The Evolving Influence Of The Internet On Presidential Candidates, Issues, And Voter Opinions

Pamela A. Mulligan
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Thesis Advisor

Michael S. McGraw, Ph.D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web is revolutionizing the way we choose the President of the United States. It is influencing our views, changing our minds, and presenting new presidential choices. The World Wide Web is permeating American lives and changing the way we interact with our families, coworkers, elected officials, and the general public. With the wealth of information available on the Web, each American now can interact with candidates and have a powerful voice in American politics whether they be Democrat, Republican, Independent, woman, man, Black, White, Hispanic or Asian, straight or gay. The World Wide Web is shaping a new era in American politics; an era in which the American people will have a stronger voice in the selection of the President.

Bush versus Gore in 2000 “was a made-for-the-Web story,” announced Rusty Coats (as cited in Neuwirth, 2000, paragraph 7) of startribune.com.

In homes and offices, for weeks, millions looked to the Web for all election news all the time. They covered the presidential election that refused to die. Newspaper Web sites moved beyond simply posting early stories from the print products. Online editors continually added “bells and whistles” to their sites in an attempt to keep the daily dose of legal machinations between George W. Bush and Al Gore fresh and fun, as autumn turned toward winter. (Neuwirth, 2000, paragraph 1)

The question is: Are presidential elections made-for-the-Web? The Web is changing the face of presidential elections, emerging as an easy and convenient method by which the electorate can gather information, formulate opinions, and state views
regarding presidential candidates in real time. In the 2000 American Presidential
election, where the terms “recount” and “chad” became household words, individuals
were able to keep track of events via a multitude of Web sites, including
ABCNEWS.com, CNN.com, and algore.com, and by using the Web as an interactive
medium. Hoffman (1999) spoke to the current diversity and interactivity of the Internet:

With the Web, you’re able to cobble together what is essentially a never-ending,
personally assembled newscast, with sources as diverse as the adjuncts of TV
news operations (ABCNEWS.com), online magazines (Salon.com), and less-
reliable sources like the Drudge Report (drudgereport.com), the muckraking
online tabloid. (paragraph 4)

The use of the Internet as a medium for conducting a political campaign began
with the 1996 election Web sites of Bob Dole and Bill Clinton. These sites were used by
the respective campaigns to help the candidates get their message directly to voters and
provide in-depth information to allow voters to develop their own opinions. In fact, at
the end of the first 1996 presidential debate, Republican candidate Bob Dole announced
his Web address and encouraged voters to visit (Davis, 1999). This is believed to be the
first personal Web advertisement for presidential candidates. However, during the 1996
election, the campaigns did not fully utilize the Web’s interactivity.

In the presidential election of 2000, campaigns via the Internet more actively
attempted to influence voters. Mike Wendland (as cited in Trombly, 2001) stated that
during the 2000 election, the Internet became a mainstream source for news on the
candidates and the election. The Internet was a key factor in voters’ lives and will
continue to be a factor as time goes on.
A survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (as cited in Trombly, 2001) found that nearly 20% of Americans went online for presidential campaign news, more than double than in 1996. Furthermore, the poll showed that 43% said the Internet affected their voting decisions, an increase of over 31% from 1996.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the Internet is influencing voter opinions during presidential campaigns. The author will explore the brief history of the use of the Internet as a way to effect voter opinions, as well as attempt to determine what role the Internet is playing and will continue to play in future presidential elections.

Research Question

How is the Internet and its multitude of Web sites influencing voter opinions on U.S. Presidential candidates and issues? This study explores the effect of various Web sites including candidate sites, news organizations, and politically-oriented Web sites on voter opinions. Analysis from a poll of voters who voted in the New Jersey 2001 primary election will be utilized to ascertain the degree to which their opinions are shaped by the Internet.

Subsidiary Questions

In an attempt to understand the effect the Internet and various Web sites have on voter opinions about U.S. Presidential candidates and issues, this study will also address the following questions:

1. What has been the historical role of traditional media, including network television, radio, and newspapers, and nontraditional media, including cable television and talk shows?

2. What role did the Internet play in the last two presidential elections?
3. To what degree did the Internet influence voter opinions in these elections?

4. Did the wealth of information available on the Internet and Web sites grow over the past election cycle?

5. What roles do economic stature and education play on the degree of influence that the Internet has on voter behavior?

6. What are the advantages of additional information from Internet sources regarding the presidential decision? What are the disadvantages?

7. To what extent is the Internet going to further permeate the political decision-making process, from the actual voting process to targeting individual voters and various voting constituencies?

The author answers these questions through a review of pertinent literature related to the Internet and presidential campaigns. This primarily forward-looking approach at the effect of the Internet on voter opinions and decisions in presidential campaigns will include a survey of voters in the 2001 New Jersey Primary Election, which is explained in more detail in Chapter Three. This will help determine where the Internet will take us in the future and what additional analyses may need to be undertaken.

Need for the Study

This is one of what the author presumes will be many studies that will analyze the effect of the Internet on voter opinion. As a new medium, the Internet is just beginning to play a major role in determining political opinions, and in doing so, affecting the results of major elections. Many studies have been done in the past analyzing various other media, including radio, newspaper, network television, and cable television. Each of these media have affected political opinions and, as Richard Davis (1999) has
mentioned in his book, *The Web of Politics - The Internet's Impact on the American Political System*, the media has been and will remain one of the important players in American politics. What the Internet is adding to the mix is the selectivity and interactivity that is characteristic of this medium.

As a media professional, political science graduate, and political aficionado, the author postulates that more voters may become involved in the political decision-making process and more alternative presidential candidates may gain exposure in future presidential elections due to the influence of the Internet. The elections of 1996 and 2000 were only the beginning of what the author believes will become the most influential medium in the history of presidential elections.

Other studies on this subject are on the horizon, such as a study being completed by Syracuse University associate professor Steve Davis, at the university’s S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. In contrast to my assertion above, Professor Davis is finding in his initial research that the Internet may not get people more involved and excited about political campaigns (Study shows Internet not likely to affect 2000 vote, 2000). Others are framing the Internet as a vehicle where candidates who previously would have received little or no attention are gaining exposure “buzz” momentum for fund raising, and critical mass. The Internet is also allowing voters to become familiar with campaigns that do not have the benefit of affiliation with a major political party (Lynch, 2001). The Internet has already dramatically increased the exposure of major candidates, such as Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican candidate (now President) George W. Bush, as well as their issues and images (Morton, 2000).
A broader look at the available literature is necessary, as well as a compilation of actual voter opinions, to determine the effect of the Internet on voter opinions on presidential candidates and issues.

Objectives

In designing a study that examines the role of the Internet in voter decisions, the author identified three main objectives. The first was to explore the historical role of media and its effect on voter opinions. The second was to determine if and how the Internet has affected past presidential decisions. Finally, this study attempts to understand how the Internet may impact voter opinion in future presidential elections.

Definition of Terms

1. **Internet**: an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the world.

2. **World Wide Web**: a part of the Internet designed to allow easier navigation of the network through the use of graphical user interfaces and hypertext links between different addresses, also called the Web.

3. **Digital Divide**: In just about every country, a certain percentage of people have the best information technology that society has to offer. These people have the most powerful computers, the best telephone service, and fastest Internet service, as well as a wealth of content and training relevant to their lives. There is another group of people. They are the people who do not have access to the newest or best computers, the most reliable telephone service, or the fastest or most convenient Internet services. The difference between these two groups is what we call the Digital Divide (About the digital divide, 2001).
14. **Cyberwarrior:** promoters of candidates on their own time via the Internet to further public knowledge about their candidate (Wayne, 2000).

15. **Tell-a-Friend:** promoting a candidate by passing on the candidate’s information or opinion via the Internet.

16. **Web Marketing:** promoting a product, service or person (i.e., presidential candidate) via the Internet through e-mail marketing, banner advertising, viral marketing (word of mouth marketing), Web sites, and other Web promotions.

Limitations

This study is limited to the use of the Internet to impact voter opinions in presidential elections. This study will not analyze, except for establishing historical context, the effect of other media on voter opinions in presidential elections, including but not limited to network television, radio, newspaper, and cable television. This study will touch upon the topic of the “Digital Divide”. While the author believes that the Digital Divide may account for differences in the way the Internet affects voter opinion in presidential elections, it is such a large topic itself that future studies should be done to address it.

Much of the literature addressing the subject issue is from popular rather than academic sources. The author believes this is due to the current nature of the topic and believes full academic studies have not yet been completed.

Other limitations are related to the collection of information for this study. There are hundreds of references on the Internet from popular newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and journals about the subject topic; too many to discuss in this study. The author utilizes scholarly journals and books to provide a historical context about the
effect of the media and the Internet on voter opinion in past presidential elections, including the American Presidential election of 1996. Popular articles from Web sites, magazines, newsletters, and newspapers were used to develop the portion of this study regarding the American Presidential election of 2000 published prior to June 27, 2001.

To determine current and future use of the Internet by voters, the author conducted a survey of voters during the 2001 New Jersey primary election on June 26, 2001. The survey was limited to voters at polling centers in Central New Jersey.

Another limitation is related to the statistical reliability of the participants in the survey. While no personal information was requested in the survey, the survey participants were likely employed locally, stay-at-home parents, retirees, and politically-involved individuals who participate in primary elections. The author realizes that this sample cannot be representative of the thinking of all people in the United States on this topic. Furthermore, as indicated, those who vote in primary elections are generally more focused on political issues.
so with average donations of $110 (Stephcu, 2000). O’Leary (2001) found that this $3 million is even more impressive when it is considered that each of the contributions were in small denominations, meaning the number of supporters was substantial. McCain’s supporters claim that about 70% of Web contributors to his campaign were not reachable offline, which means they were not reachable through direct mail, television, and so forth.

Furthermore, McCain raised close to 6 million dollars when all was said and done. He amassed 131,708 e-mail addresses and a large quantity of volunteers to help with his interactive campaign. “The Internet,” claims Phil Novel (as cited in Glasser, 2000) from Politics Online, “is a great place for insurgents (like McCain)” (paragraph 3). Also, McCain used the Internet to grow his campaign operations base. In California McCain had 16,000 volunteer electronically. McCain also used the Internet to convince voters to change their party affiliation. California Secretary of State Bill Jones, (as cited in Glasser, 2000) estimated that 50,000 California voters converted to Republicans due to the online campaign. Lawrence (2000) agreed, crediting McCain with introducing a new energy and new interest to the Republican party. Via the Internet, his team tried to create a new subset of the Republican party called McCain Republicans.

Glasser (2000) further said that all of the candidates during election 2000 used the Internet as an innovative new medium to reach the voters. George W. Bush posted the names of his contributors on his Web site; Vice President Gore used the site to carry live Web casts of his events; Bill Bradley convinced the Federal Election Commission to match online contributions with federal dollars. However, it is Glasser’s contention that McCain capitalized most on this new medium during the election of 2000.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Powerful new links are being created between the voting public and presidential candidates. The World Wide Web is offering voters access to vast amounts of information, a diversity of perspectives, and new forums for sharing ideas about presidential candidates (Corrado, 1996). The Web began to be a factor in affecting voter political opinions in the 1996 presidential election. However it wasn’t until the 2000 election when the Web began to realize its promise as a revolutionary new medium, combining traditional media with interactivity to make for a combination that is sure to continue to change the face of presidential elections for years to come.

In contrast, Esther Dyson (2000) argues that despite the fact that half the U.S. population possesses Internet access, a very small number follow politics on the net, stating that “national politics is not interactive” (paragraph 1) and that voters are not actively influencing political candidates with this great medium. Dyson believes that if American voters are going to be passive and not take an active role in presidential campaigns, they will not derive any benefit from the Internet. However, the Internet can be coupled with grassroots efforts, enabling voters to collaborate with others, feel empowered, and effect change (Dyson, 2000).

The power of the Internet was exemplified in Senator John McCain’s run for the White House during 2000. Senator McCain raised over $3 million dollars online through effective Web marketing almost immediately after the New Hampshire primary and did
4. **Information dissemination**: This includes candidate name recognition and familiarity. It also means conveying image as well as issue information, and including facts about the opponent (Davis, 1999).

5. **Opinion gauge**: Opinion polls done on the Internet to see how visitors to the site feel about various issues (Davis, 1999).

6. **Chad**: Problem of punched-card voting systems – the stylus does not always fully remove the paper (chad) when voters attempt to make a hole in a ballot to select their candidate (Carey, 2000).

7. **Recount**: A second or fresh count.

8. **Traditional media**: Newspapers, television network news, radio news, newsmagazines, and news programs (Johnson, Braima, & Sothirajah, 1999).

9. **Nontraditional media**: Internet, talk shows e.g., Larry King Live, radio talk shows, for example, Rush Limbaugh, MTV, and late night talk shows. (Johnson, et al., 1999).

10. **Cyberpolitics**: Using the Internet to influence political decisions.

11. **Two-way symmetrical mode of communication**: Both the organization and the public can communicate directly with each other on an issue (McKeown & Plowman, 1999, p. 323).

12. **Mixed-motive model of communication**: Combining research and feedback from an audience and compromise to change behavior (McKeown & Plowman, 1999, p. 323).

13. **Votemobiles**: Mobile Internet access voting booths (Isenberg, 2001).
Historical Role of Traditional Media

Political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool (as cited in Davis, 1999) announced that "electronic communication, of which the Internet is the primary force, is the fourth stage in human communications development, following speech, writing, printing, and broadcasting" (p. 4). The Web, the major media development of this new century, is taking elements from every medium and giving them life.

Not only can information be immediately disseminated to millions, but those millions can then respond with an immediacy and personalization that previous media have never offered. It is important to take a look at the role that traditional media and other forms of non-traditional media have played in affecting political opinions about presidential candidates through the years.

Davis (1999) notes that newspapers, first published in the 1600s, were the first medium to be acknowledged as a breakthrough in providing American citizens with information on which to base selections among presidential candidates. Davis states that "The newspaper press became the cutting edge in man's battle against ignorance, isolation, superstition, autocracy, drift, and misunderstanding," (p. 28). Newspapers brought people together.

Ashley (2000) further asserts that newspapers were for over 60 years the top medium for campaigning and forming political opinions. They were rivaled by the advent of television and radio, and the ability of these new broadcasting media to depict the character of the candidates. Fico and Cote (1999) suggested that newspapers could have the tendency to be slanted towards various parties and candidates and thus influence the voter opinions. Daily news coverage by newspapers has been a credible way for
candidates and political parties to speak to voters, however, the newspaper can and has in
the past put it’s own spin on events and given more time to certain candidates, especially
candidates of major parties. Due to space limitations, it is difficult for newspapers and
other media to report in both a partisan and structural balance and to allow all candidates
true equal time and maximum exposure to the voting public.

Davis (1999) believed that new communications technologies during the 20th
century spawned a communications revolution, and new innovations in media followed.
After newspapers, radio entered the scene as a portable media which was truly a major
advance in informing the American public. Radio allowed for communication to a
multitude of people simultaneously.

After newspapers, Davis points out that television further influenced political
opinions by better allowing the voice and personality of the candidates to come through.
An unnamed local television journalist stated that, “the most outstanding of the
contributions that television can be expected to make to further democracy … will be its
unique usefulness as a means of public information” (Kisseloff, as cited in Davis, 1999,
p. 29).

The 1948 US presidential election is generally considered to be the first television
campaign (Stephen, 2000). Voters began to form their opinions by how the candidates
came across to them on television. Studies have established that television is the public’s
preferred method for receiving political information, however scholars have only begun
to document the effects of television on voter cognitions and behaviors, such as candidate
interest and information gain (Johnson et al., 2000). TV is great at showing the
characters and personalities of politicians, attributes that previous media did not
effectively convey (Ashley, 2000). Lynch (2001) agrees with Ashley, examining television’s influence on the voters through his look at the Nixon/Kennedy debate of 1960. The televised debate gave a definite advantage to Kennedy due to his polished good “television” looks. This helped him connect better with the American people.

McKeown and Plowman (1999) take this a step further, stating that through the immediacy of television the American public would be exposed to more direct forms of information including live feeds, debates, and so forth. Furthermore, due to relatively short segments, television omitted some of the subjective analysis that previously came through in newspaper articles. Davis (1999) stated that cable television further increased the viewing options of the American people by offering new politically-oriented networks, such as CNN and C-SPAN. This offered voters the chance to see unfiltered conferences, events, hearings, speeches, and debates in real time.

In each case, new media have established new methods by which the American people can access news information and form political opinions. And rather than replacing the old media, Davis (1999) claims that the new media simply enhanced and extended the existing media. Furthermore, the American audience is accustomed to the existing media and therefore will continue to have a distinct following due to their confidence in the information.

Now television, radio, and newspapers are all using the Web for their political coverage. ABC, NBC, CNN, USA Today, The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and many more are using their established presence to extend their reach and maintain their role as the primary dispensers of information to the public (Davis, 1999; Weber, 2000). Weber states that, in cyberspace, these media channels have
unlimited time and space to report on everything that transpires in the campaign and make the public aware. Airtime and column inches do not exist, and the size of the media organization does not matter. The voter does not need to decide which televised news program to watch; they can watch all of them which increases their exposure to more ideas (Palser, 2000). Morris (1999) further approves of this stating that broadcast channels no longer rule as the broadcast television audience is shrinking and voters are turning to the Internet for their political information.

The Internet’s Evolving Political Influence

More than half of U.S. households had access to the Internet in the first quarter of 2001 (Trombly, 2001). According to Wendland, (as cited in Trombly, 2001) “People have heard about it [the Internet], know how it works, and are increasingly comfortable with it. We are now a point-and-click society” (paragraph 10). In fact, Glass (2000) adds, U.S. adult Internet users passed the 150 million mark in 2000, which is greater than the size of the U.S. electorate.

Davis (1999) supports this by stating that the Internet’s power to communicate from candidate to voter through various Internet-based sources is revolutionary. Internet sources range from individuals in e-mail communications, to multi-users in a Listserve or Usenet group, to a group of journalists on a Web page. The senders can be professionals or just everyday voters. The recipients can be one person or millions.

Marinucci (2000) points out that the Internet has opened up a two-way channel of communication that is personal and interactive. Trombly (2001) agrees stating that the ease of access to information, such as the vote tally during the 2000 presidential election, was much more easily retrieved on the Internet than waiting for a newscaster to present
the information on television. The Internet excels at getting to stories you may have missed on television, radio, and the newspaper, and finding more obscure topics that traditional media just won’t cover. You can retrieve a multitude of information any time, day or night, on your time. Trombly states this is the unique nature of this revolutionary medium.

This new medium is certainly changing the campaign scene. Dickerson (2000) asserts that the Internet is changing our political culture. “Cyberpolitics” has emerged. Washington’s direct mail and fundraising professionals are learning e-language and fast learning and employing Web strategies.

Melillo (2000) in her study of the digital democracy, makes a strong case for the future of the Internet in American politics. Presidential candidates need a platform to communicate to the American people that is not as expensive as television. Campaign staffers are communicating with supporters of their candidate instantly and 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Likewise, Shields (2000) and Corrado (1996) support this perspective. Shields (2000) says that no other medium can match the personalization and quick response time of this revolutionary, yet evolving communication vehicle. Corrado (1996) points out that the new forms of communication certainly suggest the potential for a revitalized democracy in which citizens rather than special-interest lobbyists will have a voice in politics (Corrado, 1996). The Web will allow more communication between voters and the candidates and may make it more interesting for more voters to get involved.

In contrast, Ashley (2001) suggests that the Internet will not replace other forms of more traditional media. It will, however, transform them, but may also provide the
power for people who could care less about campaigns and politics to ignore them entirely. In this regard, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) of The Washington Monthly state:

The first presidential election of the 21st century may go down in history as the moment when campaigning disappeared into private space. Eighty years ago, radio allowed people to hear candidates by their firesides for the first time. Thirty years later, television added pictures, which transformed even party conventions into events arranged for people to absorb in their living rooms. Video tapes, computers, and direct mail added to the precision. This year, the Internet, with its personal "cookie" technology, joined automated celebrity phone calls, push-pull proselytizing, issue Web sites, and political e-mails to drive politics even further into a personalized invisible space. (paragraph 1)

Fico and Cote (1999) hypothesize that the intent of media prior to the advent of the Internet was "to inform the public rather than to promote a candidate" (p. 1). Now, the Web is not only informing but also promoting, branding, announcing, and recruiting. The Web is also being used to complement traditional media in integrated marketing campaigns to appeal to a broader reach of the American public, through a wide range of media, as well as grassroots campaigning.

Wealth of Information Available on the Internet

F. Scott Tillet (2000) believes that "people are thirsting for information" (paragraph 14). The Internet offers the world at your fingertips which other more traditional forms of media did not offer. Companies, schools, associations, friends, and the government are all within a point and click. Interestingly, Tillet contends, for right
now, that E-businesses should take a step back and look more closely at the Web sites of the presidential candidates for they may learn a thing or two about “Web marketing”. Both sites he found were easy to navigate and offered information never before available to the voting public.

The Internet offers voters access to news information from many sources. From the New York Times to the Drudge Report to Democrats.com, voters can find all different types of information that may influence their opinion or at least encourage critical thinking. Furthermore, the information is for the most part free. So even an average voter can access an above average amount of newspaper and broadcast opinions via the Web (Morris, 1999). Rust added that major Internet companies such as America Online offered their members new ways to participate in the presidential conventions of both parties and new ways to interact with the presidential campaigns. America Online offered broadcast video and audio versions of the Democratic and Republican conventions, firsthand accounts from the delegates, interactive polls, and chatrooms.

The two major party candidates both had their own Web sites: www.algore2000.com and www.georgewbush.com. Both used advanced techniques to reach voters and supporters in the same manner business try to reach customers. Gore offered a personalized area where voters could create their own Web page and then e-mail others to visit that page. Bush offered a feature called “my-George W” which enabled voters to focus on issues of local interest. Tillet (2000) concluded that the depth and breath of information available on both presidential candidate sites was unprecedented, creating a one-to-one relationship with voters.
The pro-Internet posture of other campaigns was also reflected in Weber's (2000) report on the Web. Weber notes that the Web is available on an as-needed basis. Web surfers can feed the dog, pay their bills, do their homework, and check in to get a campaign update whenever they want. During election 2000 America Online set up “Results Tracker,” which was a small window that subscribers could keep open on their computer to see flashes about the campaign and not miss a beat, regardless of what else they may have been doing on their computers. Weber also states that, if a voter perused Voter.com’s Web site, they would have seen the virtually infinite amount of data, for example candidate biographies, local reports, and so forth, that would provide the voter a wealth of resources that could very well influence future elections. Palser (2000) agreed by adding that the 2000 presidential election demonstrated that the Web has the potential to add greatly to the information that voters have available to form their political opinions.

Confessore (2000) discusses a unique site, “Web, White, and Bluc” which not only possesses a very catchy name but is a site that is underwritten by seventeen other news and political sites. The site offers a “Rolling Cyber Debate” between each of the candidates along with audio and video. In this cyber debate a new question is posed to the candidates and parties each day. The candidates or parties must then respond, offering the chance for voters to review and compare answers.

Palser (2000) believed that major news sites gave the electorate more information to decipher than ever before. ABC, CNN, and NBC offered live speech and debate coverage and voting resources at the click of a mouse. Davis (1999) adds that their sites were easy to find due to cross-promotion on television. MSNBC.com offered
personalized results on their Web site. By visiting the MSNBC Web site and typing in their ZIP code, voters received results for their state and district, in addition to the presidential contest. Kerschbaumer (2000) contended that MSNBC did this in an attempt to encourage more voters take an active role in the election, rather than the passive stance resulting from more traditional media.

Marinucci (2000) added that many other political Web sites were launched for election 2000, including those for Grassroots.com which covered the Democratic and Republican conventions and focused on the elements that mainstream coverage left out. Voter.com, a non-traditional media Web site brought the voting public what they could not find through other more conventional media during the 2000 presidential campaign. In fact, Voter.com was the official political information Web site of the Democratic convention. Davis (1999) agreed, stating that voters would be exposed to more information due to the increasing quantity of available information, thereby stimulating participation. However, he argues that the information available on the Internet from non-traditional media sites may not be very reliable. The journalistic standards held by the traditional news media are just not the same for these non-traditional sites, thus potentially influencing voters with inaccurate information.

Glass (2000) reported that on election night, many political Web sites, including those of the major networks, featured: (a) rolling updated results for each of state of the union; (b) updated electoral maps as states were won by either Gore or Bush; (c) video and audio coverage at many campaign sites; and (d) links to other sources of campaign information.
The Washington Post’s Web site (http://www.washingtonpost.com) added a multitude of audio and video clips to really give the electorate a more complete picture of the presidential campaign and election process. Neuwirth (2000) states that traffic on the Post’s Web site increased 177% during the election season. The New York Times Web site (www.newyorktimes.com) generated traffic from more than a million unique visitors on Election Day. It’s the new Web audience almost matches the current circulation base of the newspaper, which is one of America’s best known at 1.2 million copies.

The politically interested will undoubtedly continue to take full advantage of this new political power that they have been provided.

Role of the Internet in Past Presidential Elections

The GOP spent $5.7 million dollars on Web marketing during the last few months of the 2000 presidential campaign, primarily to boost election turnout. As George W. Bush is now in the White House, we can speculate that this effort was to some extent successful. One of the main reasons why they spent this much on Web marketing was that they found that of all registered voters who use the Internet, more than half lean toward the GOP due to their affluence. In fact, Jim Nicholson (as cited in Simpson & Bridis, 2000), chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) stated, “E-mail will decide who is America’s next president” (p. A6). The RNC used e-mail to shape public opinion in response to the Democratic National Committee’s (DNC) attack on Bush’s drunk driving charge, altering negative public reaction. The RNC’s e-mail supporter list was about 995,000 during election time, while the DNC’s was only about 400,000. Additionally, these e-mail lists are not only a great value in getting the word out to voters, but also as a method to make extra money for the campaign. Each
campaign can rent their e-mail list to other organizations that support their cause and make approximately $75 per thousand names for the list each time it is rented.

The GOP's $5.7 million dollar Internet effort was a substantial amount, since all of Internet advertising totaled $1.9 billion, an increase of 34 percent over the prior year. Advertising and marketing via the Internet is not nearly as expensive as other media. Advertisers pay from $5 to $30 per thousand displays for banner ads. This translates to a candidate spending only $10,000 for one million voters to see their advertisement (Morris, 1999). The Internet is also too unregulated at this point for the costs to really skyrocket. Furthermore, the Web can be used by campaigns to distinguish likely Republicans from Democrats by identifying them through various Web technologies and allows candidates to target their particular audience which brings a further savings. Ad-serving companies helped the candidates compare Web portal visitors to the list of registered Democrats or Republicans in order to determine if they should be promoting their candidate to that audience (Tillet, 2000). Sunstein (2001), states that the targeting and customization of the Internet is what advertisers are paying for on a daily basis. Advertisers can learn how many people and which ones visit specific advertisements.

In both McKeown and Plowman’s (1999) “Reaching Publics on the Web During the 1996 Presidential Campaign,” and Johnson, Braima, and Sothirajah’s (1999) “Doing the Traditional Media Sidestep: Comparing the Effects of the Internet and Other Nontraditional Media with Traditional Media in the 1996 Presidential Campaign,” the authors explore the role of the Internet in reaching the voting public. Both articles provide a look at the influence of the Internet on the issues of the election race and the public's image of the candidates. McKeown and Plowman’s (1999) study set out to
answer the question, “How are presidential candidates using the World Wide Web to increase the level of interactivity between the candidate and the voters?” (p. 322). Johnson et al. (1999) compared the Internet and other forms of nontraditional media, including “talk shows like Larry King Live, radio talk shows like Rush Limbaugh, MTV, and late night talk shows” (p. 102), with more traditional forms of media.

Epstein (1996), as cited in Johnson, Braima, and Sothirajah (1999), suggested that while the Internet may be a primary method for future candidates to campaign, the 1996 election was merely a “test drive year for politics on the Internet” (p. 102). In contrast, McKeown and Plowman (1999) showed that the use of the Internet for presidential elections was coming of age. They stated that the Web sites of the candidates provided continuous updates of positions, gave more data than had been previously available through other media channels, and helped the candidates to get their message directly to voters. Both candidates attempted to provide specific information on the Internet that corresponded to the needs and interests of the voters. McKeown and Plowman (1999) showed that it was more than a test drive. Rather, in the 1996 election, the Internet was used as a way to target individual voters and provide them with information needed to formulate an opinion or make a decision.

Johnson et al. (1999) indicated that in the 1996 campaign, survey respondents “paid more attention to traditional media defined as “newspapers, television network news, radio news, news magazines, news programs and more elite broadcast outlets [than to the] ‘new news’” (p. 107). McKeown and Plowman (1999) and Johnson et al. (1999) reached different conclusions, however, both articles agreed that the Internet was not utilized to its maximum potential during the 1996 campaign.
Stephen (2000), a writer for the New Statesman who researched the impact that the Internet has had on the last two presidential elections, found four times as many Americans using the Web in 2000 to help make their voting decisions and get election news as in 1996. Both presidential candidates in the year 2000, Al Gore and George W. Bush, fully integrated the Web into their presidential campaigns. Each candidate revamped their Web site just prior to the November election. They each rid their sites of novelty items and distractions, making sure that their sites were uncluttered and user-friendly since they expected a large amount of traffic and wanted to insure that they captured the voter’s attention.

The Gore camp used “their Internet site to rally (their) supporters and get (their) message out aggressively. They (Bush campaign) didn’t do that,” noted Ben Green, Gore’s director of Internet operations (as cited in Glass, 2000). The Bush site focused on more personalization than Gore’s site. The Bush camp focused on the individual, while Gore staffers built their site like that of an interest group.

In campaign 2000, both Gore and Bush used powerful search engines to make it easy for voters to find campaign speeches, press releases, and issue papers, as well as to cover topics that were not covered by traditional media. This is the unique ability of the Internet, to tell your story the way you want it told. Both Bush and Gore allowed users to customize their site to reflect their language preference of English or Spanish, as well as other interests. The sites endeavored to make the voter seem connected with the candidate, something the mass media has never really been able to do.
Glass (2000) added that when Al Gore and Joe Lieberman (his vice-presidential running-mate) were on the campaign trail, they always had their Web site address visible on their podium so it would be photographed and then used in shots found in other media.

O’Leary (2000) states that two of the key aspects of political campaigning are fundraising and identifying supporters. The Internet has proven an effective tool for both. The use of e-mail and personalized Web pages will help to further individualize the campaign effort and reach constituencies. Both major party candidates used the Internet successfully for fundraising and to recruit volunteers for their campaign. Bush campaign officials raised upwards of four million dollars online for their Florida recount fund alone. Morton (2000) found that candidates that were not GOP or DNC frontrunners, such as Senator John McCain and Ralph Nader, pitched their constituency and generated millions of dollars using the Internet, which is less expensive and more reachable for candidates that previously could not pay for national airtime on the broadcast networks. This opened the door for alternative candidates to be higher stakes players in the election. Also interesting to note is that the average donation over the Internet to the Republican Party during Campaign 2000 was $148, which is a 200% increase over the average obtained through traditional direct mail appeals ($45). It was almost as if Internet fundraising is the closest we can get to an “impulse buy” in a presidential campaign (Morton, 2000).

Rohrs (2000) and Shields (2000) also suggested that the Internet was an advantageous fundraising vehicle via the example of John McCain. After Senator John McCain’s New Hampshire primary win, the candidate generated $162,000 in new credit card contributions by the next morning, and by the end of the week topped more than two
million in contributors via the Internet. McCain used this money to further spread his word through the Internet, television, and contacting local communities. This is a strategy that even businesses and advertisers can learn from. McCain successfully used the medium of television to spread the word about his Web site and maximized the use of both media to their potential. McCain waged an insurgency campaign via the Internet that allowed him to be able to bypass major party politics (O’Leary, 2000).

In contrast, Jackie Ashley (2001) called the Bush-Gore campaign, “only an Internet battle at the margins” (paragraph 1). Pressman (2000) agreed, stating that the campaigns barely scratched the full potential of the Internet during election 2000. In his view, the $50 million spent by the campaigns on the Web seems minuscule in comparison to the three billion spent overall during the 2000 election season (2000). However, Pressman does go on to say that the Internet will change politics in ways not evident today, including, as Davis (1999) states; leveling the playing field and lessening the domination by major party candidates.

Davis (1999) believes that the Web will continue to be dominated by the same media players that currently dominate traditional media, and that the groups and individuals who currently dominate the political landscape will continue to do so via the Internet. Even so, states Morris (1999), voters will be exposed to more ideas from more television outlets and more newspapers, through the Internet. The media will need to put a new twist on the information to keep readers interested, since the Internet user can easily switch from site to site with all of the free information that is available. This may make the power of the reporter and their influence over the voting public even more important than before.
O’Leary (2000) believes that no matter what type of information is available on the Internet, it is too soon to determine whether the Internet will revolutionize presidential campaigns and voter opinions as television did starting with the 1960 campaign of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Nevertheless, O’Leary speculates that in a few elections from now, the American populace will be wondering how we had presidential campaigns without the Internet.

In a summary of Internet use during election 2000, the Gallup Poll (Carlson, 2000) reports that 60% of survey respondents followed news about the presidential campaign via the Internet. Fifty-two percent utilized the Internet to find out information about the candidates’ issue positions or backgrounds. However, only 4-10% of survey respondents used the Internet to donate money or communicate their views back to the campaigns or to others via chat rooms or e-mail (Carlson, 2000, paragraph 4).

Davis (1999) states, “A new medium of human communications is emerging, one that may prove to surpass all previous revolutions -- including the printing press, the telephone, the television, and the computer -- in its impact on our economic and social life.” (p. 9). If the arrival of broadcasting provide us with any indication, the effects of the Web “will be cumulative, but will shape the parties and political battles election by election,” says Ashley (2001, paragraph 4). Parker (2000) agrees and adds that the Internet provides the candidate with a medium to interact directly with the voter and develop a relationship with the voter. The Internet will allow for better targeting and profiling of a candidate’s audience. Parker (2000) quoted Bush’s e-strategist Greg Sedberry who stated, “the Internet is the fastest growing medium in politics” (paragraph 17).
Advantages/Disadvantages of the Internet on Presidential Decisions

McKeown and Plowman (1999) described how the Internet could be used to better affect the election process, identifying missed opportunities from the 1996 presidential campaigns. McKeown and Plowman (1999) determined that in 1996, Web sites did not include a “two-way symmetrical mode of communication”, as defined by Grunig and Hunt (as cited by McKeown and Plowman, 1999, p. 330), which would have promoted voter interaction with the candidates via the Web. Further campaigns did not use the “mixed-motive model” of communication (Dozier, D.M., Grunig, L.A., & Grunig J.E., as cited in McKeown and Plowman, 1999, p. 330) which also would have increased voter/candidate interaction. Although the 1996 campaigns used their Web sites to increase donations and volunteerism, they did not exploit the true interactive nature of the Internet. Johnson et al. (1999) touched on this by saying “candidates can listen in on discussion groups to get a sense of the public’s attitude toward issues and the candidates” (Kurtz, as cited in Johnson et al., 1999, p. 101). However, Johnson et al. (1999) did not fully examine the Internet as a true two-way interactive medium in their study.

In the 2000 election, the use of the Internet as a two-way symmetrical mode of communication began to show evidence of affecting voter opinions. Once it was clear that the outcome of the 2000 presidential election wouldn’t be clear at all, Internet activists demonstrated the Web’s potential, launching online petitions, e-mail campaigns, and Web sites, such as the self-explanatory, RevotePalmBeach.com (Harris, 2000). Negroponte (as cited in McKeown & Plowman, 1999) predicted this:
[Organizations will] move away from a push distribution of information, in which organizations distribute information through mass media channels, to a pull distribution, in which individuals access only the information that interests them. (p. 321)

This pull distribution was taken a step farther with cyberwarriors across the country. A cyberwarrior, Pamela Sybrandy, promoted Al Gore on her own time and in her own space to increase the public knowledge of Gore’s views on family and children’s issues. Independent and homegrown Web pages sprung up all over the Internet during campaign 2000 (Wayne, 2000). Wayne agrees with Negroponte’s (as cited in McKeown & Plowman) earlier contention that, where the mass media previously had a push-type distribution of information, now this pull-type distribution of unorganized, grassroots Web sites are making it possible for individual Americans who were rarely heard before to take a more active role in political campaigns and control their own messages.

A study completed by the Committee of Concerned Journalists (2000) furthered this position. They concluded that more citizens turned to the Internet for coverage of certain issues during the presidential election, as television abdicated covering the story. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2000) discovered that one fourth of Americans are obtaining some of their campaign information through the Internet. The Annenberg Public Policy Center (as cited in Anonymous, 2000) found that the major networks are averaging only 36 seconds a night of candidate coverage.

Lynch (2000) added to the finding that the Web improved on the more common methods for political fundraising, such as direct mail and telemarketing. The Internet reduces transaction costs and the effort of calling or finding the perfect person who to
mail. E-mail can blast-out thousands of messages to potential donors in minutes. On the candidate Web sites, Lynch (2001) states the voter can obtain volumes of information never before possible, exposing the voters to new ideas, opinions, and candidates. The Internet will go-around the gatekeeper technologies of mass media and shoot straight to the American public about the issues and the candidates.

Melillo (2000) further suggests that the Web will continue to prevail in cases where media candidate budgets are not high. John McCain (as cited in Melillo, 2000) proclaimed the Internet “the great equalizer” (paragraph 13). The power of the press in creating an image for a candidate is unquestionable. With the Web, however, the candidates have more control over their message and how voters will perceive them. O’Leary (2000) similarly found this was the case of Alan Keyes in election 2000, where he staged a grassroots appeal. Despite, the fact that Keyes didn’t win or even garner enough votes to receive much national attention, he received more attention than he probably would have without the benefit of the Web.

Squitieri (2000) and Ashley (2001) added that the Web has also increased interest in the concept of trading votes between candidates. Due to the immediacy of Web messages which can be delivered in seconds, voters can theoretically trade votes with voters in other states voting for alternative candidates to ultimately change the outcome of a presidential campaign. Ashley determined that in election 2000 the so-called “Nader traders” traded votes with Gore supporters in areas where they believed they could sway the vote and effect the overall outcome of the election. In this way, Squitieri (2000) suggested Nader supporters could still affect the election without harming the chances of the Democrats. Nader voters were concerned about freedom of parental choice, the
environment, and didn't want to see Bush become president. Michael B. Cornfield (as cited in Wakin, 2000) believes that vote trading is "not going to have a big effect on the election, but it's the first time I've seen voters talk to each other in a sophisticated way without having to go through the media or parties" (p. 20).

Davis (1999) claims that Internet users will continue to frequent the sites of organizations and parties with which they are familiar disagreeing with Ashley (2001), Melillo (2000), O'Leary (2000), and Squitieri (2000), who support the equalizing effect of the Internet referenced by John McCain. Davis (1999) argues that the dominant players will remain the dominant players (p. 6). The sites that Davis believes will continue to receive the greatest attention are the ones who have the money and can place ads with other media to continue to draw attention to their campaigns. Morris (1999) notes that a few years ago he could find very little about candidates, voting records, donor amounts, and so forth. Through the Internet, we now are benefiting by receiving instantaneous reports of presidential candidates, donor histories, and other tools which increase awareness of voters and therefore influences their voting opinions.

Perhaps one of the largest negative outgrowths of the Internet has been the creation of a digital divide amongst the American people. This inequality of U.S. citizens was evident in the past two presidential elections. This potential exclusion from information suggests that computers and Internet access should eventually be considered "essential to the basic acts of citizenship" (Anonymous, 2000, p. 12).

Palser (2000) discovered that among persons having an income of $20,000 or less, White Americans are five times more likely to have Internet access than minorities. In fact, Whites have more Internet access at home than other racial and ethnic minorities
have at any location. Even though minorities are gaining in Internet access, the digital divide is continuing to grow numbers, since Whites are still gaining at a faster rate. Similarly, the fact that Republicans outnumber Democrats on the Internet is believed to be due to economic factors.

Morris (1999, p. 34) offers data which compares the proportion of Internet users from each age or racial group to further demonstrate the under representation of Hispanic's, African-Americans, and the 50+ audience. In Morris's findings, over 80% of Internet users were between the ages of 18-50. Voters that were 50+, Hispanic, or African-American represented less than 11% of Internet users.

Sunstein (2001) contends that by 2005 we will no longer see the effects of this digital divide, as the gap between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not will dramatically close and more individuals will have access to the Internet and thus effect electoral change.

Also, the Internet, if used as a medium to activate younger voters who will soon have the ability to vote, may rekindle a desire for democratic participation and, when they join the electorate, turn out in large numbers (Morris, 1999). As Professor Larry Elin (personal communication, May 22, 2001) discusses, this may also have another impact on the presidential election, since these young voters will have a more powerful voice as a community.

The information that citizens will receive via the Web will undoubtedly increase, as will the control the individual has over the information to which they expose themselves, which will should result in a more informed public (Davis, 1999). In this
regard, Corrado (1996) states that the Internet offers "the prospect of a revitalized
democracy, characterized by a more active and informed citizenry" (p. 29).

Participation in the presidential election process has declined during the last 3
decades. The Internet offers a way to reverse these trends and allow two-way
communication between the American people and presidential candidates and their
campaigns. This type of democratic participation has been missing in American
presidential campaigns and politics in general for many years. Once more Americans
have use of the Internet, this may open up the political world to the once non-
participatory, such as the homebound, elderly, and the infirmed (Anonymous, 2000).
Corrado (1996) believes that the Internet can, in fact, be a conduit to change or replace
many of the structures for allowing public participation that are commonplace in today’s
political system.

Future of the New Medium

The consensus seems to be that it will be essential for candidates of the future to
use the Internet for campaigning. Johnson et al. (1999) suggested that "future studies
should ... focus on the Internet and its ability both to increase candidate knowledge, as
well as to reconnect voters to the political system" (paragraph 66). McKeown and
Plowman (1999) indicated that, "As the reach of this new communication medium grows,
campaigns may be able to resolve some of [the current] problems [such as reaching
voters] and incorporate new interactive communication techniques into their
campaigns" (p. 345).

Fast forward to the 2000 election of Al Gore and George W. Bush, and many of
the predictions of McKeown and Plowman (1999) and Johnson et al. (1999) have proven
correct. Morton (2000) declared that we are left with the memory of an election where the winner was not clear and where the Web has dramatically increased the exposure of candidates, their issues, and their images. Gore and Bush utilized streaming video and real time headlines to enhance their sites. The candidates used their sites not only to create a dialogue with the voters, but also to sell campaign-related merchandise, for example, Dubya mouse pads and t-shirts, promote their campaign stops, and use “tell-a-friend” promotions to spread the message via word of mouth. Both campaigns constructed very elaborate Web sites and their converted them to solicit contributions to defray the legal and other costs of the Florida vote recount.

Campaigns will continue to develop a Web component to everything they do, decided Shields (2000), as communication via the Internet grows at rapid speed. Shields also outlined how media reporters should best use the Internet in the future, including monitoring campaign sites, researching candidates’ public records, and writing about volunteerism, campaign fundraising, and privacy of campaign information.

And if the balance of McKeown and Plowman (1999) and Johnson et al.’s (1999) predictions are correct, the continued growth of the Internet may take us a big step closer to a national electronic vote, as discussed in an article by Davenport (2000):

Since Al Gore invented the Internet, the least that technology could do is declare him — or George W. Bush, or anyone else — president. It’s inevitable that in the current morass of the presidential election, many people are suggesting that modern information technology could solve or could have prevented this problem.

(p. A27)
Pressman (2000) states that for now “the Internet has not fundamentally changed presidential campaigns... but political professionals ... are already drawing lessons” (paragraph 4). The 2000 election will add to the knowledge generated from election '96, and this new data will continue to change presidential elections and thus voter opinions and election outcomes.

The Web serves a captive audience. When most news stories regarding the presidential election in 2000 were breaking, it was during the day when most people are at work. The only way they can get information in the absence of television and radio is via the Internet right at their desktop. Neuwirth (2000) declared that this immediate source of information was unheard of before the advent of the Internet. By the time you receive your newspaper in the morning, you would have already seen a breaking election news story on the Web.

Interestingly, Davis (1999) discussed that the Internet may actually decrease the active electorate. The information available on the Web may also create a greater division between voters. However, voters that are using the Internet to shape their political opinions and determine their choice for president will undoubtedly be better informed about the candidates. Ashley (2001) claims that because of the Internet’s effect, this smaller, real electorate is making it harder for the politicians to take votes for granted.

Despite the fact that in the most recent presidential election campaigns were able to raise only about a quarter of their funds on the Internet, its future use in fundraising is very bright. Traditional direct mail can cost campaigns 45 cents for every dollar they raise. In contrast, tens of thousands of e-mail requests can be sent for pennies and can be
better targeted to specific voters than direct mail or other media. We won’t be so tied to
the major broadcasting networks, newspapers, and so forth, for political information.
Instead, we can explore the wealth of information available on the Web. The Web is
likely to become more effective for campaign rallying and fundraising efforts than any
other media that has preceded it (Simpson & Bridis, 2000).

The Internet can also assume a leading role in interactive presidential debates.
For example, users could review an extensive list of issues and rank those that concern
them the most. The candidates would respond to those issues where the greatest interest
is indicated (Glass, 2000).

Futuristic articles have been written already, telling tales of Web elections to
come. An article by Doug Isenberg (2001) predicts that in the 2004 election, voters will
cast their ballots over a weeklong period. Absentee ballots will be eliminated, since all
voting will be completed online. The digital divide will be a non-issue, since the
installation of Internet connections in grocery stores as well as “votemobiles” will make
it easy for people who do not own a computer to learn about the candidates, form their
opinions, and vote. Voters will be asked to confirm their ballots twice before logging-out
to ensure that they made their desired choice for president. This futuristic approach
demonstrates how the Internet may change election outcomes in the future.

If there is still doubt about how the Web will impact the U.S. decision for
president, Pressman (2000) states:

As Vice President Al Gore’s motorcade took him to a Nashville plaza to deliver
his concession speech early Wednesday morning, an aide monitoring a Florida
elections Web site noticed that Texas Gov. George W. Bush’s lead had suddenly
shrank to a few thousand votes in the Sunshine State. Gore abandoned his planned speech and called Bush to withdraw his concession. Without the Web, the electoral crisis surrounding the Florida vote might not have materialized and perhaps the results of the election would have changed. (paragraph 1)

Lynch (2001) believes that moment may prove the real moment when the Internet truly arrived as a political force.

Summary

The author's review of scholarly and popular literature regarding the use of the Web as a tool and medium to influence voters in presidential campaigns provides further clarification to questions raised in the first chapter of this report. More specifically, the author examined: (a) the role of traditional media and how history repeats itself as a new medium is born; (b) the role of the Internet in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections; (c) the type of presidential campaign information available on the Internet; (d) the advantages and disadvantages of this new medium; and (e) the future of the Internet in affecting other presidential decisions. Past studies reveal the effects that the Internet has had on presidential campaigns and voter opinions in the recent past. However, no definitive conclusions from this review of scholarly and current literature have been reached as to whether the Internet will truly affect voter decisions for president since it is too early to realize the full impact the Internet will have on Presidential elections.
Chapter III

INTERNET AS A COMMUNITY FORMATION VEHICLE

Background

While researching this topic, the author found an article from Black Issues in Higher Education that referenced Syracuse University professors who were researching the effect of the Internet on presidential elections with the objective of writing a book (yet untitled). The author identified the professors involved in this research and contacted them. In a phone interview, Professor Larry Elin discussed their research findings to date.

A group of professors were gathered together by the Dean of the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University to study the effect of the Internet on the 2000 presidential election. What started as a large group narrowed, due to an apparent lack of information about the topic (almost naming their book, "Election.dud"). At first glance, says Professor Larry Elin (personal communication, May 22, 2001), the Internet did not appear to increase the number of people interested in the campaign. Since the outset of the project, Elin and his team approached the Internet as merely a new medium. They went on to discover that the Internet served not just as a tool to broadcast news, but also as a "community formation" vehicle, that is, as a way to communicate and exchange information. Elin concluded that the Internet was very much needed to reconnect society and to increase participation in various communities, including political interests.
Elin (personal communication, 2001), backed by the Medill School and Pew Center, theorized that the Internet was a community formation vehicle and would bring people together and allow them to form new opinions regarding political candidates. Harvard author Robert Putnam (as cited by Sunstein, 2001) coined the term “Social Capital” and discovered that less people on an ongoing basis are deciding not to join political parties and organizations. In their place, the Internet is bringing a sense of community to the voting public. What Professor Elin and the Newhouse team found is that not just techies are online anymore. Over half of the U.S. population is online and people are again connecting with each other.

Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things

Elin (personal communication, 2001) states that “ordinary people are [beginning to do] extraordinary things on the Internet.” This will make a change in how this information super-highway (Gore’s invention or not) will influence voters of all demographics. Sunstein (2001) agrees, stating that ordinary people have a much greater range of choices. This growth of options for consumers has been a prime engine behind the growth of the Internet.

Elin (personal communication, 2001) suggests the Web is merely a billboard on the highway of the Internet, which is used to communicate and exchange information between people, e.g., e-mail, Web sites, chatrooms, etc. The Internet, not the Web, allows people to reconnect with each other socially. This results in more of a community, and hopefully the consequent social benefits of producing less crime, good education system, and perhaps a greater interest in the electoral process.
The Internet is allowing employees to work at home, still maintaining their connectiveness to the workplace via the Internet (Davis, 1999). However, Corrado (as cited by Davis 1999) admits that the electorate must have a willingness to connect through the Internet. Davis believes that while people may use the Internet to telecommute, the majority of people will not use this inexpensive, convenient tool to become more involved in political affairs.

Most citizens have a range of common interests (i.e., golf, tennis, politics), states Sunstein (2001). Common experiences, including the commonalities we find in the media, provide a form of social glue between individuals. Sunstein calls newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters, “general interest intermediaries” (p.11), in that they bring the American public together with a sense of commonality. Now with cable television, the Internet, and other “narrowcasters,” people are forming a glue with others with whom they share a like interest. This forms “social capital” (Putnam, as cited by Sunstein, 2001, p. 96), where people feel that relationships of trust and reciprocity are crucial to a well-functioning society in which people see their fellow citizens as allies. A society needs shared experiences to continue to be a society.

Morris (1999) agrees, but states that candidates will not be specific in addressing the concerns of individuals who frequent a particular Web site. Voters only want to hone in on what they are interested in and what impacts them the most, and tune out the rest. The Internet will enable candidates to monitor this more closely, since they will be able to quickly analyze what voters are looking for.

During the last two presidential campaigns, the majority of Internet users were technophiles and political junkies. Now that has changed, with more than half the
country online the digital divide is narrowing. Sunstein (2001) believes that the digital divide will not be an issue come the election of 2004. The author agrees with Sunstein since it is the author's opinion that the Internet is becoming more available on a no cost basis in libraries, schools, and community centers. The Internet became more commercial in the early 1990s, as a part of government regulations removing restrictions on commercial property. Now, ordinary people will be looking to do ordinary and extraordinary things via the Internet, and will have more of a voice and thus more of an impact on the electoral process. Morris (1999, p.125) states that, as voters are able to have a greater impact on the political process, the alienation between them and candidates will decrease. The Internet community will bridge the cultural divide and the demographics of who participates in the presidential electoral process will change.

Sunstein (2001) feels that "collaborative filtering" also advances community formation. Collaborative filtering is a Web site tool that tells you other choices of people who selected the same topics or products as you. This personalization of the Internet will enable you to have television, Web pages, and so forth, tailored specifically for you. "Cookies" are another Web site feature allowing a site you visit to monitor your Web activity so an Internet Service Providers (ISP) can present you with more information in which you would likely be interested (Davis, 1999). As a result, more people will become more aware of the common threads between them.

Sunstein (2001) states that,

Because the Internet makes it easier to find like-minded individuals, it can facilitate and strengthen fringe communities that have a common ideology but are dispersed geographically. Thus, particle physicists, Star Trek fans, and members
of militia groups have used the Internet to find each other, swap information, and stoke each other's passions. In many cases, their heated dialogues might never have reached critical mass as long as geographical separation diluted them to a few parts per million. (p. 58)

Morris (1999) agrees with Sunstein that, as Internet numbers increase, people will gain a political force that will not only influence their vote and opinion but influence candidates. In contrast, however many Web sites do not offer opposing opinions leading to bias and fragmentation. Sunstein (2001) stated that the problem of fragmentation can be greatly reduced with links to other sites with opposing viewpoints. Davis (1999) noted that many major media sites are offering these links to increase interest and provide additional exposure to new ideas. This is similar to what Elin (personal communication, 2001) noted about the “Web, White and Blue” Web site. The Internet is bringing people together everyday on a local, state, national, and even an international level. During the last presidential campaign a Harvard professor, Dr. Wu, sent an e-mail to a friend suggesting that Asian-Americans did not have a true political identity. Then, through viral marketing (word of mouth) using the Internet, within 6 months they had that formed an Internet group of 400,000 people through their newly formed community and the resulting sharing of views and ideas, many shifted from the Republican to the Democratic party resulting in Gore capturing 57% of the Asian-American vote. David Bohnett (as cited in Sunstein, 2001), stated that “The Internet gives you the opportunity to meet other people who are interested in the same things you are, no matter how specialized, no matter how weird, no matter how big or how small” (p. 54).

In this regard, Al Gore (as cited by Davis, 1999), remarked,
[The Internet] will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community. From the connection, we will derive…strong democracies…and ultimately a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet. The Global Information Infrastructure (as Gore calls the Internet) will help educate our children and allow us to exchange ideas within a community and among nations. It will be a means by which family and friends will transcend the barriers of time and distance. (pp. 20-21)

Ben Green, (as cited in Tillet), the Internet manager for Al Gore, said that because of last minute, “Get out the Vote” e-mail campaigns, we saw very close races and, in fact, we believe that Gore won several states due to this form of Internet campaigning. The Internet is taming the politically passive into activists, changing opinions and influencing the vote declares Grossman (as cited by Davis, 1999, p. 22).

The Internet has proven that the candidate who gives a group attention will more than likely win their vote. Morris (1999) agrees, stating that spectators will become players and will have an impact by playing the game during the presidential election process. It allows communities to form and allows people to relate and bond. The Log Cabin Republicans were another group enhanced through Internet community formation. This group of Gay Republicans living in mostly rural areas found that they did not have anyone to connect with. With the Internet, they found other individuals like themselves who helped them to make their opinion stronger and have a greater voice. Citizens in a free republic aspire to a system that provides a wide range of experiences that they would not have specifically selected in advance (Sunstein, 2001). As Ray (2000) adds, that the Internet offers gays the chance to be discreet and still be involved in politics. They are a
powerful community and have sought greater acceptance by both parties. The Internet gives them the means to commune and form a distinct, powerful interest group to which candidates will listen. The biggest downside to their coming out, states Ray, is that the Internet may attract hate groups in response. But shouldn’t they have a voice too? The Internet is increasing the ability for people to hear echoes of their own voices and to barricade themselves from people with other opinions (Sunstein, 2001). More interest groups will be formed and more opinions and choices will become prevalent.

Voters with a common interest, such as the Log Cabin Republicans may have as much of a say than the major political parties over time and thus influence the vote. Sunstein (2001) spoke of the term “group polarization” which means that “After deliberation, people are likely to move toward a more extreme point in the direction to which the group’s members were originally inclined” (p. 65). In bringing people with like interests together -- left-winged Democrats with left-winged Democrats, and right-winged Republicans with right-winged Republicans -- and engaging them in like conversation may become even more radical and feel stronger about their particular cause. The fortunate occurrence is that people who before never had the opportunity to find and converse with other people with similar interests can come together and share similar concerns and political views, and therefore grow the strength of that one party who was formerly alone. Democrats.com has bound together folks with a common interest to support the Democratic party beliefs without being directly affiliated with the Democratic party. This site follows the tenants of community formation that Sunstein discussed. That is, of a group of people with common interests coming together and becoming even more radical and extreme in their beliefs. “Democrats.com has been
exposing the truth about Bush since last August, when we reported about the last two years of his National Guard duty” (D. Lytel, personal communication, June 25, 2001).

Until the advent of the Internet, this type of pseudo-journalism has really never been communicated as widely. Of course, their objective is to find more interested parties and to make them even more radical about their party and their beliefs.

Perhaps the primary disadvantage of the Internet is that when people are able to customize the channels through which they receive communications there is not a broader spreading of information that has been associated with general interest intermediates, for example, broadcasters, newspapers, and so forth. People will not be exposed to the quantity and type of information that they have been. Sunstein (2001) claims that people lack freedom if they are not privy to all the different types of information that a society has available. They cannot make the best decisions for them unless they are exposed to a multitude of ideas.
Chapter IV

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Through this study the author hopes to determine what effect the Internet has had and will have on voter opinions during the electoral process. In addition, the author plans to conduct a survey to determine: (a) the types of political activity for which the electorate will use the Internet; and (b) the impact the electorate believes the Internet will have in future elections.

Population and Sample

The survey was completed by polling voters at the following voting locations: (a) Lawrence Township Municipal Building, Lawrenceville, New Jersey; (b) St. Ann's School, Lawrenceville, New Jersey; and (c) South Brunswick Municipal Building, Monmouth Junction, New Jersey during the 2001 New Jersey primary election held on June 26, 2001.

The primary election in New Jersey was moved from the original date of June 5, 2001 to allow more time for the redistricting required due to the population shift from the latest U.S. Census (Personal Communication, Voteline, June 27, 2001). Every voter was asked to fill out a survey during the following hours: 7:00 AM-10:00 AM, 11:00 AM-12:30PM, 1:30PM-4:30PM, 5:00PM-8:00PM. Less than 20 voters said they did not wish to complete the survey.
Survey

The survey was one page consisting of 11 questions. A copy of the survey form is included as Appendix A. All survey respondents were assured that their identities would not be revealed and that their answers would not be revealed on an individual basis. The survey was conducted during the New Jersey primary election because many voters that participate in the primary elections are politically aware and eligible to vote, and thus would be more likely to formulate an opinion about the Internet and its effect on the electoral process. The author selected Central New Jersey since that is the author’s area of residence. In addition, the Board of Elections for these voting locations gave permission via a single phone call to allow distribution of the survey at the above voting locations.

Data Collection

The survey questions were all multiple choice or yes and no questions. The survey was handed to each participant on a clipboard and a pen was provided. The author along with two assistants passed the survey out to the participants at the three polling locations.

The survey asked if the participant had access to the Internet either at their home or office, in order to determine if they were exposed to the Internet at all during their daily lives. The remainder of the questions asked the participants about their use of the Internet as it pertained to presidential campaigns, in order to determine if the Internet or another type of media was having a greater impact on their choice for president.

The survey also asked more prospective questions, such as the Internet’s capability or lack thereof to present more presidential candidates to voters, and what type
of impact the Internet would have on future presidential elections, including voting via
the Internet.

Since this survey was conducted during a gubernatorial primary election, the
author conducted research on the Web sites of the gubernatorial candidates and how they
were using the Web as an element of their campaigning. The objective of this research
was to determine the effect of the Web sites on voter turnout and the responses of voters
at the polling booths.

A total of 134 surveys were collected at the three voting locations.
Approximately 20 participants choose not to fill out the survey. The 134 responses were
analyzed for this study.
Chapter V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The objective of this research was to determine if the Internet and its multitude of Web sites influence voter opinions about U.S. Presidential candidates and issues. The author's primary assumption was that more voters will be involved in the political decision-making process and more presidential candidates will gain exposure in future presidential elections due to the influence of the Internet.

The author based her assumption on the increase of Internet use by the American public, as well as the increase of information and sites concerning politics and news (Corrado, 1996; Glass, 2000; Glasser 2000; Hoffman, 1999; Johnson et al., 2000; Marinucci, 2000; McKeown & Plowman, 1999; Melillo, 2000, Morris, 1999; Morton, 2000; Neuwirth, 2000; O'Leary, 2000; Palser, 2000; Pressman, 2000; Rohrs, 2000; Rust, 2000; Shields 2000; Simpson & Bridis, 2000; Tillet, 2000; Trombly, 2001; Wayne, 2000; Weber, 2000) The Internet is permeating everyday lives and having a major impact (Wendland, as cited in Trombly, 2001).

Davis' (1999) theory, that the current media superstars -- including major broadcast networks, newspapers, and so forth -- will retain their preeminence and all other Web players may have to play "second fiddle," has been countered by Sunstein (2001), whose postulation that the Web operating as a community-builder will construct and reconstruct relationships with friends, relatives, and people with similar interests. The author also sought to determine if the Internet would replace other media.
The author also wished to review the current election briefly to comment on the campaigns of the candidates involved in the 2001 New Jersey primary. In the gubernatorial election, Jim McGreevy, a Democrat, was running uncontested, and two Republicans were running neck and neck: Bret Schundler and Bob Franks. Both of the Republican candidates had their Web sites up and active for donation, interactivity, and education during the primary. They further promoted their Web site on billboards, banners, and television ads. Jim McGreevy did not appear to promote his Web site via other media, and the author could not find the site easily using the major search engines (Excite, Yahoo, Google). This cross-promotion typically used in mass media outlets ensures that the candidates are receiving the most exposure for their dollar (Davis, 1999). The contested Republican election was won by Bret Schundler who, in the author’s opinion, did a slightly better job of connecting with the voting public in the days prior to the election than Bob Franks. The author felt, based on the historical success of John McCain (Glasser 2000; Melillo, 2000), that such Web ploys as e-mail campaigns during the days leading up to the election to increase the numbers in the candidate’s favor at the polls and additional cross-promotion could have made a difference for Bob Franks, who conceded the election by the narrowest of margins. Furthermore, according to Siegel (2001), Franks would have won the primary had the vote occurred on the original date, because Schundler would not have been able to get his last minute push, which included a more effective Internet campaign than Bob Franks.

Dresner, Wickers, and Associates survey (as cited by Morris, 1999, p. 32) of 1,000 Internet users found that 54% of Internet users were interested in voting in presidential primaries. While the present survey was not conducted during a presidential
primary, the author still expected an appreciable turnout since the Republican
gubernatorial candidate was being decided. Instead, the author discovered that voter
turnout for the primary elections at the Central New Jersey polling locations were less
than 200 voters per district, with several districts reporting less than 100 voters. The
author’s contention on selecting primary election day for polling was that the interest in
survey participants would be highest, since the tendency of primary voters is they are
interested in politics. However, turnout was very light throughout the day, which turned
out to be a beautiful sunny day, which should have made the polling numbers even
higher. The turnout was somewhat heavier after 5:00PM; the standard end of the
business day.

Data Review

A total of 134 surveys were completed in this study. Of the 134 respondents,
87% reported that they had access to a computer at home, and 80% reported that they had
access to a computer at work (see Table 1). This is consistent with Palser’s (2000)
contention, since most of the respondents were White, a group known to have higher
percentages of computer and Internet access. This is a higher percentage than the Pew
Research Center for the People and the Press (2001), which found that 68% now use a
computer on a regular basis and 59% have a computer at home. The higher percentages
observed in the present study are likely due to the relatively affluent demographics of the
Central New Jersey area.

As indicated in Table 2, 81% of the respondents have access to the Internet at
home and 77% at work which are again high percentages since the Pew Research Center
for People and the Press (2001) indicates a lower percentage of 54%.
### Table 1

**Computer Access**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have access to a computer at home</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have access to a computer at home</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have access to a computer at work</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have access to a computer at work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

**Internet Access**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have access to the Internet at home</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have access to the Internet at home</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have access to the Internet at work</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have access to the Internet at work</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey generally confirms Davis' (1999) observation that more people go online at home than at work. Due to the polling hours, the survey participants were likely employed locally, stay-at-home parents, retirees, and politically active individuals who generally participate in primary elections. Retirees, estimates Morris (1999), are generally the largest voting audience, with 63% of over 65 getting out to vote. Although the author did not ask the age of survey participants, a large percentage appeared over age 65.

The demographics of the districts surveyed suggest that the respondents are relatively affluent, which may be responsible for indicate the increased Internet and computer usage of this audience, as compared with the Pew Research Center for People and the Press's (2001) research, which showed a 54% Internet access response. The author realizes that this sample is not representative of the thinking of all people in the United States on this topic. Furthermore, those who vote in a primary election are generally more focused on political issues.

The Web is changing the face of presidential elections, emerging as an easy and convenient method by which the electorate can gather information, formulate opinions, and state views regarding presidential candidates in real time. As indicated in Table 3, however, over half of the survey respondents did not use the Internet for information during the presidential campaign this stands in contrast to the Gallup Poll's (Carlson, 2000) survey, which found that 60% of respondents followed the campaign via the Internet. The present survey suggests that these voters still may be using other media as their primary source of information.
Table 3

Internet Use During the 2000 Presidential Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used the Internet</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not use the Internet</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the survey respondents visited Web sites of major media and news organizations, which confirms with Davis’ (1999) contention that these media outlets will remain preeminent. However, new sources including Web sites and politically-oriented Web sites were visited by these respondents, although in smaller numbers, which means this non-traditional form of media (Johnson et al., 1999) is receiving attention and potentially taking a share from more traditional forms of media. This creates a new relationship with these sites and organizations (Tillet, 2000) which opens the door to new ideas (Morris, 1999; Sunstein, 2001).

The survey respondents in Table 4 may have, as Davis (1999) claimed, just continued to frequent sites with which that they were familiar, which may not have included using sites to follow the campaigns. Also, the author assumes that several of the survey respondents may not have recalled their use of the Internet for this purpose.

The Pew Research Center for People and the Press (as cited by Committee of Concerned Journalists, 2000) found that nearly a quarter of Americans are obtaining some of their campaign news through the Internet, which was consistent with the author’s findings.
Table 4

Those Who Did Use The Internet During the 2000 Presidential Campaign Indicated That They Visited The Following Web Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet / Use</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Media (Wall Street Journal, New York Times, NBC)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Organization (CNN, MSNBC)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Web Site (algore2000.com, georgewbush.com)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically Oriented Web Site (Salon.com, Voter.com)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gallup (Carlson, 2000) took a similar poll on what medium was most up-to-date and immediate, and found similar findings to the data in Table 5. In Gallup’s poll, 59% found television the most immediate, while 32% chose the Internet. While the author’s poll indicates television at 57% and the Internet at 23%. It can be postulated that since 55% of Pew Center poll (2001) respondents indicated that they watched a news program on television “yesterday,” down from a high of 74% in 1994, the difference may be attributable to the Internet usage.
Table 5

The Most Up-To-Date and Immediate Medium in The Voter's Opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Choice</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Internet is also allowing voters to become familiar with a campaign that does not have the benefit of being affiliated with a major political party (Lynch, 2001). This is because, as Melillo (2000) indicates, it is a less expensive medium and, therefore, the voting public will be exposed to more candidates. However, only 39% of survey respondents believed that the Internet would expose them to more alternative candidates. Nevertheless, the Internet is a great place for insurgents like John McCain's run in 2000 (Glasser, 2000). If close to 40% of the audience, as indicated in this poll (see Table 6), pays attention to these insurgents, they will certainly have an impact on future electoral results.

The interactivity of the Internet (Morris, 1999) will make the whole voting process a two-way street, where the relationship between the voter, their community, and the candidates will be even more important. Again, John McCain's New Hampshire primary success (Glasser 2000, Melillo, 2000, O'Leary, 2000) indicates that the
information available on the Internet may influence who you vote for, as indicated by 44% of these respondents (see Table 7).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer More Candidates</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not Know (Write-in)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Influences</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not Know (Write-in)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Morris (1999) found that election turnout dropped substantially after World War II and never really rebound. He claims that the Internet will make it easier for potential voters to vote and will entice them to participate in an election. He also contends that Internet voting will definitely increase the participation of the electorate in day-to-day issues such as regulatory and legislative matters and thus influence political affairs even more. The Internet will also make it easier for commuters, business and recreational travelers, the handicapped, and others to participate in political affairs. Sixty-six percent
of respondents think that voting online is a very strong probability, since several states
(Morris, 1999; Sunstein, 2001) have already attempted it. As the digital divide narrows,
more people will be able to participate in the electoral process (Sunstein, 2001).

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vote via the Internet</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe (Write in)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Not (Write in)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest percentage of respondents on Table 9 (22%) thought that by 2012, we
would be voting online. The Gallup poll (2000) indicated that 42% thought it would be
by 2008. Whatever the year, the author believes that it is quickly approaching, since an
answer needs to be found for an election that almost never ended because of a "chad"
(Pressman, 2000). Some predict a month-long Internet voting period, (Bowie, as cited in
Corrado, 1996) which may be the answer to increasing the number of voters and number
of voices to be heard.

Morris (1999) believes that the Internet will replace the voting machine, however,
he emphasizes that candidates won’t let it happen too soon. Such a system will definitely
have a major impact on the number of voters participating, and thus make the candidates
work much more difficult.
Table 9

Vote Via the Internet in What Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 or later</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Davis (1999) has mentioned that the media has been and will remain one of the important players in American politics. As a new medium, the Internet is just beginning to play a major role in determining political opinions and, in doing so, effecting results of elections. Many studies have been done in the past analyzing various other media, including radio, newspaper, television, and cable television. Each of these media have affected political opinions in the past and will continue to do so.

Studies conducted before television emerged as a major political media indicated that radio had a major impact on voting turnout (Kraus & Davis, as cited by Johnson et al., 2000). Johnson et al. (2000) report that television is a stronger predictor of intent to vote and campaign interest then radio during the 1996 election. Based on the present survey, television, and newspaper are still the strongest mediums (76% and 72%) influencing voter decisions. However, the interactiveness of the Internet not only influences voters, but will also get the voters more involved in the process. In 1999, Davis quoted that 37% of Internet users go online instead of watching television. Survey respondents in Table 10 indicated that 34% were influenced by the Internet, which is a
major development since the Internet has only been around since the early 1990s (Morris, 1999).

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the Above</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interactive transmission and reception of the Internet through chatrooms and e-mail encourages a two-way communication scenario unlike its media predecessors, and also bridges the gap between mass communications and interpersonal communication, (Davis, 1999). However, most of the respondents to the present survey indicated that they did not use the Internet for any of these functions. However, Table 11 indicates that the Internet is increasing the interactivity between candidate and voter, as evidenced by the 40% of survey respondents who found out information about the candidates, 4% who visited chat rooms, and 3% who donated to committees or campaigns. The Internet is becoming “a key component of people’s lives and will continue to be” (Wendland, as cited by Trombly, 2001, paragraph 4). Corrado (1996) thinks that Americans will feel more connected and get a chance to ask a candidate a particular question and reestablish a communication between the two.
Table 11

Internet Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow news about political campaigns</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out information on the candidates</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send e-mail to the candidates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit chat rooms about the presidential election</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donate to political committees/presidential campaigns</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is in sharp contrast to Esther Dyson (2000), who argues that a smaller number of Americans follow politics on the Internet and that politics is not interactive. Also, Davis (1999) contends that the Web is not going to turn passive Americans into active voters. This may be the case and may not have been apparent in the present survey due to the number of voters polled and sample bias. However, the author believes, as a result of this poll and through her research (Corrado, 2000; Glasser, 2000; Johnson, et. al. 1999; Kovach & Rosensteil, 2001; McKeown & Plowman, 1999; Marinucci, 2000;
Melillo, 2000; Morris, 1999; Morton, 2000; Neuwirth, 2000; O'Leary, 2000; Palser, 2000; Rust, 2000; Shields, 2000; Simpson & Bridis, 2000; Stephen, 2000; Squitieri, 2000; Sunstein, 2001; Tillet, 2000; Wakin 2000; Wayne, 2000; Weber, 2000), that the Internet is the first true interactive medium.

The new two-way communications medium is revolutionizing the relationship through the interactive nature of donating, chatting, and following news and thus is influencing voter opinions (Davis, 1999). The promise of the Internet is an increase in information readily available to the average citizen and more individual control over what information is received (Davis, 1999). The Internet is eliminating intermediaries in politics. The Fourth Estate, a term coined for the press by Edmund Burke (as cited by Morris, 1999, p.xx) at the close of the eighteenth century, told us how to think, how to behave, and how to respond to events they reported. Now per Morris, we are introduced to the Fifth Estate, the Internet, which offers the voting public the opportunity to express their view more directly without the mediation of the media (Morris, 1999). Corrado (1996) stated that voters will be able to identify issues of common interest and band together around them. Elin (personal communication, 2001) and Sunstein (2001) agree and see that on their own and through newly formed e-communities, voters will be able to see that they can make an impact and play a more meaningful role in political affairs because they can obtain their own unfiltered information and take a stand.

The author would like to note that Seton Hall University did not validate the survey instrument. Therefore, the findings presented by the author provide only initial indications for the influence of the Internet on voter opinions. Considerable future research must be completed for a more thorough determination.
Data collected in this study are consistent with existing data that the Internet will have an impact and influence voter opinions. While the data suggest that the Internet is already influencing voters the future question will be to what extent over time and how much impact the Internet will have.
Chapter VI

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

At the beginning of her research, the author sought to determine if the Internet would have an impact on presidential candidates, issues, and voter opinions. Through a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, current articles through June 2001, interviews, and a survey of Central New Jersey voters, the author found that the Internet is beginning to have an impact on voter decisions. Ultimately, over the next few election cycles, it will undoubtedly have an impact on presidential elections.

Both the literature and the survey data reveal that the Internet is influencing the presidential election process. The author found through the literature review that the majority of articles stressed that the Internet was impacting the election process from varying degrees. Several authors reflected that the current major media outlets are using the Internet to extend their reach, and thus are continuing to permeate and influence voter decisions and election outcomes since they have the resources to do so. Other researchers discussed the fact that the Internet is presenting new candidates, new ideas, and opening the door to new audiences who may change who the American public votes for in future elections.

The author agrees with Professor Larry Elin who stated that the Internet is now forming communities of individuals, creating interest groups, and giving these new groups a voice in the political process. This will broaden who will more actively participate in the presidential election process.
Future Study

The author, in closing, believes that her literature review, as well as interview and survey material, contributes to the rapidly growing body of research on the Internet’s impact in presidential elections. In future studies, the author suggests that researchers continue to study the effect of mainstream media, for example, television, newspapers, and compare how the Internet is impacting the overall landscape of presidential elections and elections in general. The author believes after completing her research that there are various forms of research that can be undertaken in the future, including: (a) the study of communities of voters formed via the Internet and their impact in the political process; (b) the impact of major media outlets utilizing the Internet as a vehicle for reach of their intended audience; (c) the impact of new candidates and new political parties using the Internet as a conduit to increase their presence, voice, and resources; and (d) the impact of the Internet as a marketing vehicle for presidential campaigns in general.

Researchers must continue to gather information through polls and surveys on the influence of the Internet on presidential candidates, issues, and voter opinions. By confirming the importance of the Internet as a rapidly emerging medium that cannot be ignored by politicians, the mass media, and the American public, more studies will be completed to show the overall impact. The overall growth in access to the Internet by the American public will increase the information distribution to new communities of voters and open new opinions and introduce new candidates. In upcoming elections, the author hopes that presidential candidates, the media, and voters will see the true value of the Internet as not only a form of mass media by which to reach the American public and influence opinions, but also as a new community formation vehicle that will increase the
voice of all Americans, no matter what their race, gender, sexual preference, occupation, party affiliation, or age.
References


Lawrence, J. (2000, March 10). McCain's political fortunes changed with his image. USA Today, p. 15A.


Survey
How the Internet might affect your choice for president?

Instructions: Please check the appropriate box with your response.

1. Do you have access to a computer at home? □ - Yes □ - No
   at work? □ - Yes □ - No

2. Do you have access to the Internet at home? □ - Yes □ - No
   at work? □ - Yes □ - No

3. Did you use the Internet to follow the 2000 Presidential Campaign? □ - Yes □ - No

4. If yes, what types of web sites did you visit? Please check all that apply.
   □ - Major Media (Wall Street Journal, New York Times, NBC)
   □ - News Organization (CNN, MSNBC)
   □ - Candidate Web Site (algore2000.com, georgewbush.com)
   □ - Politically Oriented Web Site (Salon.com, Voter.com)

5. In your opinion, what is the most up-to-date and immediate medium? Please check one.
   □ - Television
   □ - Radio
   □ - Newspaper
   □ - Internet
   □ - None
   □ - No Opinion

6. Do you think the Internet will present to you more choices for president? □ - Yes □ - No

7. Do you think the information on the Internet will influence who you vote for? □ - Yes □ - No

8. Do you think we will vote for president via the Internet in the future? □ - Yes □ - No

9. If yes, in what year? Please check one.
   □ - 2004
   □ - 2008
   □ - 2012
   □ - 2016 or later

10. Where do you currently gather your information to make voting decisions? Please check all that apply.
    □ - Internet
    □ - Television
    □ - Radio
    □ - Newspaper
    □ - None of the Above

11. Do you use the Internet to: Please check all that apply.
    □ - Follow news about political campaigns?
    □ - Find out information on the candidates?
    □ - Send e-mail to the candidates?
    □ - Visit chat rooms about the presidential election?
    □ - Donate to political committees/presidential campaigns?
    □ - Not Applicable