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Use of Social Media in Presidential Campaigns: Do Social Media Have an Effect on the Political Behavior of Voters Aged 18-24?

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Signature Page

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Abstract

Today, the idea of social media is radically different from the media of a decade ago. While a decade ago the Internet was considered new media, our society now turns to Facebook, Twitter, and blogs as sources of information. In the United States during election cycles, the use of social media by presidential candidates has become a way for many voters to find out about candidates. As a result, presidential candidates have had to adapt their campaign strategies to work with these media in a way that will effectively target these audiences. This study examines whether campaigns that are more "social media savvy" will ultimately garner more votes, specifically from those aged 18-24. By analyzing social media tactics of the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections and surveying voters in this age range, I ultimately found that there was no relationship between social media use and young voter participation or likelihood of voting for Democratic candidates. However, there was a relationship between social media usage and likelihood of voting for Republican candidates: when social media was used, participants were less likely to vote for the Republican candidate than when no social media use was present.

Introduction

On February 10, 2007 a relatively unknown junior Senator from Illinois announced his candidacy for president. Almost 20 months later, that unknown senator was elected President of the United States. Barack Obama's presidential campaign was unorthodox (Simba 2009). As Simba (2009) noted, Obama's campaign success had frequently been credited to his public speaking and ability to inspire. However, his use of the Internet and social media to engage new voters provided Obama with a level of support that most candidates never see.

The Obama campaign not only revolutionized how campaigns reached out to their audiences, but it also affected how they fundraised. Simba (2009) pointed out that Obama outspent his Republican opponent after years of Republican candidates outspending Democratic candidates. The use of the Internet as a fundraising tool led to a remarkably high number of small denomination donations from a group of voters who had never previously been engaged in the political process (Simba 2009).

Although Barack Obama's campaign marked the most successful use of new and social media by a presidential candidate, it certainly did not mark the first. Howard Dean's 2004 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination offered the country a glimpse into what Internet campaigning was capable of producing. Murray (2005) stated that Howard Dean's rise to fame was centered on his use of new and social media. Much like Barack Obama after him, Dean was unknown prior to announcing his candidacy. By disseminating his message through new and social media, Dean was able to mobilize a new group of supporters. These supporters thrived on the ease that the Internet provided in making a donation, getting information, or coordinating an event (Murray 2005).

While Internet use was the main factor in setting Dean's campaign apart from

other candidates, Murray also pointed out that Dean utilized this new technology to target a previously overlooked demographic: young voters. Murray (2005) stated that young voters were typically early adopters of new technology so Dean's use of these methods clearly showed his dedication to reaching out to these voters in particular.

Murray (2005) goes on to cite a study, by the Pew Charitable Trust's *Internet, Politics, and Democracy Online Project*, who found that the majority of individuals who engaged with candidates online during the 2004 primary were individuals who had never before been politically active. The influx of newly involved voters was pivotal to the support that Dean was able to gain, as he "would not have been able to gain the support of the traditional active party base with his seemingly progressive platform" (Murray, 2005, pg. 5). While his bid for the nomination was ultimately unsuccessful, Dean still managed to introduce new and social media to the world of political campaigns.

The successful utilization of new and social media by both the Obama and Dean campaigns could ultimately prove to be a model to follow in engaging the youth vote. As new and social media change and evolve, it is those in the 18-24 age group who adopt and apply these new types of Internet use. The Pew Research Center's *Internet and American Life Project* found that 95% of 18-29 year-olds use the Internet, and 78% of all American adults use the Internet on a daily basis. As a result, it appears that it will be extremely important for politicians to utilize this network moving forward. This study will ultimately test how important the use of social media is for voters aged 18-24 when voting in a Presidential election.

Defining New and Social Media

Although several scholars have looked at the new media's impact and influence (Baum and Groeling 2008, Graber 1996, Han 2008, Morris 2002), few have actually provided a working

definition of the term. In the most general sense, new media is an umbrella term for "emerging communications technologies" (Peters, 2009, pg. 16), and is most commonly associated with those technologies that pertain to the Internet. However, Peters (2009) stated that for new media to remain new the definition has to be constantly evolving and changing as what is considered "new" is constantly evolving and changing. Peters then went on to provide two definitions for new media. The first was that "new media can be understood as emerging communication and information technologies undergoing a historical process of contestation, negotiation and institutionalization" (Peters, 2009, pg. 18). This definition relied on the readers understanding of the media evolution arc. The five stages of the arc include invention, innovation, regulation, distribution, and mainstream. However, without prior knowledge of this process of media adaptation, the aforementioned definition makes little sense.

Peters also defined new media as "media we do not yet know how to talk about" (2009, pg. 18). Ultimately, although it may prove true, this particular definition offers little help in understanding new media. As a result, I will utilize a combination of the previous definitions. The term new media will refer to an umbrella term for communications technologies that utilize the Internet as their primary platform and are constantly changing and evolving.

Social media can be characterized as a type of new media. However, it is important to recognize that while social media may fall under the broad umbrella term of new media, social media have its own distinguishing factors. Social media utilizes social networking sites as its primary form of communication. The networking sites themselves are the platforms through which social media occurs. In order to appropriately define social media, a working definition for social networking sites must first be established. Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined social networking sites as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (pg. 211).

This definition provided an outline for describing social media. The platform that social media is carried out on is a system that allows individuals to share information with other individuals they list and find new individuals through their friends' lists. This is generally the model that social media follow. As a result, this paper will define social media as any technological communication that utilizes peer-to-peer networking as its primary form of disseminating information. Specifically, social media will refer to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs in this analysis.

Participation Effects

Participation effects are those influences which generally induce individuals to participate in the political process. Claasen (2007) claimed that "in a spatial model, citizens participate when their proximity calculations reveal a non-zero policy stake in the election outcome" (pg. 370). In other words, if an individual recognized that their personal beliefs are not challenged by either candidate in an election, they will not participate. And conversely, an individual on the opposite end of the political spectrum from a candidate would be much more likely to participate as their personal beliefs are challenged. Although this theory had been the traditionally accepted theory, Claasen went on to claim that extremity of views may not play as large of a role in political participation as previously believed. Claasen ultimately concluded that extreme policy-motivated individuals participated in the political process because of their extreme views regardless of the election, whereas proximity-motivated individuals only participated when they have a perceived stake in the outcome of the election.

In addition, studies done in the 60s and 70s showed that racial solidarity also proved to be a factor in political participation (Chong and Rogers 2007). However, Chong and Rogers pointed out that the same correlation between racial solidarity and political participation have been lacking in more recent studies. Chong and Rogers attributed this declining correlation to differences in definition of both group solidarity and political participation. They went on to find that there are two types of group solidarity within the black community: common fate and black autonomy. According the Chong and Rogers (2007), those members of the "common fate" group tended to participate in a more traditional manner, where those members of the "black autonomy" group tended to favor more radical forms of political participation, such as protests and rallies. These findings had the potential to be applied to other ethnic groups, however Chong and Rogers warned against applying them without first doing further research. Considering that solidarity can change over time, Chong and Rogers reasoned that it can also change across racial and ethnic groups.

Voter Choice Effects

Voter choice effects refer specifically to those influences that impact who a voter chooses to vote for in a presidential election. McClurg and Holbrook (2009) stated that partisanship and presidential evaluation are the fundamental influences on voter choice. However, McClurg and Holbrook claimed that these influences can "vary in importance across campaign contexts of differing intensity" (2009, pg. 495). They believe that those voters in states that are heavily exposed to campaign materials will have more easily predicted votes, whereas those voters in states where campaign exposure is limited will be less predictable. While voters in battleground states were more likely to participate, and be heavily exposed to the candidates and messages, voters in non-battleground states receive much less information about the candidates. This

ultimately made predicting the choice of voters in battleground states much easier than predicting the choice of voters in non-battleground states.

Gilens, Vavreck, and Cohen (2007) focused on whether a decline of available information about political candidates is correlated with a decline in voters' ability to make informed decisions. Focusing on the period from 1952-2000, Gilens et al. found that news consumption had fallen dramatically over the past 50 years. While some of this is attributed to new news sources being harder to track, Gilens et al. stated that this does not make up for the majority of the decline. With such a sharp decline in available information, a similarly sharp decline could be expected in the ability of voters to choose a candidate for president. However, Gilens et al. found that there was no reason to believe that voters had decreased information about candidates. In addition, Gilens et al. found that voters' likelihood of citing policy-based reasons for their vote choice has increased over time while the likelihood of citing character-based reasons has decreased.

The Cable Effect

As a result of the ability of individuals to obtain 24-hour access to media sources through cable news channels, Graber (1996) argued that new media allowed individuals to form their own opinions and draw their own conclusions from the media sources they utilized, making it almost impossible for newsmakers to frame stories how they saw fit. Although Graber acknowledged the exponential increase of news available due to new media, she believed that the production far outpaced the consumption. Graber stated that "while available food for political thought has grown, despite much overlap and redundancy, the appetite for it and the capacity to consume it remain limited" (1996, pg. 34). Ultimately, Graber warned that as technology and new media continued to evolve, the information gap "between the information privileged and the

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information underclass is likely to grow" (1996, pg. 36). She said that the influence that the educated class currently holds over politics will only continue to grow as these media resources advanced.

While presidents have relied on broadcast television to disseminate information to the American public, the rise of cable television has contributed to a smaller audience. Cable television provided citizens with the ability to simply change the channel—an ability that was not afforded when broadcast television was the primary medium as almost every channel would broadcast a presidential announcement. Baum and Kernell (1996) attempted determine whether this smaller audience for presidential television could actually be attributed to cable's popularity or if it was more directly related to political disaffection. Baum and Kernell (1996) looked at two main areas. The first being whether viewers were less likely to watch the president because they were previously interested in something on cable. The second being whether they were less likely to watch the president because they had an inherent dislike of politics, the political process, the current political climate or the current President.

Baum and Kernell (1996) found that an increased availability and popularity of cable led to more and more Americans simply changing the channel when a president made a television appearance or announcement. In addition, with cable as competition, broadcast stations became less likely to give the president airtime. As a result of cable's dominance and influence, Baum and Kernell cite the need for new strategies when it comes to presidential television. Most notably, they suggested that Presidents limit the number of television announcements to only those which were deemed most important. This would lead to an increase in viewers willing to watch these announcements.

New Media Effect

The influence of new media on candidate evaluation has become an increasingly important issue as the Internet becomes a more widely available medium. Tolbert and McNeil (2003) suggested that as the Internet became more widely utilized as a source of information about political candidates, voters are more likely to be well informed and participate in the political process. Tolbert and McNeil concluded that the Internet could help to fill a void that is left by broadcast and cable news. The void that has occurred with broadcast and cable news is an increasing amount of distrust among citizens. According to Tolbert and McNeil (2003), cable and broadcast news is riddled with gatekeepers and newsmakers with biases. While they stated that increased use of the Internet in political campaigns should increase political participation, Tolbert and McNeil also believed that increased Internet use could have a negative effect on political participation. At the time that this article was written, Internet use was most frequently afforded to those who were already predisposed to political participations: upper-middle class, college educated citizens. Tolbert and McNeil reasoned that if political information was more heavily distributed on the Internet, groups without access to these resources may find themselves with a lack of information—leading to a lack of motivation to participate politically. Tolbert and McNeil concluded that new media, specifically the Internet, provided a solid opportunity to disseminate information and influence voter choice.

Morris (2002) attempted to see if new media sources dramatized news more so than traditional media sources, and if so, if this would ultimately negatively affect perceptions of political leaders. Morris conducted an experiment in which one group of participants was exposed to what they thought was real news. The news presented to the first group was actually falsified, overly-dramatized news, while a second group was exposed to undramtic news. Through this experiment, Morris came to the conclusion that in reality overly-dramatic news did

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have a negative influence on perceptions of political leaders. Morris also found that those participants who were exposed to overly-dramatic news were much more hostile toward media sources than those who were exposed to undramatic news.

While the dramatization of new media news sources has been a cause for concern, the concept of new media encouraging ideological and partisan extremism has been discussed. Baum and Groeling (2008) looked at three distinct online news sources in an effort to distinguish the newsworthiness of their headlines in comparison to wire service headlines. They focused on DailyKos.com, FreeRepublic.com, and FoxNews.com, because "one clear manner in which the Internet appears to differ from other mass media is the degree of niche targeting of political information-oriented Web sites" (Baum and Groeling, 2008, pg. 347). Baum and Groeling acknowledged that one of the principle difficulties in establishing a media bias is deciding what a bias inherently is. To avoid this problem, they compared the headlines from the aforementioned partisan outlets to those that are least likely to show bias—namely the wire services Reuters and the Associated Press. Baum and Groeling (2008) accomplished this by completing a content analysis of the partisan news outlets and the wire services. In doing so, Baum and Groeling assumed that non-partisan news outlets, whether traditional or new media, did not select news stories because they would be advantageous to a certain political party. However, they did believe that this would be a driving factor behind partisan news outlets.

Ultimately, Baum and Groeling found that DailyKos.com, FreeRepublic.com, and FoxNews.com all showed an inherent bias in news story selection. They found that each of these news sources was more likely to choose stories based on their implied ability to benefit the political party most closely associated with their ideologies. Although they admitted that the Associated Press showed a slight slant at times, overall wire services were markedly less biased

in their story choice. Baum and Groeling cited a 2006 survey by the PEW Center on Media Consumption that found that while fewer people tend to follow partisan news sources, those who do follow partisan news source are "more likely than typical individuals to discuss politics with others and, in doing so, to disseminate their views to the broader public" (2008, pg. 360). This eventually suggested that an increase of new media use for partisan means would have a large impact on the amount of partisan ideas disseminated.

Social Media Effect

During the 2008 Presidential Election, social media took off as a viable way for candidates to disseminate information. Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) attempted to determine whether social media usage actually had an impact on political self-efficacy and involvement. Kushin and Yamamoto recognized the drastic rise in use of social media by political candidates during the 2008 Election, and the rise in those who utilized social media resources: *"27% of adults younger than 30 reported obtaining campaign information from social network sites compared to 4% of adults age 30 to 39 and only 1% older than 40"* (2010, pg. 613).

Kushin and Yamamoto used a survey that was completed two weeks prior to the 2008 Presidential Election at a large Northwestern University. The survey focused on three major factors of political involvement on the Internet: "attention to social media for campaign information, online expression about the campaign, and attention to traditional Internet sources for campaign information" (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010, pg. 616). It was expected that attention to social media during the 2008 Election would be positively connected to political self-efficacy and involvement—however, the survey found no significant positive connection between the two. Kushin and Yamamoto reasoned that at this point, social media platforms may simply be too new to have any significant impact on political self-efficacy and involvement.

They suggested that further studies continue to explore the possibility that social media has an effect on political beliefs and involvement in the political process.

In terms of social media, Facebook has come out as a frontrunner in terms of peer-to-peer interaction. In a political campaign, social media resources, like Facebook, have allowed voters to become more politically engaged with candidates. Johnson and Perlmutter (2010) stated that while previous elections gave candidates the ability to control their image and message, social media translated to "a new era where the candidates no longer have complete control over the message" (pg. 555). This idea lent itself to a new type of political campaign: one that still focused on traditional campaign techniques, but also incorporated and embraced the digital revolution of social media.

Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) also discussed the concept of candidates losing control of their message. They reasoned that on social media, an idea could go from a Tweet, to a blog post, to a national story in a matter of hours with almost no gatekeepers. This lack of gatekeepers, however, also suggested a lack of fact-checkers and moderators: this ultimately meant that some of the information presented through social media was false. But, the nature of social media means that once information is put on the Internet it can never be retracted, regardless of whether it is true or false. Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) concluded that while social media can be detrimental to political candidates, if candidates accepted social media for what it is instead of fighting it, the benefits of reaching networks upon networks on untapped populations far outweighs any negative effects.

Summary and Hypotheses

The evolution of new media and social media has caused differing opinions about the impact it has during political elections. As these types of technology evolve and change, their use

by young voters evolves and changes. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to quantify the impact that these sources have on young voters. Prior research is quickly outdated and, in some cases, attempts to look at social media sources that are simply too new. These problems all contribute to the lack of agreement surrounding whether or not social media is an effective tool for targeting young voters during presidential elections.

In the earliest cases, such as Howard Dean's run for the Democratic nomination in 2004, social media was relied upon too heavily—to the point where those not engaged with these technologies fell out of the loop when it came to new information on the candidate. However, the reliance placed on social media during the 2008 Election been hailed as both revolutionary and non-impactful. Some claim that the sources used during the 2008 Election were simply too new to be able to accurately measure their impact.

Moving forward, how will social media sources influence the outcome of presidential campaigns? Will social media have any influence? Specifically: What effect do social media have on political participation? And what effect do social media have on voter choice? I hypothesize, based upon past research, that:

> H_1: The presence of social media in a presidential campaign will
>   positively affect participation among voters aged 18-24.

> H_2: The presence of social media in a presidential campaign will
>   positively affect support of that candidate among voters
>   aged 18-24.

Research Design and Methodology

In order to test my hypotheses, I designed an experimental study where a fictitious candidate's use of social media (used/did not use) and the candidate's partisanship (Republican/Democrat) were manipulated. The experimental manipulation was embedded within a survey questionnaire measuring general political attitudes and behavior (See Appendix A for

the survey. See Appendixes B-E for the experimental manipulations). The experiment then is a classic 2 (media usage) x 2 (candidate's partisanship) factorial design.

Participants

The participants in this study were 166 undergraduates at a regional liberal arts university in the northeast enrolled in general education classes. Participants were not told the purpose of the study prior to taking the survey, but they were debriefed on its purpose following completion. Respondents were first asked standard SRC/NES questions to measure their political participation, partisan and ideological self-identification, weekly political information gathering habits, and candidate information gathering methods. Participants were then asked to read a candidate brochure that included background information, political experience, policy views, and social media use. Following the candidate brochure respondents were asked to state their likelihood of participating in the election, state their likelihood of voting for the candidate, and evaluate their driving reasons for choosing to support or not support the candidate. Finally, respondents were asked for standard demographic characteristics.

Measures

The independent variables in this study were the experimental manipulations: candidate partisanship and social media use. Candidate partisanship was experimentally manipulated as either Democrat or Republican in an attempt to see whether the political party of the candidate made a difference in a respondent's choice to vote for the candidate. Social media use was manipulated by a reference in the candidate brochure with the candidate either being very active on social media or completely inactive. This allowed for analysis of the role that social media plays in voter choice and political participation.

Two dependent variables were of primary interest, with both being measured on a five

point scale. The first dependent variable was the likelihood that the participant would vote in the

upcoming election where the candidate that (s)he read about in the candidate brochure was on

the ballot. Intention to vote was measured by the following question:

> On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree,
> how much do you agree with the following statement: I would vote
> in this election.

The second dependent variable is the respondent's likelihood of voting for the candidate

and is measured by the question:

> On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree,
> how much do you agree with the following statement: I would vote
> for John Smith in this election.

Analysis and Results

The hypotheses lend themselves to be tested using an analysis of variance (ANOVA)

statistical analysis. I analyzed whether either of the experimentally manipulated factors (focusing

mainly on presence or absence social media) or their interaction, had a statistically significant

effect on either voter participation or voter choice. Given the limited sample size, conclusions

were drawn with caution.

I expected that the presence of social media would cause a significant increase on both

voter participation and positive voter choice. However, prior to analyzing my data it was

important to recognize that candidate party could play a role in lowering the significance of my

results. For example, a respondent may not have had a positive likelihood for voting for a

candidate because they did not agree with the ideology or issue positions of a particular

candidate regardless of their social media use.

My results did find that participants rely heavily on social media in order to gain

information on political candidates. However, the vast majority of respondents utilized Facebook

much more than other types of social media. 46.4% of respondents utilized Facebook to obtain

information on political candidates 7 days per week, while only 9% utilize Twitter and only 4%

utilize blogs at the same rate (See Figures 1-3).

Use of Facebook

Figure 1: The number of days per week that respondents utilize Facebook for information on political candidates.
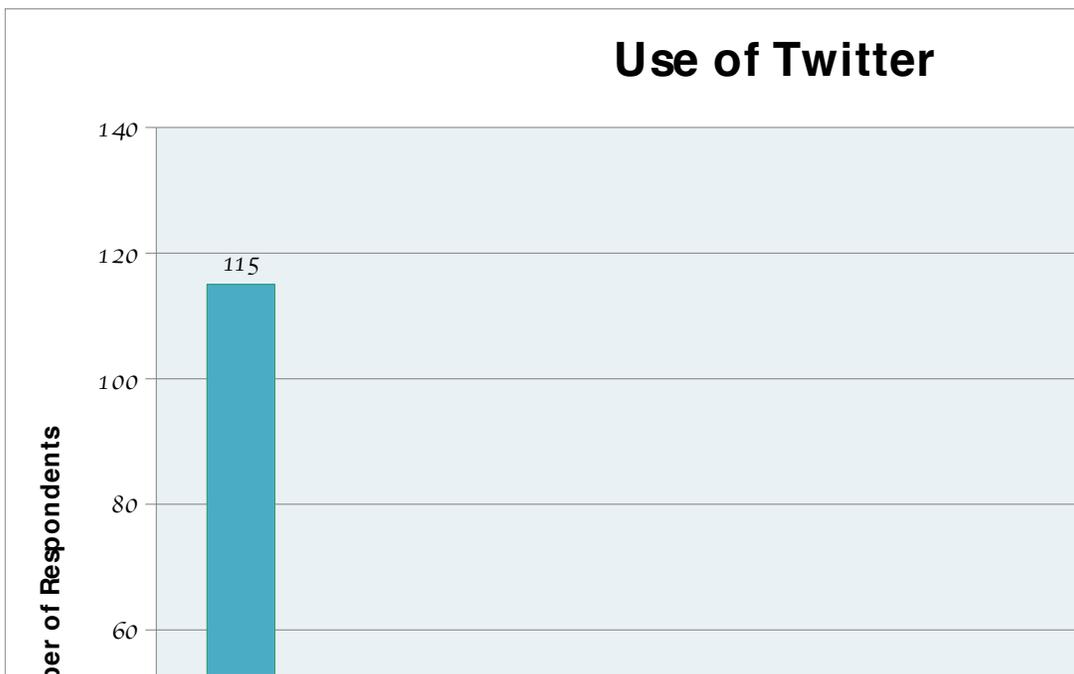
Use of Twitter

Figure 2: The number of days per week that respondents utilize Twitter for information on
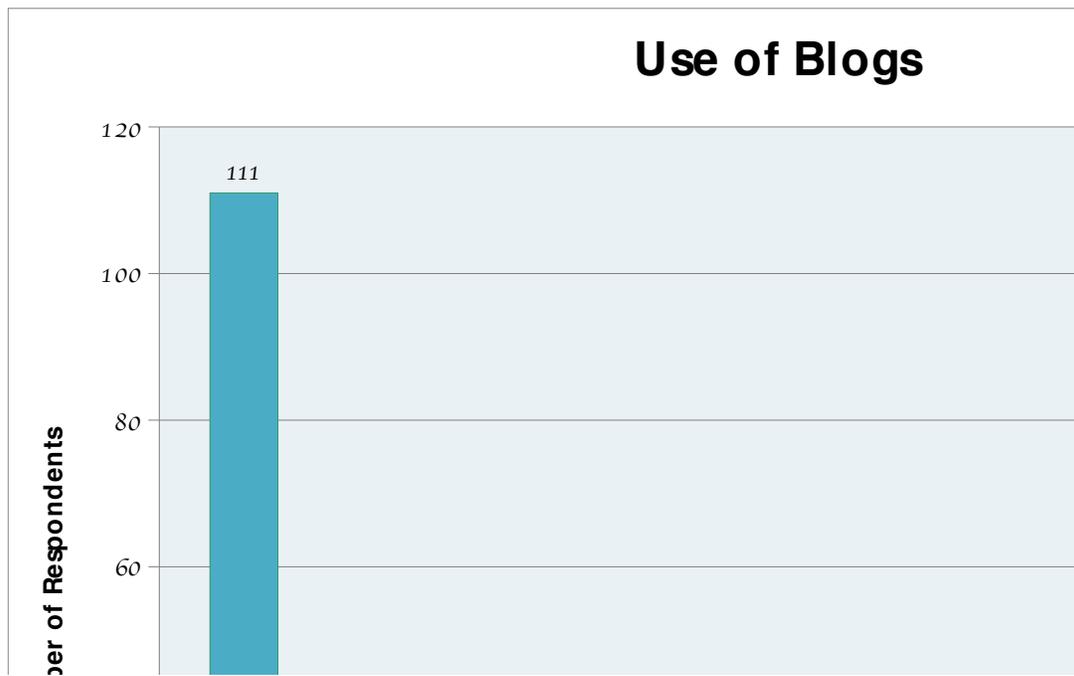
Use of Blogs

Figure 3: The number of days per week that respondents utilize blogs for information on political candidates

According to the results from an ANOVA statistical analysis, there was no relationship between social media usage and voter participation. As social media usage was manipulated, there was no change in how likely a respondent was to participate in the election. As a result my first hypothesis (H_1), that the presence of social media usage would positively effect voter participation, was not supported.

My second hypothesis (H_2), that the presence of social media would positively effect likelihood of voting for a candidate, was also not supported in the way I had originally predicted. However, I did find a statistically significant relationship between social media and voter choice, with a significance of p=.026. Although the relationship was not as I had originally predicted, there was clearly a relationship present. Controlling for respondent partisanship, I found that a presence or absence of social media had no effect on the evaluation of the Democratic candidate with a mean for both Democratic candidates of 3.63. However, for Republican candidates the

presence of social media led to a significantly more negative candidate evaluation. The mean for the Republican candidate who did not use social media was 3.23, while the mean for the Republican candidate who used social media was 3.05.

Discussion and Conclusion

When analyzing this data, there are several explanations that could ultimately account for the fact that neither of my original hypotheses were supported. In terms of participation, the fact that my manipulation of social media use had no significant effect on participation could be attributed to the high level of importance that society places on voting. As Ruggerio (2010) points out, social pressure has proved to be one of the most effective get out the vote tactics. Similarly, Gerber and Rogers (2009 pg.187) found that "a citizen's intention to vote in a given election is directly affected by her perception of whether others are going to vote in the election." As prior research has shown, social pressures to participate in an election could likely outweigh any experimental manipulation. Because voters feel such a pressure to say that they will participate, the presence or absence of social media makes no impact on their stated decision to participate.

For participants who received a Democratic candidate brochure, the presence or absence of social media had no significant impact on whether or not they chose to vote for the candidate. For both the social media and no social media manipulations of the Democratic candidate brochure, the likelihood that the respondent would vote for the candidate was equal with a mean of 3.63. For Republican candidates, the presence of social media actually had a negative effect on their candidate evaluation. The Republican candidate who utilized social media received a mean of 3.05 in regards the participant's likelihood for voting for him in an election. However, the Republican candidate who did not utilize social media received a mean of 3.23 for the same
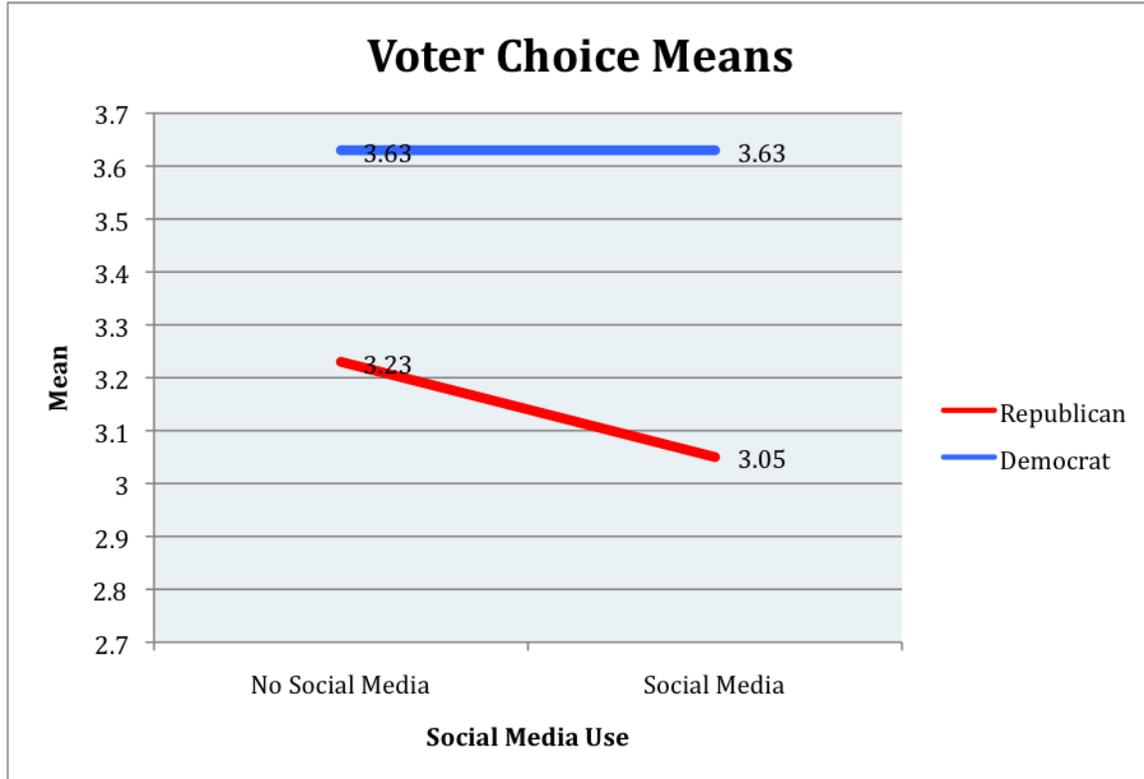
question (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: The relationship between social media use by a presidential candidate and voters' likelihood of voting for that candidate

Democratic candidates were evaluated equally regardless of social media usage by their campaign, while Republican candidates who did not use social media were evaluated more positively than Republican candidates who used social media as part of their campaigns. Overall, Democratic candidates were more positively evaluated than Republican candidates. These findings are contrary to what I initially predicted would be found—I believed that as social media was manipulated, voter choice would change, specifically, that the presence of social media would lead to a more positive candidate evaluations regardless of the candidate's partisan identification.

In the case of Democratic candidates, the lack of any relationship suggests that social

media has no impact on how young citizens, and potential voters, choose their candidates. This is surprising as Democratic candidates like Howard Dean and Barack Obama emerged as social media leaders and revolutionized how presidential campaigning is done. I believe that this lack of relationship can be explained by the inherent media savvyness of this generation. Social media during a presidential election is not something that makes an impact because it is simply expected. With the most recent presidential election for many of these participants being Barack Obama's 2008 run, the use of social media was not even a question. As a result, it is simply regarded as the norm as opposed to the exception.

According to the Pew Research Center's *Internet and American Life Project* (2009 pg. 22) "some 55% of all adults – and 74% of all internet users -- said they went online for news and information about the election or to communicate with others about the race." In addition, Pew (2009) also found that 52% of American's who use a social networking site utilize it for political purposes. During this election, Democratic voters utilized social media more than Republicans (Pew 2009). As a result, it can be said that Democratic voters, and especially young Democratic voters, were simply initiated in to the culture of social media campaigning before Republican voters.

For Republican candidates, however, there was a significant relationship between social media and voter choice. However, this relationship was the inverse of what I hypothesized. When social media was present in the Republican candidate brochure, participants were less likely to vote for the candidate then when social media was not present for the Republican candidate. This finding was odd as the sample of voters were still in the 18-24 age range—a generation who relies heavily on social media to gain information on political candidates (See Figures 1-3).

This ultimately begs the question: what does this relationship mean? Although Republican candidates have become bigger users of social media since 2008, the emergence of social media as a Republican norm seems to have been rejected by young voters. I believe the reason for this is twofold: first, because social media originally presented itself as a Democratic campaign technique and second, because the use of social media propagates the perceived "Cult of Personality." The first concern, that social media is a Democratic institution, directly explains the relationship found between social media use and voter choice. If social media is inherently seen as something that is done by Democratic candidates, than its use by Republican candidates will automatically be negative. As Democrats were the first, and most outspoken, users and proponents of social media as a campaign tool, social media may have an intrinsic reputation of being a partisan campaign tactic.

The second explanation, that social media may propel the "Cult of Personality" forward, is also of concern for Republican candidates. Social media is, at its core, linked to popularity. For politicians the goal is to have more "friends" or more "followers" in order to get a message out to the greatest number of people. Politicians who use social media are seen as being more relatable than those who do not. While respondents viewed this in a positive light for the Democrat candidate, it was clearly viewed negatively for the Republican candidate. Instead of a candidate who has more Facebook posts and Tweets, Republican candidates who focus on the issues are clearly better received. Social media dictates that the messages presented are short and direct: with Twitter limiting Tweets to 140 characters and social media generally being a medium utilized for quick messaging. This brevity of issue discussion is clearly a problem for young voters when it comes to Republican candidates.

Although both of my original hypotheses were not supported, there still seems to be room for further research regarding the influence of social media on young voters during presidential campaigns. The nature of new and social media are that they are constantly changing and evolving. As such, new research constantly has to be completed in order to effectively measure their impact. Future extensions of this study would need to consider both sample and survey design in order to appropriately expand upon my findings. A more representative sample, broadening the age range of 18-24 year olds to 18-98 year olds is in order. A sample of college students aged 18-24 is problematic in that this age group is younger and therefore lacks experience in the political realm. In addition, the characteristics of this sample group may tend to bias the results.

When expanding on this study, it would be helpful to include a two-candidate presentation. This will provide an opportunity for participants to directly compare two candidates —this would be more realistic of actual elections. A two candidate race could either be inter-party (i.e. one republican and one democrat), or intra-party (a primary setting with either two republicans or two democrats). In each setting one candidate would utilize social media, while the other would not use social media. For the primary campaign design, this would allow the participant to directly evaluate candidates with similar beliefs, with the only experimental manipulation being social media use.

Social media has made an impact on the world of political campaigns. Regardless of whether the impact is positive or negative, in the case of Republican candidates, does not change the fact that social media clearly does influence young voters aged 18-24. This study simply illustrated that social media usage by candidates is not always a good thing. While the campaigns of Barack Obama and Howard Dean have shown the positives of utilizing social media in

engaging previously underutilized young voters, the findings of this study show the negatives

that can be associated with it. It is important to recognize that however popular it may be

becoming, social media usage by presidential candidates is not always the most effective way to

reach young voters; and in some cases, its use can actually be detrimental.

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Appendix A

<u>Introduction</u>: The following survey is being conducted in conjunction with an undergraduate research project at Roger Williams University. Participation in this survey is voluntary and can be stopped at any time. All responses will remain anonymous and results from the survey will be used in an academic research project and will be presented at an academic conference.

As a thank-you for participating, a raffle will be held after all survey sessions have been completed. The prizes for the raffle will be (10) $10 Dunkin' Donuts gift cards. In order to be entered in to the raffle, a respondent must fill out the appropriate entry form (which includes an email address and cell phone number). This entry form will not be linked with your survey, and any information given will not be used for any purpose other than the raffle.

<u>Instructions</u>: Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong responses. Please be sure to clearly mark your responses to each question with a darkened mark in the appropriate circle. For questions which ask for an explanation, please answer in the space provided.

Section One
The questions in section one are intended to gain more information about your political behavior.

1. Were you eligible to vote in the 2008 Presidential Election?
   - o Yes
   - o No

   (If yes, please proceed to Question 2. If no, please proceed to Question 3.)

2. Who did you vote for in the 2008 Presidential Election?
   - o Barack Obama
   - o John McCain
   - o Ralph Nader
   - o Other (please specify): _____

3. On a scale of 1-5, where 1= very inactive and 5=very active, how active would you say you are in the political process?

Very Inactive	Inactive	Neutral	Active	Very Active
1	2	3	4	5
o	o	o	o	o

4. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a republican, a democrat, an independent or what? If you do not consider yourself a republican, a democrat, or an independent, please indicate your partisanship in the space provided below.

Strong Democrat	Moderate Democrat	Independent	Moderate Republican	Strong Republican
1	2	3	4	5
o	o	o	o	o

Other (please specify): _____

5. From the scale below, please choose the term that best describes your political ideology.

Liberal	Moderately Liberal	Moderate	Moderately Conservative	Conservative
1	2	3	4	5
○	○	○	○	○

6. On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree, how much do you agree with the following statement: I plan on voting in the 2012 Presidential Election.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5
○	○	○	○	○

Section Two

The questions in section two are intended to gain more information about your use of media. Please choose the number of days per week, ranging from 0-7, that you utilize each of the following sources of media for information about political candidates.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Print Newspapers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Print Magazines	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
News or Talk Radio	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Broadcast Television News	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cable Television News	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Online Newspapers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Facebook	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
E-Mail Notifications	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify):_____	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Section Three

The questions in section three are designed to gain information on your use of media in regards to political candidates. Please respond to the following questions using the provided scale with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Neutral** **3**	**Agree** **4**	**Strongly Agree** **5**
I listen to news stories about political candidates before voting.	○	○	○	○	○
If a political candidate does not have a web page, I will be less likely to vote for him/her.	○	○	○	○	○
When researching a political candidate on the Internet, availability of information on their beliefs is important to me.	○	○	○	○	○
I follow political candidates on Facebook.	○	○	○	○	○
The Internet is a reliable source for information on political candidates.	○	○	○	○	○
Information presented on cable news about political candidates is generally true.	○	○	○	○	○
I take the advice of parents before voting for a political candidate.	○	○	○	○	○
If a political candidate does not use Facebook, I will be less likely to vote for him/her.	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy researching political candidates on the Internet.	○	○	○	○	○
Cable news is a reliable source for information on political candidates.	○	○	○	○	○
I follow political candidates on Twitter.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I take the advice of friends before voting for a political candidate.	○	○	○	○	○
I look at political candidate's web pages.	○	○	○	○	○
If a candidate wants to appeal to me, he/she should use social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○
I read political blogs.	○	○	○	○	○
Information presented on the Internet about political candidates is generally true.	○	○	○	○	○
I would follow a candidate of a different political party than myself on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.).	○	○	○	○	○

Section Four

In the following section you will be presented with a candidate. Please read over the provided information on the candidate and respond to the questions on the following page.

<u>*Please note:*</u> *The term "social media" below refers to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs.*

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">John Smith
Republican for President
2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Born in 1960
B.A. in Political Science
MBA in Economics
Ph.D. Economics

Captain in the United States Army

Married with three children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Experience</td>
<td>1994-2000: State House of Representatives
2000-2004: United States House of Representatives
2004-2010: United States Senate
2010-2012: Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Stances</td>
<td>Pro-life
Gay marriage is a State by State issue
In favor of off-shore drilling
Against government run health care
In favor of border security
In favor of tax cuts to stimulate the economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Usage</td>
<td>No social media use</td>
</tr>
</table>

1. On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree, how much do you agree with the following statement: I would vote in this election.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5
○	○	○	○	

2. On a scale of 1-5 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree, how much do you agree with the following statement: I would vote for John Smith in this election.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5
○	○	○	○	○

For the following questions, please use the information about John Smith to choose the most appropriate answer.

3. Which factor was the most influential in how likely you were to vote for John Smith?
   - Political Party
   - Background Information
   - Political Experience
   - Issue Stances
   - Social Media Usage

   Can you please explain why this factor had the most influence on your decision to vote for John Smith?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Section Five

In this last section we would like to know a few things about you.

1. What is your sex:
    - o   Male
    - o   Female
    - o   Other

2. What is your age?
    - o   18
    - o   19
    - o   20
    - o   21
    - o   22
    - o   Over 22

3. What is your academic class?
    - o   Freshman
    - o   Sophomore
    - o   Junior
    - o   Senior

John Smith Republican for President 2012	
Background	Born in 1960 B.A. in Political Science MBA in Economics Ph.D. Economics Captain in the United States Army Married with three children
Political Experience	1994-2000: State House of Representatives 2000-2004: United States House of Representatives 2004-2010: United States Senate 2010-2012: Governor
Issue Stances	Pro-life Gay marriage is a State by State issue In favor of off-shore drilling Against government run health care In favor of border security In favor of tax cuts to stimulate the economy
Social Media Usage	No social media use

John Smith Republican for President 2012	
Background	Born in 1960 B.A. in Political Science MBA in Economics Ph.D. Economics Captain in the United States Army Married with three children
Political Experience	1994-2000: State House of Representatives 2000-2004: United States House of Representatives 2004-2010: United States Senate 2010-2012: Governor
Issue Stances	Pro-life Gay marriage is a State by State issue In favor of off-shore drilling Against government run health care In favor of border security In favor of tax cuts to stimulate the economy
Social Media Usage	Utilizes YoutTube Active on Facebook Active on Twitter Sends out daily email updates Frequently written about on blogs

Appendix D

John Smith **Democrat for President** **2012**	
Background	Born in 1960 B.A. in Political Science MBA in Economics Ph.D. Economics Captain in the United States Army Married with three children
Political Experience	1994-2000: State House of Representatives 2000-2004: United States House of Representatives 2004-2010: United States Senate 2010-2012: Governor
Issue Stances	Pro-choice Against a federal ban on gay marriage In favor of investing in alternative energy sources Pro-health coverage for all In favor of a path to citizenship for all immigrants In favor of middle class tax cuts
Social Media Usage	No social media use

	John Smith Democrat for President 2012
Background	Born in 1960 B.A. in Political Science MBA in Economics Ph.D. Economics Captain in the United States Army Married with three children
Political Experience	1994-2000: State House of Representatives 2000-2004: United States House of Representatives 2004-2010: United States Senate 2010-2012: Governor
Issue Stances	Pro-choice Against a federal ban on gay marriage In favor of investing in alternative energy sources Pro-health coverage for all In favor of a path to citizenship for all immigrants In favor of middle class tax cuts
Social Media Usage	Utilizes YoutTube Active on Facebook Active on Twitter Sends out daily email updates Frequently written about on blogs