Crafting an Online Political Ethos: Resurrecting Direct Mail Tactics on the Web

By

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Abstract

This paper examines both the Republican and Democratic National Committees' use of websites and online technologies to construct not only a political *ethos*, but, through that new *ethos*, to target and recruit user participation in ways never before possible. Resurrecting older print-based direct mail tactics (feigned familiarity, appeals to officialdom, sense of urgency, gimmicks, and vilification) for use online, the RNC and DNC have been able to surpass the effectiveness of these earlier political strategies for recruitment and fundraising. This paper specifically focuses on a close textual analysis of the most recent website of the DNC in anticipation of the 2012 Presidential election and President Obama's early drive for support.

"Words unspoken cannot easily move, but direct-mail consultants have long known of a secret ingredient to stir the soul: emotion" (Sabato, 1981, p. 240-1).

Introduction

The seeds of modern politics were not fertilized with the hopes and ideals of an energized citizenry, but fermented with the greed and ambitions of the political elite. The origins of modern politics began during election of 1824, when, Andrew Jackson, a celebrated war hero and military strategist, not to mention an ignorant and crass man, won the popular and electoral vote for the U.S. Presidency. Because he failed to gain the overall majority of electoral votes, the decision was passed to Congress, and the Presidency was given to John Quincy Adams. Feeling victimized, Jackson, perhaps correctly, accused insiders of striking a behind-doors "corrupt bargain." Just a few years later, during the next campaign, he fought back. Jackson embraced the power of aggressive public relations and a strategy full of smear and vilification, populism and baby-kissing, to become the seventh President of the United States.

Jackson's successful marketing drive in 1828 was a key moment in the early history of politicking. While his was certainly a campaign of guile, it was also masterfully organized. Since the current party system no longer served Jackson's interests, he and his supporters split the current party to create what we know now as the Democratic Party, and placed his campaign headquarters in Washington D.C. His campaign had simple themes: 1) Adams was wrongly elected; and 2) only Jackson was suited to bring democracy to the people. His political machine exploited Jackson's popular name "Old Hickory," and gave out thousands of canes, hats, brooms, and buttons, all of which bore his own image or that of the hickory tree. Although Jackson did not make many campaign appearances, his handlers organized huge campaign rallies and fed campaign materials to the people. His campaign devised songs, parades, barbecue

parties, dinners, amassed voter lists, identified friendly newspaper editors and courted them like foreign ambassadors, and always made sure that the liquor was flowing. His campaign successfully mastered the mainstream media—the available means of persuasion—long before the modern electronic age. It was among the first political machines ever created in US politics.

New era politicians have learned from the cases of Jackson and others. They have learned the importance of having an effective media strategy—one whose purpose is to craft a political identity tailored for one's audience. There are worrisome consequences too. The perhaps too powerful influence of newspaper, radio, and television has since catapulted both hero and demagogue to the center stage of American politics. The cases of Joseph McCarthy, Huey Long, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan are proof enough of this power of traditional media and the political benefits of understanding and exploiting their capabilities. Of course, the media can be used for both good and bad purposes, but this essay is not concerned with moral judgments. It is concerned with possibilities.

This essay is concerned with the political capabilities of the World Wide Web (WWW) and how our politicians are making use of this new medium. Certainly, it is the newest and most exciting component of the modern political campaign strategy. In fact, the web "has become a mandatory tool in political campaigns and an essential channel to attract voters, volunteers, and donors" (Postelnicu, 2004, p. 100). This paper, then, examines political websites, such as the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and their attempts to construct not only a modern political identity, but also to target and recruit massive numbers of supporters and fundraising dollars. It is not politics as usual. "Just as important as promoting specific issues," argue Postelnicu et al, "political candidates must create a personal identity that voters feel they can trust, and must move beyond political identities

highlighting their achievements and agenda alone" (p. 103). This essay will demonstrate that political organizations have resurrected the once inefficient strategy of political direct mail common during the 1970s and 80s, and have adapted and made more effective those tactics for use online, allowing them to generate a powerful *ethos* capable of drawing large numbers of supporters and donations. It is these very tactics that have made online politicking so fruitful for all political parties.

The Web as Universal Medium

While its overall contribution to society is certainly debatable, it is hard to deny the widespread pervasiveness and cultural influence of the web. It is a complex social technology that has garnered a critical mass faster than any medium before it. It has accelerated our ability to communicate and opened possibilities for networking beyond any other medium. The web allows for delayed or immediate contact via text, voice, or face with those around the world at any time. It is not just an evolutionary medium—it is revolutionary.

While scholars have long debated the social consequences of media innovations (McLuhan, 1964; Ong, 1982; Havelock, 1986; Postman, 1986; Jamieson, 1988), early scholars of computer-mediated communication (CMC) saw in this new medium the potential to radically change our communication habits (Marvin, 1988; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Hiltz & Turoff, 1992). The chief attraction of CMC is primarily due to its ability to work as a convergence medium, combining text, hypertext, image, audio, video, electronic mail, instant chat, group chat, and various other telephony together into one user-friendly environment. A second major appeal is the medium's gift of presumed anonymity, offering users the opportunity to lose their

inhibitions, communicate without fear of retribution, post private pictures and video, role play, and other, even more inventive possibilities. It is hard not to feel empowered when you have near instant connection to an almost limitless amount of information on any desired subject. Third, the medium delimits time and space such that it makes interlocutors appear closer rather than farther, fostering the appearance of intimacy, personalization, and connectedness. Fourth, this truncation of time and space also means that users can bring the world to them, to find very specific, previously impossible to locate information or to selectively purchase products that would have otherwise not been readily available, and to purchase them quickly and compulsively. And, fifth, users appear the same online (see Dubrovsky et al, 1991), equalizing power differentials that might otherwise limit conversational productivity.

CMC as a channel for communication has "moved rapidly from the status of futuristic dream to exponentially exploding reality" (Ess, 1996, p. 1). Early researchers frequently pointed to the medium's ability to widen the possibilities of effective communication (see Culnan & Markus, 1987; Hiltz & Turoff, 1978; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Many others focused on the WWW as a decentralized medium and its ability to empower ordinary citizens, leading to a more inclusive democracy (see, for example: Kaplan, 1990; Naisbitt, 1982; Perry, 1992; Toffler, 1980; Barber, 1984; Arterton, 1987; Becker and Scarce, 1987; Abramson et al., 1988; Rheingold, 1993; Friedland, 1996; Hacker, 1996). Calabrese and Borchet (1996) explained, during the early years of the WWW, that the "near absence of content controls" and the decentralized "openness" of CMC explain "what much of the democratic optimism is about" (p. 260).

In highlighting the democratic potential of CMC, scholars have focused on the exciting new features of the medium. Rash (1997) posited, for example, that CMC was not simply an

extension of the television, but unique as a technology. Rash, in effect, takes issue with

McLuhan's (1964) claim that *any* new medium is an extension of the older form–his notion of

the rear-view mirror. In <u>Understanding Media</u>, McLuhan wrote that the "content" of any medium

is always another medium. The "content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the

content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph" (p. 8). McLuhan's use of the term

"any" suggests application to CMC. Rash, instead, argued that CMC is not like the media that

came before it. According to him, speech, print, and television all work as broadcast media—

broadcasting general information to everyone. Instead, the WWW, he said, is a narrowcast

medium through which individuals can send specific information to specific outlets (p. 33).

Therefore, as a narrowcast medium, individuals can use the medium to target specific audiences–

an advantage much like that exploited by direct mail strategists.

 In all actuality, CMC is neither solely a broadcast nor a narrowcast medium. It is also

more than a manycast medium, or a medium that enables multiple individuals to communicate

simultaneously to other multiple individuals. It is the universal medium. Jonah Baker, Ralph

Nader's campaign webmaster in 2000, even declared that the Internet was the "ultimate means of

communication with people" (as cited in Bimber and Davis, 2003, p. 3)." Communications

through it is sometimes specific or generalized, or both, depending upon the application and

purpose. In one common situation, a group may use generalized advertisements for clothing or

golf packages on its website to solicit [or broadcast] its wares to a general audience. Yet, in

another situation, a website may be tailored to show very specific advertisements for a single

user based upon a previous collection of data that the user may have been asked to enter,

purchases made, or the types of links that the user clicked on during his or her time online. Thus,

"a young mother with children who accessed a particular page on a site might see an ad about the

candidate's education positions, while an older male businessman reading the same page might see an ad about the candidate's position on taxes or the economy" (Kaid, 1996, p. 70). In this case, a group has employed a strategy of narrowcasting. Furthermore, as an example of how both tactics may operate simultaneously, users may use an Instant Messaging (IM) program to have an intimate conversation to another (narrowcasting), while simultaneously experiencing pop-up advertisements (broadcasting) placed strategically on the user's screen by the IM software. In manycasting, groups of people may communicate with other groups of people through social networking technologies, such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, or social gaming environments, such as World of Warcraft or Second Life. Barack Obama, for instance, was quick to add blogging as a feature to the Whitehouse.gov site immediately after becoming President. In one of the first blog posts to the site, Macon Philips, White House Director of New Media, stated that this and other technologies were key to reaching "their top three priorities—priorities that were Obama's key to building a strong online audience during his election campaign—communication, participation, and transparency (as cited by Vargas, 2009). This convergence of possibilities allows for some bold political strategies, including the resurrection and improvement of direct mail rhetoric.

The Persuasion of Direct Mail

Direct mail is a marketing strategy that allows groups or institutions to target very specific demographic groups for the purpose of profit or political gain. It is still employed by corporations who can afford the long term investment that print-based direct mail requires, but it failed as a strategy for political groups that are almost always short-term focused. It was not

without its successes, however. The original rhetoric of political direct mail took the form of very personalized letters sent to carefully targeted campaign sympathizers that worked to glean from them some form of contribution. Hunter (1991) explained that "what is most consequential about direct mail is that it uses bald-faced, and rather cynical, manipulation of emotions" (p. 166). As Sabato (1981) has argued, "direct mail . . . must make the quantum leap between belief and action—painful action (the parting of money). And only emotion can do that" (p. 241). Hunter (1991) correctly labeled direct mail, then, as a "medium of passion" (p. 166).

Political direct mailers were highly organized and had very sophisticated and well-tested strategies. Hunter (1991) described the following discursive tactics employed by direct mail strategists:

1. *Feigned familiarity:* personalized greetings, personalized stationary, "handwritten" enclosures, "penciled" underlining and marginal notes, "personal" memoranda from political, media, and intellectual celebrities, and stamps affixed slightly askew.

2. *Sense of urgency:* phrases such as "Express Wire," "Urgent Gram," "Jet Message," "Air Express Urgent Letter" printed on envelopes to typically mailed third class.

3. *Appeals to officialdom:* use of references to high public office, or a government agency; and

4. *Gimmicks:* petitions, questionnaires, maps, clippings, fake honors, membership cards, and bumper stickers.

Hunter writes that these are the classic, even farcical, earmarks of direct mail (p. 166), and later adds to the list (5) *Vilification* (or "devil making), which appears in more than a few direct mail campaigns. It was frequent, for example, for direct mailers to portray as enemies of the public good established individuals (e.g., Newt Gingrich, Jerry Falwell, or Rush Limbaugh) and

institutions (e.g., ACLU, NOW, NRA, or the NEA), and they did so with great vigor. Direct

mailers learned that attacking the opposite end of the ideological/political spectrum would create

a positive reaction within their targeted audiences. And, "the farther right or left one goes in

making a direct-mail appeal," Sabato (1981) wrote, "the more successful the effort is likely to

be" (p. 231). It is no surprise, then, that that direct mail letters used by both right-wing and left-

wing committees were often mirror images (p. 57).

      We can see the power of this direct mail tactic most clearly in the success of Richard

Viguerie, the direct mailer guru who amassed millions of dollars and countless votes for the

Republican Party and special interest groups. Viguerie was successful precisely because he was

well-connected, organized, and embraced the full range of direct mail rhetoric, including extreme

pathos, to make his direct mail campaign work and to lure in sympathizers. It was this last part

that made him infamous as a direct mailer. Only the most incredible of claims would work for

Viguerie: one such claim told readers that their "tax dollars are being used to pay for grade

school classes that teach our children that CANNIBALISM, WIFE-SWAPPING, and the

MURDER of infants and the elderly are acceptable behavior" (as cited in Sabato, 1984, p. 57).

Another, even more disconcerting appeal, generated for a "Citizens' Drive to Stop Murder"

campaign, included a "grisly postal packet" with a "color brochure featuring illustrations of

President Kennedy's assassination and of a black man holding a gun to a judge's head with the

lurid warning, YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER" (as cited in Sabato, 1981, p. 232). So it was not a

question of whether the claims were accurate in depicting the so-called villains. Instead, the

question was whether those claims were extreme enough to generate support. Jim Martin, a

former Viguerie employee, once replied to a complaint about the overuse of emotion by stating

that "the bottom line in my business is to raise money" (p. 241).

Direct mail strategists like Viguerie used not only *pathos*, but also *ethos*. For them, the strategy was to showcase their vigorous hatred of the enemy, which would supposedly prove to sympathizers just how strongly committed to the cause they were. And, because they appealed to a very well-researched audience of sympathizers, they knew just what issues to exploit and which emotions to arouse. In fact, as Hunter (1991) wrote, "the more extreme the appeal, the more successful the mail campaign will probably be" (p. 166). In this most basic language, strategists like Viguerie dramatized their "cause" and wrapped their claims around terms like "bloody," "pornographic," and "sadistic." But while these appeals were dependent upon deception and exaggeration, what appeared to readers was that it was in their best interest to get involved. And direct mailers certainly pushed the urgency of that goal in their letters. One letter stated that "I believe you've been waiting 25 years to receive this letter…. But unless you step forward…there may never be another like it" (as cited in Sabato, 1981, p. 242). Another asserted that "If you're like me, you've received literally thousands of pieces of mail this summer. But I urge you to pay special attention to this letter, the MOST IMPORTANT LETTER you'll receive this year" (p. 242). The insinuation was that the entirety of the campaign would fail without the readers' immediate help.

Through these tactics, political parties and organizations would gain a unique *ethos* that gained (in)famous attention from millions of supporters.[1] Sabato (1981) wrote that Viguerie started in 1964 with only $400 and the membership list of the Young Americans for Freedom. By 1965, he had grossed $100,000. By 1969, Viguerie was sending 20 million letters annually. By 1977, he had "collected and stored on 3,300 magnetic computer tapes more than 30 million names of conservative-leaning individuals" (p. 222). At this point, Viguerie's firm was receiving more than $10 million annually.

Although the strategy was extremely effective during the 1970 and 80s, direct mail as a political medium declined in popularity for several reasons. Mainly, the expense of printing the letters became an enormous burden. "Even after prospecting is over," said Sabato (1981), "candidates sometimes receive only a few cents of every dollar raised by direct mail" (p. 250). Those who hired a direct mail consultant were often "sorely disappointed with the results" (p. 250). A major problem was that political direct mail had an extremely low response rate (Sabato, 1984, p. 58). To create a house list of 270,000 contributors, more than nine million letters would have been necessary (Hunter, 1991, p. 165). In fact, because searching for new donors required using most of the revenues, direct mail agencies often were left with little money to offer the candidates (Sabato, 1984, p. 58). Direct mail, then, as Hunter (1991) asserted, no longer became "a cost-effective way to raise money" (p. 165).

While the use of direct mail by political groups declined, and nearly disappeared as a priority strategy, it does not mean that it was shelved indefinitely. With the innovation of the WWW and all of the online technologies that is made possible through it, political parties have an alternative to inefficient print-based direct mail. Like the medium of print-based direct mail, websites can be designed to target already sympathetic voters and allow for highly personalized and ideologically-aligned messages. But CMC can perform several functions beyond the capabilities of this older direct mail. While previous direct mail has enjoyed unfiltered, fast, and relatively inexpensive access to the voters, CMC can do these more effectively. CMC is faster; an e-mail requires only a few seconds to reach its destination and a website only takes seconds to download to one's computer. CMC is less expensive; there are no postage costs and the cost of computers and web server space is negligible. CMC allows for more feedback; users can join mailing listservs and chat groups, and can read and participate in political blogs. Money,

moreover, can be sent online, even compulsively, through secure credit card transactions. Plus, while national political parties initially used their websites to offer simple "campaign brochure-like material, press releases, clips from speeches and commercials" (Rash, 1997, p. 10), the increasing interactivity of the web offered parties more options than was possible with direct mail. Sara Taylor, who worked as the White House political director under President Bush, has since created Resonate Networks, an ad network that connects advertisements to specific sites and specific users. Bryan Gernert (2009), Chief Executive of the company, wrote that, because of the ease at which you can target specific demographics, "you can have a pretty aggressive message that won't inflame your opposition, but you'll still mobilize your support base" (as cited in Clifford, 2009). Furthermore, he writes that you "can also identify the middle, the persuadable, where you can do an education campaign and move them toward your position on the issue" (as cited in Clifford, 2009). The web not only makes this micro-targeting strategy possible, but streamlines the process and makes it more effective. The importance of this strategy has been noticed at even the highest levels of government. For example, under President Obama, the Director of New Media position was moved from a midlevel position to "special assistant to the president" (Vargas, 2009). This is highly unlikely to be a one-time political fad. The narrowcasting feature of CMC, specifically, and the technological options it can offer, create a prime situation for political groups and individuals wishing to expand their support base and financial coffers.

The technology allows for some novel tactics. In the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, for example, Senator Hillary Clinton asked online voters to pick her campaign song, Mitt Romney's sons created a "Five Brothers" blog that was supposed to reinforce Romney's family-man image, and Senator John McCain posted his college basketball picks during the

NCAA tournament's March Madness, offering a free campaign fleece to the one whose picks came true (Lawrence, 2007). The online environment makes this level of interaction possible, meaning more voter engagement, more voting support, and more fundraising revenue. Plus, the online public is already primed for political engagement.

As a huge advantage to online political groups, the Internet offers access to a more politically-active and aware segment of the public (Nielsen 2004). In fact, ever since the early years of the web, studies show that "political activism among cyberspace users is higher than in the general population, with users being more interested in voting in elections, in participating in 'electronic town hall' meetings, in accessing the voting records of elected officials, and in sending e-mail to officials" (Wu, 1995, p. 22-3). Two-thirds of these users, furthermore, took information from webpages into their political conversations (Hurwitz and Mallery, 1994). Hacker (1996) argued that computer users have always been "more politically involved than most Americans" (p. 223), and Rash (1997) posited that in the future we might see more of the same:

> the nets will become a prime means of facilitating organization, providing back-channel communications, supporting logistics, and passing material to the ultimate outlets for news and related information . . . access to electronic communications can save money and time, increase flexibility, and provide a pathway for organization. (p. 11).

Recent research supports these earlier claims. According to the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet Project, "Internet users who follow politics online are much more likely to attend political meetings, contact politicians directly, attend a politician's speech or rally, and be active members of an advocacy group" (as cited in Kaid, 2006, p. 68).

Computer-mediated communication is increasingly able to more effectively perform the same functions that print-based direct mail served as a channel for participation as well as many functions that it could not. It is cheaper, faster, and more efficient than anything before. The demographics of the web are perfect for political discourse and for targeting politically-interested consumers of information. Current and future administrations cannot ignore this fact if they wish to be re-elected or build support for their issues. Obama, for example, worked hard to turn the "YouTubing-Facebooking-texting-Twittering grass-roots organization" that put him in the White House "into an instrument of government" (Rutengerg and Nagourney, 2009). It will no doubt continue to serve him as he works to build an even larger voter base and fill the party's coffers.

Rash was right. The possibilities for political engagement have certainly increased with the WWW and the new social media tools that have been developed to support it. According to a Pew Research Center survey (2009), completed by the Internet and American Life Project, fifty-five percent of all adults got their "political fix online during the 2008 election, using the Internet not only as a source of information but also to share information and get involved in campaigns" (as cited in Hall, 2009). "Barack Obama," according to Hall (2009), has "capitalized on the online phenomena – raising money, gathering supporters, spreading his message" and "continues to do so." Obama's Facebook page, for example, indicated that more than six million people had signed up as supporters during his first run (Hall, 2009). Another Pew survey found that, in 2008, forty-five percent of Internet users had "watched online political or election-related videos," thirty-three percent "shared political content by e-mail or various online sites and applications," and fifty-two percent of those with a "social networking profile on a site such as Facebook used it for political purposes" (as cited in Hall, 2009). The "ideal campaign," says Joe Trippi, who managed online fundraising and organizing for Howard Dean's 2004 campaign, "combines

online tools with television, direct mail, personal appearances and conventional fundraising" (as cited in Lawrence, 2007). Thus, the key is learning how to integrate "the Internet with the face-to-face and the broadcast media" (Lawrence, 2007).

If it is not altogether apparent by now, this paper asks several specific questions: Whom do the RNC and DNC envision as their online audience? What rhetorical purposes do they have in addressing that audience via the Internet? How do the parties shape their individual party identities and distinguish those identities from the opposition? How do the parties seek to exploit the unique characteristics of the web as a communication medium? How are these characteristics similar to–or different than–those employed by direct mail strategists to recruit involvement from targeted party sympathizers?

In the following sections, we offer a brief look into the ways in which the RNC and DNC have in the past viewed their place on the web and how they employed the unique characteristics of the web to generate votes and fundraising dollars. Then, through a close analysis of one modern political party website, Democrats.org, we illustrate how modern political parties may resurrect and make more effective "direct mail" tactics in an effort to win support from an already loyal and sympathetic audience.

Republican and Democratic Identity on the WWW

The Republican Party was the first to use the new web-based medium. In early spring of 1996, the RNC launched their site on the WWW. The site made impressive use of the new web technologies–Java scripts, animation, and applets, and webpage-embedded political speeches, video clips, sound-bites, and press releases. As a demonstration of their technological savvy, the

RNC embedded on their main page an imagemap of a town square, titled "Main Street,"
including icons for a café, gift shop, tool shop, newsstand, and school (see Figure 1). Each icon
linked users to a different place within the site. Jonathan Kinsley, former Electronics
Communications Coordinator for the RNC, asserted that the RNC built this and other features to
challenge the traditional mold of webpage design. "Part of that change in direction," he stated,
"included an interactive conferencing area where visitors to the RNC Web site could have on-
line conversations with Republican staffers and with each other." Even later, "the RNC was the
only major party offering a Web site that went beyond the traditional media approach of simply
passing out information" (Rash, 1997, p. 19).

Figure 1: RNC Mainstreet

The impressive use of these new technologies helped to project an initial political identity
for the RNC that compressed the notions of service and community into an identity that could
draw its users further into the site. The "Mainstreet" image illustrated, among others, a school
flying the American flag, café, post office, help station, newsstand, television station, and a gift

shop where you could purchase Republication memorabilia. The RNC used these symbols to generate a goodwill ethos, and it is powerfully explicit as to what kind of ideal future society it envisioned.

The DNC eventually projected a similar kind of initial identity. At first, the DNC's website was more basic than its counterpart and supported very little interactivity for users. The site, for instance, did not place the e-mail addresses of its staff on the site, offer an option for general questions and feedback, and did not have a chat-room like the RNC. It did, however, make use of hyperlinks to Democratic candidates, the White House, Library of Congress, and others. Late 1996, the DNC redesigned its website and included many of the same devices and types of images used by the Republican site (Rash, 1997, p. 19). For example, depending when one visited the site, the first page showed either a photograph of President Clinton and his wife standing with both White and African-American children (see picture below), or another photograph of Clinton speaking at a podium in front of a large banner that read "American Council on Education." The Democrat's page, then, appealed to the same goodwill persona as the Republican's, adopting a consistent and not very unique, populist strategy to entice support from a wide audience of possible supporters. Modern political parties, however, may, by resurrecting and making more effective older direct mail strategies, appeal to very specific audiences—those already sympathetic to their aims. The online technologies now possible on the WWW make interacting with users much easier, thus ensuring a greater chance at connecting with party loyalists who can and are willing to offer their political and financial support.

Figure 2: One America

The Online Political Audience

Both parties both started with the premise that the online audience is particularly drawn to their own party beliefs. Lisa McCormack, former Director of Publications and Online Communications for the RNC, argued years ago that "We feel that the demographics of the Internet lean toward the Republican Party's demographics" (as cited in Rash, 1997, p. 39). She saw two typical users. The first is "intelligent, self-sufficient, confident, curious, and likes a good strong argument" and "resourceful, so in that sense, independent" (as cited in Rash, 1997, p. 40). This person would also have a "better than average education," which means "at least two years of college, and probably would not mind the idea of going into business for themselves" (as cited in Rash, 1997, p. 40). She saw the other user as younger, "mid-twenties, a bit of a smart ass, cocky but sociable, likes people" (as cited in Rash, 1997, p. 40).

The DNC also once believed that its party ideology appeals to the typical online user. Dick Bell, former Interactive Media Director for the DNC Communications Department, argued that the Internet is not solely a Republican space, and it is not just a place for those who have money: "If you thought it was only the income distribution, then that might lead you to think the

Republicans would benefit more, but certainly the early [users] of the Internet [are] not, because [they are] more libertarian than anything else" (as cited in Rash, 1997, p. 40-1).

New research on the use of social media by American citizens tells a different story, though there is indication that it is not a totally meaningless exploit for political organizations. According to one Pew report (PewResearch, 2011), although two-thirds of online adults use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, only five percent of them read comments by celebrities, athletes, or politicians as a major motivation or reason for adopting the technology. Another Pew report (PewInternet, 2011) indicates that seventy-seven percent of American adult Internet users use the Internet on an average day, but only thirty percent use it for political news or political information. In fact, political motivation is just one of many reasons why American citizens use the web. They also use it to check the weather (34%), go online for fun or to pass the time (38%), and to watch videos (28%). Staying in touch with current friends is a huge motivation for using social networking sites, with sixty-seven percent of adults choosing it as the major reason (PewResearch). One possible conclusion here is that the online environment has become a major factor in our lives, and that our use of the online technology mirrors the diversity of activities found in our offline world. Political activity is only part of the larger equation. Political organizations, then, must now compete even more fiercely with these other motivations so that users are encouraged to stay connected or engaged with the target party site.

Traditional broadcast audiences are like large brew pots filled with those with all sorts of party affiliations and political philosophies, and political groups know that overly charged partisan discourse would likely be a turn-off. In this case, it makes sense for political parties not to broadcast these types of messages through traditional media, but to narrowcast those appeals on the party website where visitors would consist mainly of party loyalists only. Here, a political

party could target those who already support or are sympathetic to its party ideology, and not hold back the charged nature of the discourse for fear of alienating those on the political fence. This strategy is exactly characteristic of older print-based direct mail tactics. The following analysis demonstrates how the Democratic party, currently holding onto the US Presidency one year away from a second term election, uses these traditional direct mail tactics in targeting and recruiting support on the Democrats.org website while also constructing and exploiting its online identity in ways that have not been possible before.

Democrats.org

The Democrats.org website, originally DNC.org, is stubbornly plain and makes only a modest use of modern web technologies. The site has a white background, and employs mostly light blue text and text bars with a dash of dark blue lettering and text bars. There is a splash of red text under the main circled "D" logo where it says "Change That Matters" and for the "Contribute" link, both found near the top of the main page (see below). The main page scrolls enough to include two full page views, and can been read as five separate sections. The top, or header, includes the logo, a link for the Spanish version of the site, and a "Join" button that asks for the user's email address and zip code.

The second section just below the header is the major feature of the main page. At the top of this section includes seven text links that connect to seven separate pages. They include "Who We Are," "What We Stand For," "People," "Elections," "News," "Contact," and "Contribute." Below this is a very large picture box that rotates four central pictures: (1) a picture of the Capitol Building with the text "Stand Up For Jobs – Join with the President"; (2) a picture of a

group of school children with the text "Lifting Up our Schools – Delivering for Students"; (3) a

picture of President Obama signing unknown legislation with Democratic Party leaders looking

on with the text "Women's Equality at the Heart of the Agenda – Tackling Discrimination"; and

(4) a picture of President Obama giving a speech with the text "Education is Everyone's

Responsibility – Innovation in Learning." These pictures, and others throughout the site, are

changed by the DNC on a regular basis, and have already changed since the initial reading of the

site. Below each rotating picture are brief news blurbs, and beneath these is a new text bar that

reads "Get Connected." This text bar contains image links to Facebook, Twitter, DNC blog,

Figure 3: Democrats.org

YouTube, and Flickr. There is even a FaceBook "like" option that, at the time of this analysis, had 211,494 "likes."

The third and fourth sections update the user on recent news and stories within the Democratic Party. In the first part, under "Democratic Updates," there are three news sections for "Democrats.org," "Elected Democrats," and "State Parties." Under each of these three parts is a featured news blurb that links to a page with more elaborate information. In the next section, the user sees featured stories, which includes a three-by-three section of pictures with text. These nine pictures link to other pages on "Women's Equality," "Black History Month," "Credit Card Reform," "Health Reform," "An Easy Guide to the President's 2012 Budget," "DNC Winter Meeting," "Women's History Month," "Democratic Store," and "See Progress in your Area."

The main page finishes with the logos of the Democratic National Committee and BarackObama.com. Since the initial reading of this page, a third logo for the White House website has been added. Also included at the bottom are links to a site map, privacy policy, and terms of service. Of note on its "Terms of Service" page is a statement that reads "the DNC has adopted a policy of terminating, in appropriate circumstances as determined by the DNC in its sole discretion, subscribers or account holders who are deemed to be repeat infringers." Whether these individuals post inappropriate information or are confirmed Republications is unknown.

The website structure seems to focus mostly on the top seven categories in the second section of the main page. These categories link to seven sub pages, which link to even more specific content area pages. The site structure is very much like an onion, allowing users to peel back multiple layers to discover more specific information as

needed. On each of these pages, the user will find the Facebook "like" link, a link to a report called "Promises Kept: President Obama's First Two Years in Office" (see below), recent news updates from national newspapers and other such sources, and a link to the Democratic online store. In general, however, these seven pages represent the area of the site where anyone looking for basic information about the Democratic National Committee would likely go.

Figure 4: Promises Kept

After clicking on the "Who We Are" link from the main page, the user views a new page with four sections: "Our Party," "Our History," "Our Leaders," and "In Your State." This page begins with a quotation drawn from John F. Kennedy and is about "Change." Following this, there are four sections for each of the four key phrases, followed with a paragraph teaser of information that might draw the user into clicking on the link to a much longer page of information. These pages contain information about the history of the party and committee, past and current political leaders, and specific state information should the user want to get involved on a local level. The first two subpages begin with the same quotation from John F. Kennedy, the third page begins with a quotation about the power of the people

from Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the fourth page has no quotation. This last page, however,

may have analyzed my IP address because the page directed me to information about my

local Democratic Party information.

After clicking on the "What We Stand For" link from the main list of links, the user

sees a quotation from Robert F. Kennedy, this time about the power of the individual to act

as a catalyst for change, a video link using the same picture of President Obama signing

legislation, an excerpt of the 2008 Democratic Platform with a link to the entire report, and

links to thirteen subsections for more information. These thirteen links include ""Civil

Rights," "Economy and Job Creation," "Education," "Energy Independence," "Environment,"

"Fair Elections," "Health Care," "Immigration Reform," "National Security," "Open

Government," "Science and Technology," "Retirement Security," and "Voting Rights." All of

these pages are constructed similarly to previous pages. They begin with a relevant

quotation, mostly from President Obama, but also from John F. Kennedy and even Al Gore.

There are bulleted lists of issues of concern, news blurbs, opinion statements from

concerned citizens, links to relevant political action committees and social groups, and each

page has its own Facebook "like" option. These pages have not received many "likes,"

however, with "Retirement Security" only receiving seven, for example, and "Voting Rights"

only receiving nineteen. The video clip shows mostly black and white footage, likely to

symbolize the party's historical lineage, and discusses the social changes spearheaded by

the party, like Wall Street Reform and the leaders who led those political battles. Among

the comments made include statements that the DNC is the "party of Jefferson," authored

the "Bill of Rights," and boasts connections to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and Barack Obama.

The "People" page opens with a quotation from Robert F. Kennedy, and then provides, again, a long list of links to other pages. This page links the user to groups of people that seem targeted specifically by the Democratic Party. These groups include "African Americans," "Americans with Disabilities," "Faith," "Hispanics," "Native Americans," "Seniors and Retirees," "Veterans and Military Families," "Women," "and Young People and Students." A statement provided by the DNC provides some explanation:

America's diversity is America's strength, and that diversity and strength is reflected in the Democrats across the country. "Democrat" is a word that bridges class, race, region, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The Democratic Party is the party of diversity and inclusion, a place where Americans of all backgrounds are able to find shared goals and common cause.

What is not found in this list is illuminating, of course. The user does not read anything about small business owners or corporate leaders, and, despite how the statement reads from this "party of diversity and inclusion," no groups linked by sexual orientation are listed. There is a video clip here as well, but this one is in full color. The clip begins with a statement from Tim Kaine, Chairman of the DNC, and then transitions to comments by other DNC officers and party leaders. Following these statements about the Democratic Party's fight for civil rights, among other issues, is a picture montage that features JFK and the first man on the moon footage, Obama with his family, farm houses, small towns, and homes with proverbial white picket fences.

The "Elections" page has only three links to subpages and begins with a quotation from DNC Chairman Tim Kaine. His comment reads that "A TV ad disappears the minute you run it, but putting resources into people is an investment that stays far beyond Election Day." The three links include "Voter Protection," "Voting Information," and "The Accountability Project." After clicking on the Voter Protection link, the user reads a statement about the problems that potential voters face each year, turned away for a multitude of issues, and that that they need "your" help at the voting centers to ensure equal access. The page reads that **"this work requires folks like you to be there, watching and holding officials accountable." On this page, the user can fill out an online form to register his or her interest in being a volunteer.

On the "News" page, the user will see a more elaborated list of news updates from around the country on Democratic Party issues. Some of these news blurbs are repeated again from the main page, but they range from school bullying and rising gas prices to financial waste and patient reform. The featured video is, in fact, on patient reform and spotlights Austan Goolsbee on the White House White Board. There are five Democratic Party Blogs linked on this page (DSCC, DCCC, DLCC, DGA, and CDA), and forty-two state democratic blogs, including "Barefoot and Progressive," "Daily Kingfish," and "Delaware Liberal."

The "Contact" page begins with a repeated quotation from John F. Kennedy about change, and provides four major mechanisms for contacting the DNC. The first, "About Issues," is for users to who have "political and public policy-related questions and comments." The second, "About Technical Issues," provides a place for any technical

concerns or problems with the website interface. Both of these subpages provide an online form for users. On the "Jobs" page, there are six posted jobs with the DNC, and included posting and closing dates, descriptions of the jobs, and the mailing information for application packets. The last link is for those interested in "Internships." For these users, the DNC offers a very detailed online application form, which asks for users to submit letters of recommendations, write essays, and provide other relevant information. At the very bottom of the "Contact" page is the mailing address and phone number for the DNC.

The last of these main subpages is the "Contribute" page. This is the DNC's main fundraising effort, and the red links connecting to this page can be found on every other page throughout the site. After clicking, the user is taken to a subpage that solicits for contributions. After a brief appeal to goodwill describing all of the DNC's altruistic efforts for the country, it reads that "we need the resources to win," and that

> Unlike our opponents, we don't take money from special interests, corporate lobbyists, and political action committees. What we have is supporters like you. Join us by making a donation today.

The page (see below) offers the user an online form to fill out, which includes options for their credit card donations of $25, $50, $75, $100, $250, $1,000, $2,000, or "Other" in USD. The page also reminds users that their donations are tax-deductible as charitable contributions. What should not be overlooked is that this is the first page where the top links disappear, providing fewer ways for the user to opt out of this page for another.

Direct Mail: The Tactic of Feigned Familiarity

Feigned Familiarity is the rhetorical appeal employed to create the appearance of familiarity, connection, community, and identification between rhetor and audience. In this case, the Democratic National Committee's strongest tactic is to use indexical devices like "we" and "our" to create, however artificial or superficial, the suggestion of inclusion. This

Figure 5: Democrats_Contribute

is certainly the case as soon as the main page where the DNC is quick to label its main links as "Who We Are" and "What We Stand For" (see below). On the main picture, when the education link appears, the text reads "Lifting up all our schools." On the "Who We Are" page, users once again read "Our Party," "Our History," "Our Leaders," and "In Your State." This is a tactic that is repeated throughout the site.

Figure 6: Who We Are

Figure 7: What We Stand For

Names and pictures may be even more powerful as inclusion devices. The DNC website takes full advantage of both. It is no surprise that certain names and pictures are repeated throughout the site. John F. Kennedy, for example, is quoted more than even

President Obama, which is no surprise since JKF had the highest approval rating of any

President in US History—popular with both Democratic and Republican audiences. Also

named often are Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Hilary Clinton, Bill Clinton, Al Gore,

Harry Truman, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr, and recent party leaders, such as

Senate Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi and DNC Chairman Tim Kaine. The DNC also seems to

connect specifically with working class and middle class users, as when it discusses directly

women, Hispanics, African Americans, Americans with disabilities, Native Americans,

young people and students. It also indirectly connects to this larger demographic with its

video imagery of civil rights era leaders, farm houses, small town America, students, and

health and economic reform. In case the user does not yet feel included, the DNC reaches

out via its "Gets Connected" page, which features several social networking links, email

registration, and links to all state Democratic political parties.

Making users feel as if they belong to a larger community is exactly the tactic

employed by the Democrats on the party site. Although it may be feigned for the purposes

of exploiting user sentiments or even weaknesses for a communal attachment, but creating

familiarity for users is a strategic method of encouraging additional party loyalty,

contributions, and votes.

Direct Mail: The Tactic of Urgency

It is not enough to join, contribute, lobby, serve, or vote, you must do so

immediately. Such is the appeal of urgency in direct mail political discourse. These sorts of

claims are typically followed by scare tactics designed to frighten the reader into action. If the reader fails to act now, horrible consequences will ensue. Words like "now" or "today" or "immediately" serve this tactic, but also exclamation marks, bold face fonts, animated or otherwise colored typefaces can indicate a sense of urgency.

Certain issues will always be of more importance to voters than others, like jobs or national security, but how those issues are framed on the site can show what issues are most important to the political party. Framing an issue to show urgency could include special placement on the page, the size of the link or image, animations that draw attention to the issue, or even repetition of the appeal. On the "Elections" page, readers are told that, to ensure "that every voter has the information necessary to exercise his or her right to vote," they need "volunteers like you, watching and holding officials accountable." This appeal and the corresponding image are seen first on the page. On the "News" page, links to the "Latest Updates," "Latest Blog Post," "Latest Release," "Latest Video," "Weekly Address," "Recent Posts," "Recent Releases," and "Recent Videos" creates an atmosphere of urgency in which the users feel required to log into the site on a regular basis. This also creates more opportunities for them to contribute time or money to the party. Again on the "News" page, users read that "This week we posted our rules for being a delegate in 2012," and are told to "Read the rules and comment here" and then are provided a link. Hortatory remarks, such as "Read the rules," "Read the Report," "Sign Up," "Get Connected," "Join Democrats.org," "Watch the Video," and other such immediate commands indicate immediacy.

The Democrats.org website was not only designed to inform readers about its political activities and philosophies, but also to persuade them to contribute money to the cause. On the "Contribute" page, the site asserts that, "Unlike our opponents, we don't take money from special interests, corporate lobbyists, and political action committees" and ask that readers "Join us by making a donation today." The addition of "today" is significant. Furthermore, not only is the user able to contribute directly through the site, but they can "Click here to make a recurring donation." The consistent and pervasive link at the top of every page to the "Contribute" page also raises a sense of urgency regarding monetary donations. The solid red box around this link when all other main links are surrounded in blue does little to hide the appeal.

Direct Mail: Appeals to Officialdom

Although the Democratic Party is two centuries old, and little needs to be done to validate its official status as a mainstream political party, the web is full of fake sites that either try to malign their official counterparts or parody its existence. Furthermore, there are always new generations of voters who may be on the fence politically. This is certainly a reason to create an online design that generates confidence in the user, suggesting that he or she has located the official organization and one worthy of consideration. Using the appropriate rhetorical devices, parties can also create the appearance of importance, credibility, and authority that may work to create sufficient identification with them that will lead to party membership, votes, or campaign contributions. Flags, logos, party colors,

the naming of party heroes, and images of official buildings, events, and party politicians, can all serve to create this effect. Even the link to the Democratic Party Facebook page, which is repeated on almost every page on the site, serves this function since the number of people who have "Liked" the page makes it a very obvious attempt to showcase the site's popularity.

As one might expect, the Democratic Party website makes ample use of traditional red, white, and blue colors within its website. One top of its white background, most of the text headlines and links are either in blue or surrounded by blue framing. The color red is employed to emphasize or to create the aforementioned sense of urgency. There are several logos for the DNC, and they utilize all three colors (see below) to varying degrees. What is surprising is the lack of the American flag. While it does appear on pictures of official buildings, such as the Capitol Building, it is not prominently displayed on the site.

Figure 8: Change that Matters

A major device seen on the DNC site is the naming of party heroes and historic leaders. This may work to situate the current political platform in a historic context that adds legitimacy and credibility. It may also add credibility to the party itself. Among the names that are seen most often include President Obama, of course, but also John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. These individuals are fairly safe

bets as mainstream political icons, not likely to alienate even those who are sitting on the fence of the Democratic spectrum. There are also images of Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, and DNC Chairman Tim Kaine, but in secondary and tertiary pages.

The website includes an abundance of links to state and local democratic resources, which could work to further legitimize the Democrats.org site as the central portal for Democratic-leaning individuals. The site offers users links to all 50 state party offices, major Democratic Party blogs, the blogs of elected Democratic opinion-leaders , and links to President Obama's personal political website, BarackObama.com.

Appeals to officialdom may not be the most powerful of the five direct mail appeals, but, for users who need an extra level of reassurance that they are in the right place with the right group, it may go a long way toward building a positive connection. As the WWW has no gatekeeper, there are many parody and fake sites that aim to manipulate users. The appeal to officialdom may become more important as the web evolves and grows for this very reason.

Direct Mail: Gimmicks

Those wanting to employ the strategy of print-based direct mail would use a combination of gimmicks to engage and ingratiate an already-eager audience into further participation. Historically, included in letters to political sympathizers were items like buttons and bumper stickers, which were cheap but effective in increasing party loyalty. With the web, these physical items are no longer possible, unless mailed to users after they volunteered their personal contact information. What is more likely is free offers for party

documents, online quizzes and games, social networking opportunities, language

translation options for the site, downloadable videos, and other extra features that could

work to engage online visitors.

The Democratic Party website is fairly void of free items for visitors, but does utilize

some common web devices in order to engage its users. The site makes ample use of web

forms on its volunteer solicitation page and also its contribution page, and web videos on

its "Who We Are," "What We Stand For," and "People" pages. Animated images and banners

add the appeal of movement to the site, making it seem alive and energetic. The site's

online store sells the basic t-shirts, hats, stickers, magnets, mugs, posters, cards, water

bottles, and bags, with free shipping included (see below). Users can create an account for

shopping and make use of the site's online shopping cart for convenience. On the main

page, near the bottom, there is an image link to a page that shows "Progress in Your Area."

Figure 9: Store

Users can select their state, or add their physical address for local information, to read

about "the real effects of the steps President Obama and Democrats have taken to rebuild

our economy." The page reads that, "Behind these numbers are stories about people whose lives and communities have been positively affected by the change Democrats have made." With the user's state automatically selected, as evidence of the site's powerful identifying program, the user can see, among other statistics, that, in North Carolina, 93,000 new jobs have been created or saved "because of the Recovery Act," and 194,600 small businesses are now "eligible for health care tax credits under the Affordable Care Act." The website is designed to bring customized information to the user. As other gimmicks, users can click on a link at the top of any page within the site to opt for the Spanish language version, choose social networking options on Facebook, Twitter, or the site's blog, or watch an embedded promotional video on YouTube or promotional images on Flicker. Finally, users may download a few documents, such as their own personalized "Progress Fact Sheet" or the 2008 Democratic Party Platform, "Renewing America's Progress," which is also available using the site's reading device, Scribd. There are no games or quizzes. Very little on this site seems to engage young children despite having a page dedicated to "Young People & Students." The most rhetorically interesting gimmick on the Democratic site is found after clicking the link provided on the "Accountability Project" page. Here, users can upload from a"video camera of any kind, or even a cell phone that records video," or "copies of candidate mailers, emails, and attack ads," so that "candidates see that there's a cost to their dishonesty." If one is unable to record the event personally, the user "can also report upcoming public events in your area, so that other volunteers can document them." If you are the one who is looking for such opportunities, the page offers you a chance to register your interest and search for local events.

 Direct Mail: Vilification

  One of the most pervasive but also loathed tactics in modern politics is the purposeful undermining of one's political opponent through vilification, especially when one's opponent is not yielded a chance for a defense. On television during campaign season, broadcast channels are forced by law to offer opposing candidates equal air time, which provides a chance for each to counter the claims of the other. On the web, however, there are no such rules. In fact, it is likely that, online, one political counterpart is not even part of the discussion, unable to hear, watch, or read whatever partisan words the other might be publishing. In this case, there is little incentive to moderate the appeals. On your own political party website, your claims about the other could be severe, even overtly ad hominem, and be accepted with aplomb. Possibilities include critical comments about another's political philosophy, past votes and political actions, and even complaints over personal life decisions. The more deplorable forms of vilification include quoting an opponent out of context, exploiting logical fallacies when analyzing your opponent's arguments, posting less than attractive pictures of your opponent or manipulating those same pictures, and, of course, simply falsifying information. These tactics do not have much of a life in the mainstream press, where they are quickly refuted. Online, however, that is another story.

  The Democratic Party website does not vilify its counterpart harshly, but it does criticize Republican Party leaders, and even calls them enemies. On the "Accountability Project" page, where the Democratic Party seeks to "document Replublication candidates and their public statements . . . as well as their campaign tactics," it implies certain

inherency within Republication discourse. The page writes that "there's a cost to their dishonesty." It says further, without specifically mentioning Republicans, that "for too long, our politics have been poisoned with misinformation, lies, and doublespeak." On the main page, as one of the featured stories and pictures, the "Budget Guide" includes a byline that reads "The Republican budget proposal puts at risk nearly 1 million jobs" and that "The consequences of the Republican budget plan are a threat to our economic recovery." Further, on the "Contribute" page, the Democrats write that "Unlike our opponents, we don't take money from special interests, corporate lobbyists, and political action committees," which, however weak the connection may be, is an attempt to label the Republicans corrupt.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine how political parties may exploit the unique characteristics of the web to construct a party identity capable of recruiting votes, money, and other forms of support. Specifically, the analysis here demonstrates the potential to use print-based direct mail strategies, once common only in letter form, on websites. The appeals to feigned familiarity, urgency, officialdom, gimmicks, and vilification are not only possible via the medium of the web, but made more effective because of it. With fewer costs, fewer limitations on content, and the potential for more user engagement, the web is the perfect medium for direct mail appeals and the political parties that wish to use them.

We might now question Chartrand (1972) when he asserted decades ago that "While both the Republican and Democratic National Committees have evinced an appreciation of the role of computer technology . . . they have done so in different ways" (p. 27). Even in the early days of

the web, both parties had a similar sense of the online audience, similar appeals, and used similar technologies. Both strove to construct an identity that embodied the notions of the family, community, and education while placing emphasis on "service" and "goodwill." While not exactly mirror images, the Democratic and Republican sites were designed in a way that showed a definite appreciation for the power of this new technology. While their recruiting and retention efforts offline might be limited by their fundraising abilities and party coffer size, what is most important is that we realize that both parties have full access to the same online technology online regardless of budgetary concerns, allowing for nearly countless possibilities for persuasion. The site that is best able to coordinate the combination of online technology and direct mail appeals will most likely glean from their users the most in terms of party loyalty and financial contributions.

The web as a complex social technology has evolved and matured, and so have the types of online rhetorical appeals. Social networking capabilities, specifically, have certainly allowed website developers to incorporate more advanced interactive options, increasing the possibilities for user engagement, personalization, and eventual contribution. This study focused on the Democrats.org website and its use of web technologies to create a modern political identity capable of eliciting significant support from users. This case study in web politicking certainly indicates the complexity of designing a modern political website and what is necessary in order to make use of the available means of persuasion. Moving far beyond the posting of political documents and brochure-like information, photographs and email addresses of party leaders, and links to party affiliates, modern political websites must exploit all of the possibilities for social networking, be professionally designed and attractive, be easily navigable, current, comprehensive, and allow for individual user site personalization. Furthermore, the appeals must

be assertive, friendly, and appeal directly to user motivations. Full attention must be paid to content, language, design, and placement.

Finally, this paper illustrates the ways in which direct mail tactics have been resurrected and employed by national political parties to arouse its audience into participation. These parties, however, have not used the direct mail typology simply as a template that is placed over the web. Through the unique capabilities of CMC, political groups can adapt the tactics of direct mail for their own needs and move beyond the limitations that were characteristic of direct mail. Hyperlinks, images, movies, sound bites, animated pictures, scrolling text, e-mail and online surveys, real-time chats, imagemaps, online shopping, and guestbooks all allow the user to become hyper-interactive with the website and to create a sense of involvement/participation in the user; these are abilities that direct mail could not offer. The use of these online technologies allows the parties greater ease in soliciting contributions–users can send contributions instantaneously and even compulsively which is a huge advantage over direct mail. Also as important, CMC is much more cost-efficient than was print-based direct mail. For instance, the cost of maintaining the website does not significantly increase as the number of users rises; any number of users can visit the website and at any frequency without costing much more to the party. Ultimately, a party can narrowcast its messages to a specific constituency–one that is already supporting the party's "cause." Therefore, with these new technologies, masters of political CMC can more effectively target and recruit support for any number of goals. This paper, then, illustrates the ways in which direct mail tactics can be and have been resurrected by political parties to arouse users into participation.

CMC has become a significant factor in online political strategy and a potent tool for persuasion. Scholars have long shown how this form of communication dynamically changes the

way in which we communicate, but there is so much more to learn about how it may be changing

us as consumers of political information. The technologies presently used by political parties, as

evidenced by the Democratic Party in this analysis, can relay information, offer users an

interactive experience, liberate unequal power status, and free users from temporal and spatial

constraints that normally bind their sense of commitment. The potential of this medium is a long

way from being fully realized, however, but we should and will most likely see a continued

presence on the web by political organizations. What this means, of course, is that we should

continue to investigate the various political strategies used to control the perceptions of its users.

This analysis serves to contribute to this ongoing conversation.

Notes

1.Sabato (1989) asserts that millions of Americans have been shown to contribute as a response to direct mail tactics (p. 53).

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