485	317,165	339,217	540,248	551,053	563,973	**577,041**
MySpace fans								
Obama-Biden	465,091	494,457	513,664	531,488	548,134	640,662	680,048	**712,605**
McCain-Palin	158,713	158,639	157,886	N/A[***]	N/A	N/A	160,569	**173,809**
YouTube subscribers								
Obama-Biden	72,981	79,585	83,221	87,290	90,248	93,835	97,183	**101,489**
McCain-Palin	14,308	16,417	18,449	20,287	21,501	22,750	23,888	**25,387**
YouTube views								
Obama-Biden	15,415,250	15,782,127	16,020,249	16,249,612	16,446,533	16,666,096	16,901,105	**17,174,974**
McCain-Palin	1,140,201	1,253,780	1,374,538	1,466,794	1,539,236	1,611,201	1,683,682	**1,788,870**
Twitter followers								
Obama-Biden	66,780	71,874	76,517	80,491	84,223	89,899	94,625	**99,261**
McCain-Palin	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	2,581	**3,144**

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[*] This study cites Hitwise, which collected campaign website traffic by collecting data directly from ISP networks.

[**] Data in week 8 for Facebook fans, MySpace fans, YouTube subscribers, YouTube views, and Twitter followers also represent totals in this study.

[***] Midway through the campaign, the McCain MySpace format changed, hiding the number of friends.

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Table 10. Web User Blog Posts and Wall Posts to the Obama and McCain Official Campaign and Facebook Websites in the 2008 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Campaigns

	Campaign blog posts	Facebook Wall posts
Obama websites	40,922	22,480
McCain websites	1,662	11,120

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