EXPRESSIONS, IMPRESSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS: HOW ARE TECHNOLOGIES AFFECTING JOURNALISTS, THE CANDIDATES THEY COVER, AND THE ORDINARY CITIZEN WHO RELIES ON BOTH?

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EXPRESSIONS, IMPRESSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS: HOW ARE TECHNOLOGIES AFFECTING JOURNALISTS, THE CANDIDATES THEY COVER, AND THE ORDINARY CITIZEN WHO RELIES ON BOTH?

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ABSTRACT

Technologies are changing the ways in which our political process works. Technology, politics, and individuals are inextricably linked. Journalists are able report and publish information at a rapid pace. Candidates are attempting to use technologies to their advantage. Ordinary citizens are able to take make their presence felt through new technologies. In contrast, the same technologies that help the aforementioned actors can act as a hindrance on the process.

I employed an inductive/qualitative approach in an attempt to understand how technology is affecting journalists and what the implications to our political process are. I interviewed three subjects with experience in different fields of journalism to understand how our political and social narratives are being written, not just by journalists, but by political candidates and ordinary citizens. I look to the past, present, and the future in an attempt to better understand where we have been, where we are going, and if it changes our political process?
Acknowledgements

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Note to the reader:

A narrative approach was used throughout this thesis. The author’s thoughts and observations are indicated by the use of italics.
Chapter 1. Introduction

January 23, 2008, 12:34pm, Florida Atlantic University, Student Union Building

Upon walking into the Student Union Building at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), my brain was operating at a rapid pace. There was an aberrant mix of fear, anxiety, and excitement that worked its way from my brain through my extremities. It was not the type of fear that lodges itself in your throat before a roller coaster drop, or when the phone rings in the dead of night. Moreover, I could not pinpoint why I felt such fear. Putting my anxiety aside, I asked the box office worker where I could find the NBC Offices. After grabbing not one, but two people to place me on the right path, I was given the wrong directions. As my anxiety increased, I helplessly looked around for some sort of direction. I later discovered a number of a FAU students and employees were wearing “Ask Me,” pins. I could have taken advantage of this particular self-help tool might I been in the know. The fear that was running through my veins was not because I was lost. The fear stemmed from the subject of journalism, campaigns, and technology. Simple as it seems, this fear had legs. Something dawned on me. In some detached way, I was a member of the Washington, D.C. media; a lowly intern representing MSNBC. Here I was, in Florida, for a Republican presidential debate. How did I, or more importantly, how did “We,” the media, end up in this precarious position? Was I a journalist or a spectator? New technologies have redefined journalism. Even though I did not sample the plethora of journalists running around at the debate, I’m sure a
plurality of the herd asked themselves a similar set of questions. Are journalists redefining how presidential campaigns are covered? Is there a blending of the new and old regimes that morphs into a new machine? In addition to journalists, how are presidential candidates and the ordinary citizen navigating through an election inundated with an array of new communicative devices? To what extent can journalists, candidates, and ordinary citizens control their professional and private environments? Is there a complete change in terms of our political and social processes or are the rules altered? Are journalists representing the old guard?

According to the FAU website devoted to the event, more than 400 credentialed media members attended the debate on January 24, 2008. The Democratic Presidential debate held at St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire on January 22, 2004, sponsored by FOX News, ABC News, WMUR, and The Manchester Union Leader did not receive the coverage I witnessed at FAU (Nagourney and Seelye 2004). There is a definite possibility this thesis will be found on a digital database many years into the future. The individual who encounters these words may find it hard to believe the 2008 election cycle was, at the time, the longest primary season on record. If this is being read in the year 2396, you, the reader may find it amusing that presidential campaigns started 22 months before Election Day. From my vantage point, there are several contributing factors that triggered the long primary season. 2008 marks the first time since 1928 that an incumbent president or vice president is not seeking the Presidency. In addition, since the reelection of George W. Bush in 2004, the president saw failures in social security reform, Hurricane Katrina, controversy over Supreme Court nominees, a quagmire in
Iraq, and low poll numbers. Without an obvious heir-apparent, mixed with President Bush’s performance, regardless of circumstance, the process that would eventually select the next president started early.

Even though I did not spend a great deal of time in the “Spin Room/Media Room” at the FAU debate, the full spectrum of media were represented. On one side of a table, CNN’s Dana Bash was working on her laptop, while bloggers not affiliated with a big media conglomerate were doing the same. Blogs as we know them have been around for close to 10 years. Jenna Wortham in 2007 wrote an article detailing the history of blogs. In the article, she explains, “Jorn Barger coined the term "weblog" to describe the list of links on his Robot Wisdom website that "logged" his internet wanderings. In the decade hence, blogs have come to dominate the net, from 100 million personal diaries to the breaking news sections of the August The New York Times.” (Wortham 2007). Blogs began to make their political presence felt during 2001 and started to reach critical mass around the 2004 United States presidential election. In 2008, blogs, or the blogosphere are not only a recognized journalistic media, but a necessary one. Not everyone can have their own CNN, but most individuals can blog. Jeff Jarvis, a news blogger, media pundit and director of the interactive journalism program at the City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism said, "It's [the blog] the easiest, cheapest, fastest publishing tool ever invented. The people have a voice they didn't have before," (Wortham 2007). A blog can have an audience of one million or a constituency of one. Blogs are just one example related to a shift in covering presidential campaigns. The relationship between a journalist and the campaigns they cover is clearly changing, but
how and to what extent? Is there a real game-changer, or is there a slower maturation process? In an age increasingly dominated by new technologies, how have journalists adapted to learning and using new technologies in covering a presidential campaign? Do new technologies allow journalists more agency or do technologies reduce the quality of campaign reporting? Do new technologies change the job of journalists?

How and why journalists and news organizations cover campaigns is not new subject matter. Why am I delving into topic that has been previously explored by the likes of Hunter S. Thompson, Theodore White, and Timothy Crouse? My motivations are similar to those that brought me down to a GOP debate in Florida, at the last second, with no defined job.

History allows us few times to explore what is happening, when it is happening. Technology and politics are inextricably linked at a time when subjects and actors can be looked at both individually and collectively. We can live without certain characteristics of the Internet, hyper-connectives, and other new technologies, but for how long? Further, the way stories, facts, and journalists are presented is changing; but have stories, facts, and journalists changed with the advent of new technologies? I will argue that even though there is a proliferation of new media applications available for journalists to use, these technologies do not change the journalist’s gut instinct and natural talent. I am not a skeptic, nor am I trying to latch on to an old school, chic line of thinking. I am relying on researchers and writers who have come before me, and those journalists who are working now to share their feelings and insight with me, and ultimately the reader.
Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72* put the author in the thick of the campaign; an active participant whose activities may or may not have to do with his subject. Thompson has no problem admitting, “Journalists are pretty hard people to like,” (Thompson 1973). Like Thompson, I was active participant. In the same moment, I was passive, watching journalists, campaigns, and producers create heroes out of flesh and bone. Timothy Crouse’s *Boys on the Bus* detailed the mercenary reporters who covered the 1972 presidential campaign. Crouse wanted to research the press. He completed the task with grace knowing individuals like Harry Kelly deemed him a, “Goddamn gossip columnist,” (Crouse 1973). Theodore White, who authored *The Making of the President 1960*, paints an eloquent picture of what would eventually become Camelot and Watergate, respectively. Even though White was not well regarded by his colleagues at the time, including Crouse, his narrative was the first strong literary account of a presidential campaign. He wrote of the primary and general election process in sweeping narratives, doing his best to explain every detail to the reader. This project strived to take elements of the above-mentioned authors in an attempt to research the world of new technologies and journalism. Like Thompson, Crouse, and White, I put myself in the middle of the subject. These authors achieved this feat to varying degrees, but placing themselves in their narratives was critical to their work.

This thesis included a series of narratives written by the author that hopefully reflect the aforementioned spirit. I wanted to tell a story along with my research and findings. The narrative approach presents the reader an opportunity to see what it was like to ponder my own questions in addition to the research questions. I did not want to
limit myself in the narrative approach, but strived to have the subject matter pertain to the
thesis. While reporters and news organizations are implementing new technologies into
their reporting, seldom do they write about the technologies they use.

One purpose of this project is to flesh out journalists’ reasons and aspirations for
reporting in a certain manner. Crouse states writers often omitted information about
traveling around with a campaign which was, “So important in forming their gut feelings
about the campaign,” (Crouse 1973). In the same spirit, a large portion of research is
devoted to one-on-one interviews with Washington, DC media members. Tucker Carlson
of MSNBC, A.B. Stoddard of The Hill, and Matt Lewis of Townhall agreed to
interviewed for this project. Their insights were invaluable. Engaging one-on-one with
those who have written about politics and worked in politics long enough to understand
changes to journalism is crucial to our understanding of the questions. Portions of
interviews were used throughout the thesis to provide valuable research.

The chapter outline is as follows: 11. Methodology and Analysis This chapter
explained how I conducted the interviews for the thesis and explained the
inductive/qualitative approach used throughout the thesis. The chapter provides
extensive passages from the interviews I conducted. These passages provided the context
from which the analysis is formed III. Where have we been? How are journalists using
New Media to aid in covering presidential campaigns? I asked the interviewees to
discuss their experiences covering campaigns. I intended to relate the research question
back to Crouse’s book, The Boys on the Bus. IV. Where are we now? In 2008, we find
ourselves in a difficult spot in terms of television and politics. We know where we have
been, but we are still confused about where we are. This chapter will flesh out what is happening now and how it affects the overall narrative of campaign coverage. I particularly focused on the state of cable news coverage throughout the 2008 cycle.

V. Controlling Your Environment: Technology and politics Technology has not necessarily changed the rules, but has changed the way the game is played. Does it help or hurt the political process? What are the implications for journalists, candidates, and ordinary citizens? VI. Conclusions? After flushing out five chapters, I answer the aforementioned question. Where are we going, and why? 2008 is a different presidential election, but in its striped down form, the explication of a presidential campaign is not a new ball game. It is merely a new inning.
Chapter 2. Methodology and Analysis

During the preliminary stages of the thesis, I determined the best way to answer my research questions would be to ask journalists and media professionals to offer their thoughts and opinions regarding the role technology plays in journalism and politics. In addition to interviews, I used the Communication, Culture, and Technology course *The Production of Political News: Citizens, Journalists and Technology* to provide background on the rapidly changing world of political newsgathering, journalistic integrity, politics and the Internet, and political television. I developed the class with Professor Diana Owen and fellow CCT student Jacqueline Klingebiel in August 2007.

An individual can learn a great deal about technology and journalism from books. An individual can learn a great deal from a subject’s columns, blogs, and television appearances. Often, however, the researcher cannot develop an intricate picture of a subject or subjects without sitting down and asking the subjects questions specifically designed for the individual. The subjects represented a mix of Old Media, New Media, and Old Media/New Media hybrids that represent the continuing and changing, 21st century political landscape. I tried to choose subjects who represented different categories. Each subject fell under a different category. A.B. Stoddard, who is a trained print journalist, is an Old Media/New Media hybrid. She writes columns and appears on television. Stoddard also posts on The Hill's “Pundits Blog” and produces her own video blog, “Ask A.B.” Tucker Carlson fell under the Old Media category. Carlson appears on television and is a feature writer by trade. Carlson does not currently post on
a blog, but his feature pieces that appear in print also appear online. Matt Lewis is part of the New Media category. Originally known as a conservative media consultant, Lewis entered the realm of journalism and blogging within the last several years. While he uses Old Media forms like television in his role as a commentator, he is booked on television primarily because of his conservative blogging. By interviewing the subjects, I set out to find, through their personal experience 1. What it was like to cover presidential campaigns. 2. How technology affects the job of covering the campaigns. 3. How they see the state of technology and journalism in 2008 and beyond. I will show how I designed and posed questions that related to my research questions. It was difficult to write questions that were entirely uniform. Because journalists and media professionals are specialized in different areas, I thought it better to cater to different subject manner with the different interviewees. I employed a semi-structured interview approach that included a basic series of questions that I worked from and elaborated upon and adapted for each subject. Tucker Carlson is widely known for his television shows and appearances. A.B. Stoddard, and Matt Lewis, both appear on television, but all appear because they are journalists or produce journalistic content. The flow of the questions also altered the results. If a conversation took place in person, it was easy to jump into other subject matter. I found I did this more with Tucker Carlson because of the working relationship I established with him. An interview that takes place via email is more structured because there is little room for an immediate follow up question. In total, I gathered approximately 20,000 words of transcription. Large portions of the transcriptions are used throughout the thesis.
The protracted election year greatly affected how the interviews were conducted. Because the primary election did not end after February 5, 2008 and lasted well into spring 2008, I was not able to conduct the interviews early in the thesis writing process. Either the subjects requested that I not conduct interviews until after Super Tuesday, February 5, 2008, or there was simply no time for the subject to sit down and be interviewed. Several prospective subjects did not answer my inquiries regarding interview requests. Other interviews, such as the interview with Townhall’s Matt Lewis were conducted via email because of time constraints. Email can cut down on the number on minutes, hours, and days it takes to receive return communication. Email was helpful in conducting interviews because the subject could look at the questions, answer the questions, and return the questions to the interviewer at their convenience.

I employed an inductive/qualitative approach to my research. I submerged myself into the study environment as an active participant and essentially created my own access. My goal was to start with observations, detect patterns, create several tentative hypotheses, and finally develop several general theories and answer a basic set of questions. My access to subjects was determined by my internship with Tucker at MSNBC in Washington, DC. The internship started in August 2007 and ran through May 2008. Ideally, I would have liked to interview more journalists, but limits to access, time, and the election year did not favor the thesis’ time constraints. A.B. Stoddard, associate editor of The Hill remarked, “I’m on TV 5 times a week now. That won’t happen next year when we are talking about the Congress,” (Interview by Author 04 April
2008). If the thesis were written in 2009, or in a year where the presidential election did not reach such historic levels, I would have had more timely access to individuals.
A.B. Stoddard, Associate Editor of The Hill, trained printed journalist, writes columns that appear in print and online, posts on The Hill’s “Pundit’s Blog” and “Ask A.B.” video blog

In January 2008, I contacted A.B. Stoddard. Because of the presidential election, I was not able to conduct the interview until April 2008. I established a relationship with Stoddard, who was a regular panelist on MSNBC’s Tucker. An associate editor of The Hill, Stoddard has covered Washington, DC politics for almost two decades. Stoddard is a traditional print journalist, who is making the transition into the world of New Media and technologies. I wanted to investigate what it was like to work as print journalist in a world inundated with new technologies. It is a cloudy morning by all means, but not necessarily a miserable one. Stoddard and I were to meet at the Maggianos Restaurant, but the small café in the front of the restaurant had closed. Cosi, located on the opposite side of Wisconsin Avenue NW, has a large menu including coffee, sandwiches, and salads. Cosi’s proximity to the original destination made it the obvious second choice. I particularly like the Grilled Chicken T.B.M., which is grilled chicken breast, tomatoes, basil & fresh mozzarella with Cosi vinaigrette. Being that it was 9:30 in the morning, I chose instead to drink a cup of coffee and call it a day. Stoddard and I sat down at a medium sized table, chatted for several minutes and then I conducted the interview.

I used my Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-4100 to capture the interview. I used a notebook to write down any additional notes on answers, questions, and notes regarding the interview environment. Politically speaking, Republican
Senator John McCain had started his general election campaign. Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were campaigning for the Democratic Nomination for President of the United States, with the next contest to be held on April 22 in Pennsylvania. The week prior, Hillary Clinton had been caught fabricating a story, telling reporters she endured sniper fire in 1996 on a tarmac in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Clinton story is alluded to during the interview. The campaigns of Senators McCain and Obama are also mentioned.

I first asked Stoddard to provide background information, pertaining to her career. I had the following exchange with Stoddard:

John Marullo: Please state your background and how you entered into journalism.

A.B. Stoddard: Well I was on the newspaper 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade. I was in the newspaper freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year in college. I ran the newspaper at the end of high school; I ran the magazine at the end of college. I graduated. I had internships in the summer. They were unpaid internships at the Village Voice and The Los Angeles Herald-Examiner. I did several different programs. I did the program at the Madill School out of Northwestern that they [Northwestern] offered. [It was] the cherub program. I was always actively seeking out opportunities to learn more about it [journalism]. I've never been a real breaking news hound. [I was] a writer at heart. I also really love the conversation. I was interested. That's what has always tied me to journalism.
You get to meet people you never would have met and you get to ask some things you never could ask them. That is what I’ll never lose. But, you burn out on the news cycle. I was actually never addicted to that [the news cycle]. So, I landed at The [Washington] Post in the bottom, entry job, where they say you’ll never get a reporting job and I sorted mail. Then, I got a reporting job out at The Potomac News, which is out of Prince William County, Virginia, and that was my first reporting job. On the side, I wrote for Washington Life Magazine, which was just starting out back then. It’s a society magazine. I was there for three years and I went to The Hill. No, I went to States News Service, which you might Google and learn more about [States News Service]. Howard Kurtz wrote this really great, great piece [about States News Service]. You need to know more about it because it was a brilliant idea that failed miserably, business wise. It was customized coverage of the Congress. I wrote for small newspapers in Alaska and Louisiana. I’d follow the delegation and the coverage was customized literally for that town. It was a genius idea. Everyone in journalism knows about States News Service. Famous people like Lois Romano worked there. It was this sweatshop and turned out that all these people wanted to work there. They would hire you to cover the Congress with no experience covering the Congress. I got there in March 1994. The revolution [1994 Republican Revolution] happened in November. It was the most unbelievable luck of timing. I was there for a few years and went to The Hill newspaper for a few more years; all covering the Congress. I have basically been covering the Congress since 1994. Then I went to ABC News for three years as an off-air reporter. They call it a producer. I knew nothing about television. It was a three-year contract and I realized in
those three years I didn’t want to be an on-camera reporter. I didn’t want to have that life. I didn’t want to be in an edit room. So, I had to get back into print. I freelanced for a while. Then, I went back to The Hill in’06 (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Stoddard, by all measures is a print journalist. Stoddard is an individual who speaks candidly, on the record about her forays into the world of technology. Starting in August 2007, Stoddard began her video blog, “Ask A.B.” Because I was investigating how technology was changing the face of politics, I asked Stoddard how, “Ask A.B.” came to fruition, her feelings towards using the medium, and what the results had been thus far. I had the following exchange with Stoddard:

John Marullo: How did the “Ask A.B.” video blog begin?

A.B. Stoddard: This is another interesting thing. There is a temptation, a pressure to move into the new technology realm because it’s a money maker, and to move into it so forcefully. We have a pundit’s blog. The pundits on the blog are partisan expect for me. I’m the only paid staff member of The Hill on the blog. All of a sudden, they [The Hill] wanted us to do videos. Armstrong Williams, and Karen Hanretty were making these videos. I’m not supposed to do that [take a side]. I couldn’t come on and say, “The FISA fight really breaks down into two important questions.” People were going to die of boredom. There was nothing I could do (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).
The Hill and other organizations of the same persuasion adopt new technologies because the technologies are becoming part of the national and political narrative. Potentially, a video blog can attract more traffic, which in turn can drive ad revenue. Stoddard attempts to look past the monetary reasons for the technologies. Stoddard is hesitant to commit fully to new technologies because she is weary about how her training as a print journalist would work on a New Media format.

John Marullo: Did posting on the video blog feel similar to on-air reporting?

[Stoddard mentioned during the interview that she never felt comfortable being an on-air reporter when she was with ABC News]

A.B. Stoddard: It wouldn’t make good video for me to come and say “I just have a post and I’m going to start talking. So you notice that.” It wasn’t going to be good. I couldn’t go as far as they [the other pundits] could go. I can’t say, “Boy…” and really make fun of, and rib. I thought this [the video blog] is going to be bad. This is going to be bad for the blog, and be bad for me. I was just in a corner. So I said, “How about I answer people’s questions?” Then it’s kind of a conversation. I found that the first four months of the blog were horrible. But now it’s gotten more fun. I am more at ease with it because I have worked so hard to engage the readers. I email them back. I suggest articles for the readers to read. If they send me an article, and if I have another [article] that I just read and it was good I tell them, “Look up this one.” I am now friends with them, I have engaged with them so they stay with the video. When I’m doing the video,
I’m happy that Jorge sent me another question because he and I have been corresponding since last August [2007]. You know what I mean? It’s like a little club and it’s the conversation for me. Even though I am talking straight to a camera for 8 minutes, by myself, looking at a piece of paper, it is the conversation. We’ve kind of gotten to know each other. I know the minute I see the email pop up that if it’s Jay from Texas, he’s a Republican. I know that Roland from Texas is like smart and is always going to send me something interesting. I’m engaged with people that I can’t meet and hang out with. We’re never going to put on an expensive show and they’re never going to come into my conference room. I’m not going to video conference them in from wherever. But for this project, it’s now just much more interesting than me in the conference room going, “Hi, I’m A.B. Stoddard, associate editor of The Hill, and today I’m going to talk about...” I got lucky that it was a good idea. I got lucky. It was born from desperation (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Stoddard wants to engage her readers and viewers in the conversation. This is not just related to the conversation on her blog posts and columns, but an over-arching conversation meant to drive the political and social narrative. If Stoddard, a journalist feels she is driving this conversation, then Stoddard feels like she is contributing to the process. The interview reads in such a way that if Stoddard did not feel like she was driving the conversation, she would not feel like she was completing her job as a journalist. It is worth mentioning that Stoddard often refers to the viewers of her video
blog as, “readers.” This provides more proof that Stoddard is an Old Media/New Media hybrid.

John Marullo: Did your video blog start as a component of the protracted election year, or do you think it would have happened anyway?

A.B. Stoddard: No. It started when my bosses said you have to do videos. You have to do a video blog once a week. I was freaking out. Not every one of mine was on the presidential [election]. But, then because the presidential [election] got so intense starting in the fall, then all my viewers were asking, they wanted longer videos. They wanted 30 minute videos and they wanted two videos a week, or three. A lot of my readers are smart with it [new technologies]. They have their own blogs. They write me. One particular [reader], said “You need to post as much as Halperin and Cilliza and all these people because I read them all day, and I like your stuff better, but you only post once a day, or every 36 hours.” You know what? It’s not my blog. I’m on a group blog. I’m on TV five times a week. I have a column every week. I have a lot of work to do. The problem for me is that in the excitement of this very intense election I could have ramped up to more posts, more videos, videos with special guests, interviews with people about the ’08 cycle. Then, when we ramp down in 2009 it would be so disappointing. I have to keep that in mind that it’s very important not to over market because then you can’t deliver. In the excitement, sure. My videos used to be three or four minutes long and now they are 8 or 9 because I take more
questions. I want the readers to keep coming back and I don’t want a reader to say, “I haven’t had a question answered by her in 6 weeks.”

John Marullo: So, you have to be pragmatic about using new technologies?

A.B. Stoddard: You need to be pragmatic because if, in this moment we get too excited [cross-talk]. Sure, I’m on TV 5 times a week now. That won’t happen next year when we are talking about the Congress even once a week. But, for the pundit’s blog, I know that we can’t ramp it up to the point where I will post everyday. First of all, I don’t have the time. Then even if I wanted to be a maniac, we still won’t have the material a year from now.

John Marullo: A pragmatic approach is an important thing a lot of people have not thought about.

A.B. Stoddard: That is a huge thing. I even started showing some funny pictures and stuff for a while and I lost viewers. I don’t have time to produce a really funny thing with nifty jokes. So, on a week when it’s not up to the total zany, fun, I have lost viewers because I don’t have the time. It is getting so intense, post February 5. It is getting so intense. I can’t make it a TV show, but there was a fever pitch at one point where they [readers] were all trying to send fun things, and they [readers] wanted me to include them including, funny songs and limericks. I realized then that I can’t keep up this pace of producing an 8 minute video show.
John Marullo: It takes more than 8 minutes to produce

A.B. Stoddard: It takes an entire day. If you added up the time I added up those emails, get ready, [put on] makeup, and get down to *The Hill*, and do it. Then, the whole time I spend doing the script, with all of my stuff on the floor, in the paper pile. No, it is an entire day. I work six days a week. It is not one of my five, but it is a lot. I would like it to be a lot better. I’d like a staff, but no one is offering me that [a staff]. If I do that [assemble a staff] for myself, I’ll have to keep it up when there is nothing to talk about (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Stoddard faces the problem of immediate information. Stoddard’s readers and viewers like them desire the most recent information. The only way to provide this information is to be on top of a project at all times. It is a full time job to keep an up to date blog or video blog. Stoddard, who balances a family in addition to her duties at *The Hill*, and television appearances, finds it hard to keep up with her dedicated readers and viewers. Instead, Stoddard employs a pragmatic approach to her posts. Stoddard views this approach as a way of staying relevant, without burning out on the process. Stoddard does not want to interrupt the conversation she fosters with her readers and viewers.

Stoddard is facing a struggle that many individuals, not only journalists are facing; how to exist, work, and compete in world inundated with new technologies. Stoddard is an example of a hybrid. As previously stated, Stoddard is a non-partisan,
print journalist. Stoddard’s desire is to report on what she sees, state the facts, back up her facts, and present a clear, concise narrative. Stoddard does not want to tamper with her reputation as a factual, print reporter. Differentiating between what is a factual column and what is an opinionated blog is becoming increasingly difficult. This is because blogging has become, amongst other things, a journalistic format. If an individual conducts a search for news, the individual can choose to read a blog, like A.B. Stoddard’s blog, that is meant to be factual. On the other hand, the casual web surfer may open a partisan blog whose content looks similar to that of a news blog, but contains opinion mixed with fact, rather than just fact. The information could be truth or fiction, but there are no credentials, besides word of mouth that lends legitimacy to a particular blog. Stoddard explained to me that being a blogger and blogging were two different entities:

Also remember this; I’m not a blogger, I’m blogging. The average blogger is really worked up about something and they are really dying to be heard and read. I’m a former reporter and I was only allowed to deal in fact. It’s even new for me to deal with analysis and commentary. So I have evolved into that [analysis and commentary] and tried to find ease. For example, yesterday I wrote a column on Clinton [Hillary]. It was really hard for me. I kept checking my facts, and saying, “Okay, she really lied about Tuzla, and she lied again. It was on video.” I was really trying to lay out the argument because I just didn’t want to call her a liar. It was so uncomfortable. The blogger is dying for a forum and dying to read and heard. That’s not me. I am read and heard. I don’t need to get
out there and start writing something really outrageous to get noticed, to get
blamed (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

I also asked Stoddard about her personal feelings regarding technology. While an
individual’s personal feelings are not necessarily pertinent to the political narrative, it is
important to gain insight into how the subject reasons and thinks. Stoddard explained her
personal feelings about technology:

You have to understand that I kind of grew up professionally when this [advent
in communicative technologies] just started. When my husband and I met in
1995, we didn’t email each other. There were no cell phones. There were cell
phones for serious professionals who needed them, but you and I would not have
had a cell phone at the time I met my husband. We didn’t flirt on email. It was a
really wild period, when my 30’s happened to me. So, I started to email about 8
or 9 years ago. I was one of the last people to pick it up around me. Anyway, I
think that cell phones give you brain cancer, so I don’t use them unless I have to.
I never sit, chatting on the phone with my friend. I only use it when I have to.
I’m always going to have one, but my kids are not going have them [cell phones]
with their brains growing. The radiation scares me. It’s just not cool with me.
My husband and I will fight about that. He’ll say, “Let them on the computer.” I
think too much. There are studies that show, especially for boys, too much of
that [technologies], too soon, like video games, TV, computers; is not good. I
believe that. I believe there is plenty of time to learn to use the computer. There
is no need to do it too early. That’s going to be an issue. Our kids are 6 and 4
right now. They’re not on a computer right now. They don’t have their own
digital camera. They’re not going to have cell phones when they’re 10. It is
going to be hard, but they’re not downloading iTunes. It’s just not happening. It
will happen but, not now. I’m not anti-tech, but I’m low – pro, so I resist. I don’t
have a Blackberry. The reason I don’t have a Blackberry is because I am a big
multitasker. I would always be on it. So I don’t have one for a reason. It would
make my life easier. Believe me, I work from home, I have three kids, I work 50
something, almost 60 hour week. It would help me to have a Blackberry. I don’t
have one because I know that I would be in the car with my kids on the weekend
deleting emails. I would be using it. When I was doing the Tucker show I would
always come home, and get home like 10 after 7. My children would have to go
to bed at 7:30pm. Then, I would have to go straight to the computer because I
haven’t seen it in hours. My friends say “No, no, this why you have a Blackberry
because you need to check it in the car so you can be with your kids the minute
you walk in the door because you’ve already checked the Blackberry. There are
too many reasons why I would end up on it all the time. So, I’ve resisted. Now,
my office is getting me a Blackberry. I guess I’m going to have to deal with that.
But I resist for reasons. I am the addict. I have 3 email accounts. I am
constantly Googling and doing, and I can spend way too much time at the
computer as it is. That’s my whole thing. I resist technology because I know it
will consume me. It is just so depressing to me because I had to talk to people
face-to-face or on the phone, but I had to talk. It was awkward, but it’s a really
important thing to learn to converse with people in person and kind of get over
your shyness--to stick up for yourself. Also, my parents talked a lot about
privacy and I think privacy is a huge issue that people don’t understand. I appreciate it more and more as I grow (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Stoddard’s personal views help illustrate her professional views towards technology. Stoddard is intent to resist certain technologies because she does not want to be consumed. Stoddard is aware of her own habits in terms of her own technology usage. These views fuel Stoddard’s professional outlook on the uses of new technologies.

While it is possible for journalists/bloggers to struggle with an identity crisis in terms of their different journalistic forums, Stoddard’s identity is clear. Even though she is participating in what I will call a, “new conversation,” with both her readers and viewers of her blog, Stoddard holds onto and trusts the same gut instinct that attracted her to journalism during high school and college. Stoddard wants to report the truth and back her stories up with facts. The interviewee has mixed feelings about the format she is employing. Stoddard is careful to point out that she would never characterize herself as a blogger. In ways, Stoddard is visiting the format. Stoddard is intent on showcasing her journalistic integrity throughout her posts, which are written more like columns and not the average blog post. Stoddard remarks her posts are written like columns because, “I am factual and I want to explain the whole thing and it’s just against my nature [not to be factual and accurate],” (Interview by Author 04 April 2008). Stoddard wants to continue and remain excited about the conversation she fosters between her political counterparts and the readers of her columns and blogs.
Matt Lewis, Blogger, Townhall.com

I contacted Matt Lewis in March 2008. I wanted to interview an individual who blogged, but was not trained as a journalist. I met Lewis several times throughout my tenure at MSNBC. Lewis appeared on Tucker several times and appears regularly on MSNBC Dayside and the Fox News Channel. Lewis struck me as a friendly individual who was smart and could contribute to the political conversation. Lewis, who is widely known as a conservative blogger and commentator, is not a trained journalist. Before entering the blogging and journalism realm, Lewis was a media consultant who aimed to help conservative candidates and organizations communicate effectively. I conducted the interview with Lewis via email, March 30, 2008. Politically speaking, Republican Senator John McCain had started his general election campaign. Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were campaigning for Democratic Nomination for President of the United States, with the next contest to be held on April 22 in Pennsylvania. I asked Lewis questions dealing with technology’s role in politics, how he started blogging, and how technology is affecting the political narrative. I had the following exchange with Lewis:

John Marullo: What drew you to the blogging format?

Matt Lewis: In late 2003, I ran a Congressional race. This was right about the time Howard Dean was making a lot of waves. I decided to catch the zeitgeist and start a blog on the campaign site. I read Joe Trippi's excellent book, "The
Revolution Will Not Be Televised" in 2004, and that kind of hooked me. If you want to understand why people are drawn to the blogging format read Trippi's book. Trippi goes into detail on how this technology [blogs] has the potential to "democratize" the political process again. Initially, my blogging was done more as a political operative than as a writer/journalist. I didn't start doing anything "journalistic," until 2005 when I started writing for Human Events Online. (Interview by Author 30 March 2008).

Blogging is approached in several different ways. Lewis spelled out a few of those ways in the previous exchange. Lewis stated, “Initially, my blogging was done more as a political operative than as a writer/journalist. I didn't start doing anything "journalistic," until 2005 when I started writing for Human Events Online (Interview by Author 30 March 2008). There is a stark contrast in how A.B. Stoddard and Lewis approach the medium. For Lewis, blogging is a way for him to speak out on issues he feels are pertinent to conservatives or to the political conversation. Stoddard views the medium as a component of an already existing process, sometimes beneficial and other times, a hindrance. Lewis tends to look at the medium as an outlet, or conduit for his views where other individuals with access to the Internet can learn about these views and opt to agree or disagree with these views out in the open. For Lewis, his television appearances help push forward the conversation he is developing with his readers. Television, a technology already regularly employed by both journalists and candidates, helps educate the television audience about who bloggers are and what bloggers do. Lewis did not strike me as the type of blogger Stoddard described. Stoddard was not assigning all
bloggers a blanket definition. Stoddard’s problem with outrageous bloggers is that some
bloggers practice what Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert Kaiser call, “Bad journalism-
failing to report important news, or reporting news shallowly, inaccurately, or unfairly,”
the kind of journalism that can, “leave people dangerously uninformed,”
(Downie and Kaiser 2001). Stoddard, who is a traditional print journalist, Carlson who is
a writer and television host, and Lewis who is a conservative blogger and consultant, all
subscribe to Downie and Kaiser’s special role. The authors state, “Journalists have a
special role in preserving one of America’s greatest assets, our culture of accountability,
(Downie and Kaiser 2001). A blogger, like Lewis, is becoming a larger player in the
21st Century political narrative. Lewis and others have the ability to vet candidates.
Bloggers may be paying attention to certain stories that journalists are not. I had the
following exchange with Lewis regarding bloggers and Senator John McCain’s
 candidacy:

John Marullo: You are quoted in The Washington Times saying, "If anybody
needed the blogosphere it was McCain." When the next President is sworn in, are
you of the opinion that he or she would have to thank the blogosphere for either
their victory or their opponents’ defeat?

Matt Lewis: Very possibly, but this may not be the first time. What if bloggers
weren't around to figure out that the Bush Air National Guard documents were
bogus? The mainstream media wasn't going to break that story - bloggers did.
The same thing is true with the Monica Lewinsky scandal; didn't Drudge break
that first? You could make an argument that bloggers played major roles in the 2000 and 2004 elections (Interview by Author 30 March 2008).

The above interaction is important. The legitimacy of the Bush Air National Guard documents is still debated, but bloggers were responsible for bringing their legitimacy to light. It could be said that bloggers determined the trajectory of Dan Rather’s career and put the ethics of CBS News under a microscope. Blogs wield a great amount of power and influence, right or wrong. The on-going, back and forth conversation employed by blogs can help a candidate reach a specific base. In the case of McCain, a candidate who struggles with the conservative base, conservative bloggers use technology that can either help or hurt McCain. Both the electorate and Beltway insiders want to know the basic bullet points of a presidential candidate; their background and where they stand politically. Technology, like blogs, can help foster this process. Lewis made a point to link technology and personal interaction. I had the following exchange with Lewis:

I do think it is important to have a real campaign message, and then use technology to advance that message. While I am a real believer in using technology, it's no substitute for having a compelling vision and message. Once you've got that, the goal is to find ways to communicate that message. Another important note is to not forget the personal aspect. Though he doesn't have the slickest online campaign, John McCain has done the best job of blogger outreach because he took the time to build relationships with bloggers (Interview by Author 30 March 2008).
Throughout the interviews I asked the subjects if technology and politics were inextricably linked. To different degrees, each interviewee said yes. What I take away from my conversation with Matt Lewis is that technology and politics are inextricably linked, but technology and politics also rely on human interaction and a personal aspect to be considered a success. Lewis’ background as a media consultant is evident in his response. Lewis embraces technology to a greater extent than Stoddard and Carlson, but he is aware of the fact that human touch and interaction go a long way in terms of fostering a relationship between technology, candidates, and the electorate.
Tucker Carlson, former host of MSNBC’s Tucker, currently MSNBC’s Senior Campaign Correspondent, trained printed journalist

Starting in August 2007, I served as an intern/production assistant for MSNBC’s *Tucker*. In this capacity, I helped the host, Tucker Carlson with a variety of tasks. These tasks included story research, guest relations, scripts, and administrative duties. It was in this role that I developed a working relationship with Carlson. I had a number of conversations with Carlson throughout the workday. On several occasions, I sat down with Carlson and conducted interviews relating to his role covering John McCain, the journalistic state and craft, technologies and journalism, and the state of the 2008 presidential election. Carlson, who is feature writer by trade, has inhabited several professions over the course of 17 years, much of it explained in his 2003 book, *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites*. Having gone from being a newspaper reporter in Arkansas to a television host for CNN, PBS, and MSNBC, Carlson offered a wide variety of insights and opinions.

All interviews with Carlson were conducted in Carlson’s office, at NBC’s Washington, DC Bureau. *Carlson’s office is not a “typical” office. The view from the top floor is ominous, yet inviting. Carlson’s office, who has the best view on the floor, looks out at the Department of Homeland Security. There are both smokestacks and television towers in the background, at times painting a coldwaresque picture. When it gets late in the day, the sun runs in and not even my Dell computer monitor can escape basking in the sun’s rays. Where another person might put up a few framed photographs or pictures on their desk or walls, Carlson’s office is covered in both. Many photos of*
Carlson’s family are present along with a signed picture of Jerry Garcia with a much younger Carlson, a picture of Carlson outside of John McCain’s Straight Talk Express, a framed Trey Anastasia poster, various credentials from campaigns and media events, a mirror, and other various framed pictures, both large and small. The pictures nailed to the wall are positioned next to one another, looking chaotic, yet making perfect sense. The pictures appear as if they have always been there. I have to remind myself that I was in the room the day Carlson nailed the pictures to the wall. Carlson refuses to use the florescent lights overhead, instead choosing to use an assortment of desk and floor lamps, whose incandescent light bulbs give the office a warm and inviting feel.

I used my Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-4100 to capture the interview. I used a notebook to record any additional notes on answers, questions, and notes about the interview environment. Politically speaking, the interviews took place during winter 2008. During this time, the 2008 Republican and Democratic caucuses and primaries were held in states such as Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Michigan, and Florida. The Super Tuesday contests were held where individuals in 24 states and America Samoa voted. Both Republican and Democratic candidates were fighting for their party’s nomination. As of this writing, the Republican nominee is Senator John McCain, while Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama vie for the Democratic nomination.

I asked Carlson to provide me with background information pertaining to his career both as a writer, then as a television host:

John Marullo: The Spin Room [on CNN] was the first show you were a host of?

Tucker Carlson: Yes, that was the first show I was a host of. I was a guest host at *Crossfire* [on CNN]. I was the fill in guy on *Crossfire* for years before that (Interview by Author 08 February 2008).

Carlson grew up around television. Carlson’s father is Ambassador Richard Carlson. Amb. Carlson is a former Los Angeles News Anchor, the former President and CEO of The Corporation of Public Broadcasting, and former President and CEO of King World Television.

In his book, *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites*, Carlson explains, “If O.J. Simpson hadn’t murdered his wife, I probably wouldn’t be working in television,” he goes on to say, “I was heading back to my desk with a take-out hot dog one afternoon when I ran into the receptionist. She asked me what I knew about the O.J. trial…I asked her why she wanted to know…Dan Rather’s booker
just called looking for an O.J. expert to go on 48 Hours .... Within a few hours I
was on my way to CBS in New York,” (Carlson 2003). Carlson was also an
analyst on the original Fox News Sunday. After hosting, The Spin Room,
Crossfire, and Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered, Carlson went to MSNBC where he
hosted The Situation with Tucker Carlson, that subsequently became Tucker.
Carlson falls under the Old Media category. Throughout the interviews I
conducted with Carlson, he spoke candidly not just about new technologies, but
what might be constituted as older technologies. Carlson explained to me that he
had little respect for television when he got into the business:

Tucker Carlson: I think that I had very little respect for television when I went
into it. I didn’t understand how difficult it was. I thought it was just a matter of
sitting in a chair and talking. It took me a long time to figure out how difficult it
[television] was and to understand and figure out what I didn’t understand; to
get my own ignorance. I have much more respect for it now, respect for people
who are good at it [television], good at reading TelePrompTer. It’s hard. It is
hard to sound natural. I thought because I was a print guy for so long, 10 years
before that, I thought dumb people did TV. Part of that was from my experience
being on the road covering campaigns and other events. The TV guys were
always the ones putting make up on, in the chair, while you are out actually
gathering news and putting together your story. You look at them and say,
“You don’t know what the Hell you are doing and you’re just a creampuff,”
which there is a lot of truth in that I still believe. What I didn’t get was that
these people are very good at something. That is the mechanics of television, and the aesthetics of television…No one ever gave me any lessons (Interview by Author 08 February 2008)

Television looks easy, but it is hard to learn the mechanics of the medium. When MSNBC were moving studios, the staff completed several rehearsals. I took part in the rehearsals, sitting in the anchor chair. The mechanics surrounding television were fascinating. The viewer at home may not understand how complex running a television show might be. It is no wonder that with the advent of new technologies, individuals can make their own video blogs at home by way of their computers because technology has the potential to simplify for the process for ordinary citizens. Carlson explained to me that he was never given a lesson in television or the technologies associated with television:

John Marullo: Was your experience with technology and television totally your own education?

Tucker Carlson: Oh yeah! I never had a single piece of advice or lesson. Nobody ever said this is how you read TelePrompTer. Nobody ever said, “Maybe you should spend a day learning.” I never had a practice run (Interview by Author 08 April 2008).
I could not tell if Carlson was happy about this or not. I decided to follow up with another question:

John Marullo: Are you glad that you learned television that way?

Tucker Carlson: No, I think I would have benefited a lot from taking two weeks and learning how a show is put together, learning how to read TelePrompTer, and where sound bites would be more effective. It would have made my life a lot easier. It probably would have made my ratings higher if I learned that stuff ahead of time (Interview by Author 08 February 2008).

Journalism is not solely devoted to print. Television is one of journalism’s many offshoots. Technology has followed Carlson, both as a television host and print journalist. Carlson prides himself on being a print journalist. He stated above that he loves to go out, gather real information, and write a story. Carlson understood that learning television’s technological aspects would be his only means of survival as a television host. Carlson does not exactly embrace all facets of the television. While television host is part of Carlson’s resume, in his personal life, Carlson is less willing to sit in front of a television for hours at a time. “I thought long and hard about television...TV is not good for you. I grew up in the business. I had a low opinion of its affects,” (Interview by Author 08 February 2008). Like A.B. Stoddard, Carlson shared his views regarding new technologies as well. Carlson believes the workday is continuously expanding
and can potentially dehumanize the journalists who cover campaigns. I asked Carlson to elaborate on comments he made about the expanding workday:

I’m a big believer in dinner as a spiritual matter, and lunch. I think it is really important to stop and make sense of what you’ve seen and talk it over with other people who’ve seen it. I think it’s important to retain your humanity when your traveling, which is easier given up then people realize. People who haven’t spent years on road don’t know what can happen to you. It’s not good for you to be constantly traveling. It is disorienting. I’m a big believer in taking time out and breaking bread with fellow journalists on the road. And now, because of technology, people can file blog entries from the table on their Blackberrys. I’ve seen them do it on this last cycle. It’s dispiriting. I understand that there is a market for it. People want immediate, up to date coverage of everything, I get that. I also think there should be room for a more contemplative take on what is happening. It is useful sometimes to have time to digest what you’ve seen and make sense of what it means (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

Carlson shares the same fear as a lot of individuals: a reliance on technology. Individuals choosing between human interactions or using new technologies to communicate and complete their jobs is not the fear. The fear is that people will forget there is a choice and accept the technologies presented to them. Even though there is a fear and resistance, it is not to say Carlson, Stoddard, or other journalists are anti-technology. Judging by Carlson’s answers, the subject is also worried about what the immediacy of information
does to journalism. The immediacy of information is both positive and negative for different actors. As technology flows freer in the lives of ordinary citizens, information becomes easier to obtain. Information helps ordinary citizens be informed. Carlson worries that because information can disseminate almost immediately, there is not enough time allocated for a contemplative perspective. There are a number of tools available to journalists that help them complete their tasks, and they are hard not to embrace. There are certain concessions that need to be made in order for jobs to be completed. Carlson told me, “Technology has made it easier. I’ve got everything on my phone. I haven’t carried a laptop with me in years. Since I’ve got a Trio, I have not carried a laptop with me because I don’t need it [the laptop]. Everything is at my access. If I need to write something I will go to a business center or an Internet café. It’s beautiful.” (Interview by Author 08 February 2008). Carlson, like most individuals is conflicted. Technologies are useful to his journalistic craft, but he would rather the technologies not define him or his craft.

As I did with the other interviewees, I asked Carlson questions pertaining to blogs, bloggers, and the blogging format. I asked these questions because blogging has not only become a catch phrase, but a respected form of information distribution. There are differences between the above-mentioned terms. Like Stoddard, Carlson differentiated between what it means to blog and what it means to be a blogger. “For me, the difference between a conventional journalist and a blogger often is, blogging is a description. Anyone can blog. It is a form,” (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).
During a larger response, Carlson explained how there are basic ground rules to journalism, and how if these rules are rejected, problems can occur:

A lot of reporters are now in effect bloggers. There is not hostility towards the idea of bloggers or blogging. You’re going to get people, “Covering a campaign” who have no idea what they are doing; who don’t understand the basic ground rules of journalism and there are some ground rules. It’s very easy to hurt people with what you say and write. Sometimes people deserve to be hurt, but sometimes they don’t. I think it is important not to wound people unnecessarily. It takes years of doing it [being a journalist] to really understand that, in my view. I have hurt a number of people unintentionally, or thoughtlessly. I’ve learned that lesson the hard way. I feel like through inexperience and sometimes lack of talent, bloggers end up hurting people being unintentionally savage (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

Carlson went on to explain, how journalists, and now bloggers wield an amount of power that they may or may not understand:

When you first start covering politics or covering anything, you have a limited sense of how powerful you are. You don’t really quite get it. You don’t really understand that what you are writing is read by other people and influences, to some extent, other people. The easiest way to get attention is to be savage. You don’t quite, understand. You are not able to discern between people who deserve
it, and people who don’t. I mean, that is a judgment call (Interview by Author 21
February 2008).

Journalists, bloggers, and writers alike have the ability to paint both heroic and
unflattering pictures of candidates. The format’s use is the key. Carlson and others
interviewed are not saying bloggers should not be allowed to stand in the same company
as them, but those bloggers and even new journalists reporting on the political scene
should be weary of producing bad journalism. Bad journalism can have a negative
impact of the political narrative. It is responsible to hold those in power accountable, but
it should never be at the public’s expense or at the expense of journalistic integrity.

Like Stoddard, I asked Carlson questions pertaining to technology and his private
life. These kinds of questions can help the interviewer gain insight into how the subject
reasons and thinks. In reference to the Internet and computers, Carlson told me the
Internet had an insidious nature in relation to both children and adults. He explained:

By insidious I mean, bad. Here’s why it’s bad. It [the Internet] gives you the
illusion of interacting with other people, when if fact you’re not. There is no
substitute for sitting down over a meal with another human being. The Internet
leads you to believe there is. It’s a lie. You think you are aching intimacy, but
you are not. I never say this, but it is one of things, like getting mad at the
weather. I don’t think we have thought at all of the affects and we have not
thought about, in a systematic way of the affects of technology on kids, we just
haven’t (Interview by Author 08 February 2008).
The above answers illustrate Carlson’s feelings in terms of the legacy his journalistic content will leave. Carlson is not happy with what he calls the “Illusion of interacting.” Carlson also stated that, “The Internet gives you the illusion of knowledge and wisdom, whereas, when you didn’t have it [the Internet], it was harder to pretend, or pretend to be yourself, or to lie to yourself, or kid yourself that you really sort of knew what was going on,” (Interview by Author 08 February 2008). The above answer also helps understand the subject’s overall feelings towards journalism and television. Carlson is a firm believer in a one-on-one conversation. There is a sense that technology makes the job of a journalist easier. Carlson knows this to be true. It should be noted that by reading Carlson’s personal reflections regarding technology, one could come to the conclusion that Carlson would not use many of the helpful technologies if given the choice.
Chapter 3. Where Have We Been?

February 4, 2008, 8:35am, on board Amtrak Train #84, Regional Service to
New York- Penn Station

It is Monday morning, 8:35am. I am on board Amtrak train #84, en route to New
York City. Twelve hours prior, New York City was home to the NBC News and MSNBC
headquarters. Now, it is the brand new home to the Super Bowl Champion, New York
Giants. The Giants; a scrappy 12 point underdog had upset the undefeated New England
Patriots less then 12 hours prior. The game was not, “hopelessly dull- like all the other

Unfortunately, I was not on the train to read and think about the Super Bowl. I
was traveling to the NBC News and MSNBC headquarters in New York City. Located on
49th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue, 30 Rock, as everyone calls the famous building, is
the center of the action, the big building; the real deal. I figured not asking to go to New
York City would only hurt myself. Tucker Carlson suggested that I go. In Washington,
DC, I work with Carlson at MSNBC. Whether it was a passing comment or not, it
sounded like a good idea: get on a train and armchair quarterback the most anticipated
Super Tuesday on record. If ideas or plans become too complex, we tend to sit on them
and not act. It was John Lennon who sang in the song Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy),
“Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans,” (Lennon 1980). Not
wanting to be guilty of such actions, I went ahead and asked Tucker’s senior producer if I
could come attend the festivities. I suggested I would pay my way and make it to New York City on my own; something I’ve done countless times during my personal travels. To my surprise, my trip was approved by MSNBC and my train ticket paid for by the network. Lesson: never let anyone say no for you.

The train was quite empty for a Monday morning. There was a woman seated in front of me and two men seated in the adjacent aisle. For some reason, I cached in some good karma and rode up on an older train. An older Amtrak train equals more room for long legs. The train exhibits institutional like qualities with its smell and intercom that seems to go off every 13 minutes with a track update or approaching station information. As the train roared down the track full-throttle, I was trying to figure out how I got to the train in the first place. Yes, I asked the powers at be if I could go, but was this what working for a television network was like? Perhaps, but I am not certain. The reason I was on the train was to answer “the questions.” Would the intercom, which had been left open to the dismay of the passengers including myself, tell me why I was here? Often, I hear about people in my office boarding an airplane or a train last minute to cover breaking news, ranging in content from a presidential campaign to a forest fire. The 2008 presidential election embodies the same kind of furor rivaled only by breaking news stories and of course, the Super Bowl.

2008 was not the first election cycle where journalists boarded a plane, train, or bus to cover a presidential campaign. The press has covered presidents and leaders dating back to George Washington. If one could rewind 104 years to the time of Theodore Roosevelt, 4 years into the 20th century and 6 years prior to the sinking of the
Titanic, that individual would have themselves a crash course in presidential campaign reporting. The first Roosevelt to hold court in the Oval Office was also the first, “Big-time politician to rationalize the handing out of news,” (Crouse 1973). Not only did T.R. install a pressroom for journalists, he also gave them access to phones, leaked stories to his favorite reporters, and gave out what are thought to be the first type of campaign schedules. In the modern era, we have seen this type of access with then-Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960 and two-time presidential candidate, Senator John McCain in 2000 and 2008.

According to Crouse, if a reporter were on Roosevelt’s campaign train, the experience would unfold like this:

Whenever he returned to the car after a speech he would round us up and say, “Now, the next stop will be Bankville. You don’t have to bother about that; I’m going to get off the usual thing.’ Or, ‘At Dashtown, where we stop next, you’d better be on the job. I’ll have some new stuff there.’ Sometimes he would even tell us in the rough what the new stuff was to be…In this way he not only saved us useless physical and mental work, but also economized our time and systemized our schedules. It also aided the editors at home to plan-out their work without uncertainty (Crouse 1973).
The train, filled with its stench of cigar smoke and whisky was an enabler. Whether you look at it from a technological prospective or not, the train let reporters inside a working campaign. According to Crouse, the stories filed by reporters on the train had three essential elements: what the candidate had said, the size of the crowd, and the weather. When time came to file stories, the reporters would give the stories to Western Union. In turn, the reporters were dropped off at a station. A telegrapher would transmit the stories to New York, Washington, DC, or another destination. The days on the train had a routine. There were speeches, writing, filing, eating, and sleeping. There was time for relaxing to talk with fellow reporters, and even Secret Service agents, for whom the reporters would purchase steaks because of their meager 6-dollar allowance (Crouse 1973). Candidate’s modes of transportation continue to act as both an enabler and a hindrance to journalists assigned to cover campaigns. Whether it is on a train or another vehicle, the same routines have remained largely unchanged over 100 years. Buses and planes have replaced the once essential train as the candidate-mode of transportation. The 2008 cycle included John McCain’s reincarnated Straight Talk Express bus. Hillary Clinton flies on the Hill Force One airplane (Thursh 2008). John Kerry flew on a modified Boeing 757-200 nicknamed Freedom Bird during the 2004 general election campaign (Kasindorf 2004).

In the beginning of his book, The Making of the President 1960, Theodore White explains how the press felt close to Kennedy:
Many of this group had followed him now for some 44,000 miles of campaigning since Labor Day, and one of the reporters, strained, caught him, insisting she was being prevented from observing him closely, deprived of her proper rotation in the “pool” choice of reporters who are closest to him…He was fond of her and knew her to be devoted to him, and because, moreover, this is a man who never forgets either friend or enemy, he turned and said, “You and I will never be apart, Mary” (White 1961).

John McCain is the exception to the rule. Senator John McCain is a gregarious candidate. Because McCain openly communicates with the press over donuts and coke, he develops a looseness that is not seen on other campaigns (Lizza 2008). In 2000 and 2008, some have argued McCain received better press coverage than he deserved. In Divided We Stand, author Roger Simon wrote about how then-Governor George W. Bush thought of McCain’s coverage, “Bush is also rankled by the McCain Swoon, believing that the media have turned McCain into the fashionable choice for president among the nation’s elites.” I don't think there is any plot; I hope there isn't,” Bush says, “But it's an amazing phenomenon, I'll tell you that,” (Simon 2001). In 2008, the liberal blogosphere is upset that McCain will make it difficult for Democrats to win. Will Bunch stated, “The left-wing blogosphere is declaring an all-out war against the mainstream media – desperately concerned that inside-the-Beltway reporter-love for D.C. fixture McCain is
already creating too large a mountain for any Democratic nominee to scale,” (Bunch 2008).

McCain’s campaign is one that encourages a dialogue between journalists, bloggers and the candidate. Tucker Carlson, Ryan Lizza, Roger Simon, and others have written extensively about their time covering McCain on the Straight Talk Express. McCain is also the closest thing American politics has to a Teddy Roosevelt-like character. Tucker Carlson explained to me why he thought a Rooseveltesque approach worked for McCain:

If you’re covering a normal campaign, you rarely get access to the candidate. When you do, you have lots of pent up questions. You also have lots of pent up frustration. So, if you spend two weeks following someone around and never get to ask them questions, by the time you finally get to [ask them questions], you’ve narrowed it down to three and most of them are going to be hostile. By contrast, with the McCain Campaign, there is constant a pressure valve that’s letting out pressure of the relationship between McCain and the press. You never feel like you have to throw the zinger at him because there is always next time. You can always talk to him [McCain] (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

Ryan Lizza, of the New Yorker in 2008 published an article that clearly and articulately explains how the Straight Talk Express operates:
John McCain’s campaign bus, the Straight Talk Express, has had many incarnations. In 2000, when McCain competed against George W. Bush for the Republican Presidential nomination, the bus was a stage for his around-the-clock monologues with the press corps. For the 2008 campaign, the Straight Talk (as the McCain staff calls it) began as a state-of-the-art behemoth, as big as a tractor-trailer. Then, as McCain’s fortunes fell—the campaign essentially went bankrupt over the summer—the sleek Straight Talk, which reportedly cost nine thousand dollars a day, was replaced by something that looked more like an actual bus. It is sixteen years old, not exactly shabby but definitely worn. It is usually trailed by a coach carrying McCain’s traveling press, and, during most legs of the campaign trips, individual reporters are summoned to join the candidate on the Straight Talk (Lizza 2008).

In *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites*, Tucker Carlson describes a scene similar to the one detailed in Lizza’s *New Yorker* piece, “McCain had just given a rousing speech to a pack New Hampshire VFW hall, and he was hungry,” writes Carlson, “An aide had arrived with an appliance sized cardboard box of McDonald’s food. As McCain ate, dripping ketchup liberally on his tie, the aide tossed burgers over his head to the outstretched hands of the press,” (Carlson 2003).
McCain is someone who enjoys conversation, banter, and joking, along with policy discussions. The looseness exhibited by McCain assisted in research because it provided a window into how campaigns are covered. Tucker Carlson remarked to me, “McCain loves company. He [McCain] loves conversation. He loves the verbal give and take. He loves telling jokes, hearing stories. That’s his personality,” (Interview by Author 21 February 2008). Carlson, explaining the give and take with reporters on his bus stated, “After a day or two of this sort of thing, the average journalist inevitably concluded that John McCain was about the coolest guy who ever ran for president,” (Carlson 2003). Politico’s Chief Political Columnist Roger Simon remarks, “John McCain is funny, irreverent, a great story teller. He easily wins the Presidential-Candidate-I-Would-Most-Want-to-Be-Trapped-in-an-Elevator-With contest,” (Simon 2001). Roger Simon, is well versed in the McCain narrative. Like Carlson, Simon covered McCain during the 2000 Republican Primary election. In his book Divided We Stand, Simon explains why McCain is unique:

McCain is unique: Every day, he sits down with reporters, talks on the record with reporters, jokes with reporters and just plain schmoozes with reporters. For hours and hours and hours. Is he eventually going to get burned? Sure. Does he care? Not much. "Other campaigns I've seen, you see this kind of almost a class thing. You know what I mean?" McCain tells me: “They're back there and you're up here. One out of a hundred
[reporters] may be trying to sandbag you, but that's a risk you take
(Simon 2001).

Over the course of several interviews I conducted with MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson, I asked Carlson several questions pertaining to the time he spent covering McCain in 1999 and 2000. When asked about McCain’s relationship with the press, Carlson replied:

McCain leveraged. Look, there are two kinds of media; paid and earned, or free. Earned is the same as free. That is the press coverage you derive from just being you. Paid, is of course, ads. McCain didn’t have the money this time or last time to get himself out there through paid ads. Instead, he gave huge amounts of access to reporters and hoped for the best. It turned out to be a really good strategy (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

Carlson went on to explain to me the difference between McCain’s campaign and the traditional presidential campaign:

The problem is they [the press] don’t always tell it the way you [a campaign] want it told. You have to give up control, and most campaigns aren’t willing to do that. They [the campaign] have a message. They [the campaign] want the public to hear the three paragraphs they [the
campaign] want the public to hear. That’s it. You have to be willing to put up with stories you don’t like. Most candidates aren’t [able to give up control]. McCain is [able to give up control]. Because he [McCain] goes out of his way to give access to the press, the tone on the bus is different (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

Today, journalists are able to flesh out the same types of information that reporters did on Teddy Roosevelt’s train, but can process and publish their findings with greater ease, and at a rapid pace. Journalists now also share their space with their counterpart, the blogger. While journalists inhabit the same space, the technology and landscape they inherit provides them with an edge on reporting and storytelling. These advantages however put added pressure on journalists. With the advent of new media, the routines are the same, but priorities have shifted because the expectations of journalists have changed now that they have access to newfound technologies. For example, the Internet and new communicative devices have streamlined the process through which journalists write and file stories. Because technology allows for this kind of access, the down-time journalists experience covering campaigns is continuously shrinking. This is not necessarily a bad thing. More information, policy points, and a candidates’ quotes can reach a greater number of people. The public’s expectations grow as technology becomes a greater part in people’s lives.

In an interview with MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson, I asked him about the addition of new technologies on the campaign trail.
Carlson explained technology leads to a workday that essentially never ends:

Oh yeah. It [technology] completely changed the way people cover campaigns because the day doesn’t end. You are constantly updating. It used to be when you’d be on the road on a campaign, after the last event people would file their stories, you’d go to the filing center. People are sitting there, and then it was over. The only people still up are the wire guys, who might file updates and extra paragraphs to move on the wires,
but everyone else would be ready to go to dinner, but now everyone has
go to file. Are you going to drink at dinner? Are you going to drink a
bottle of wine? I don’t think so because you’ve got to work (Interview by
Author 08 February 2008).

Even though McCain’s candidacy is more or less built upon McCain’s maverick
persona, Carlson believes McCain and Senator Obama, who the New York Times’
David Brooks in 2008 tagged as, “The Chosen One,” will eventually limit their
access to the press because both men have something to lose: the Presidency
(Brooks 2008). “He [Obama] doesn’t need to at this point, said Carlson, “As long
as that campaign is getting its message out, there is no advantage for him to spend
a lot of time with reporters on the record,” (Interview by Author 21 February
2008).

Candidates develop a greater understanding, if not respect for the press and
media every election cycle. Over the past eight years, the narrative and routines have
changed. Prospective presidential candidates saw Senator George Allen’s 2008
presidential ambitions end during his Senate reelection in the state of Virginia. The now
infamous “Macaca” moment was caught on film and uploaded to the video-sharing site,
YouTube. On August 11, 2006 at a campaign stop is Breaks, Virginia, Allen called S.R.
Sidarth, who was working for Jim Webb’s campaign, “Macaca,” which is a slur, meaning
monkey. Allen lost his Senate seat (Craig and Shear 2006). The Hill’s A.B. Stoddard
told me, “What we’re seeing, that we didn’t see in the last presidential election is the
YouTube theme. George Allen went down with “Macaca.” Everything changes in a
second flat,” (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Candidates have learned from the ghosts of the past. It is less likely for a
candidate to have a public meltdown like Senator Ed Muskie famously did in front of
The Manchester Union Leader offices in 1972. At the time, The Washington Post’s
David Broder wrote, “With tears streaming down his face and his voice choked with
emotion, Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) stood in the snow outside
The Manchester Union Leader this morning and accused its publisher of making vicious
attacks on him and his wife, Jane,” (Broder 1972). The FBI later revealed that the letter
was part of a dirty tricks campaign brainstormed by Richard Nixon’s Committee to re-
elect the President (CREEP) (Broder 1987). Muskie was not the last candidate to cry in
the Granite State. Hillary Clinton also shed tears while campaigning for the Democratic
Nomination in January 2008. Fortunately for Clinton, her tears had the opposite affect.
Clinton, who has been criticized for not showing enough emotion, her tears potentially,
humanized herself to voters. Clinton won the 2008 New Hampshire Primary. Barack
Obama excites the liberal elite much like Gary Hart did in 1984 and 1988. Obama is less
likely to be found on Monkey Business with a Donna Rice type character or insult the
state of New Jersey. While campaigning in California, Hart’s wife explained she got to
hold a koala bear at a campaign stop. In reference to New Jersey, Gary Hart retorted, “I
won't tell you what I got to hold: samples from a toxic-waste dump,” (James 2008).
Obama is finding out what it is like to have a moment like Gary Hart because of
comments he made at a fundraiser in San Francisco, California in April 2008.
The press acts as a surrogate and essentially is part of a candidate’s base when they are treated like brothers and sisters in arms. Sometimes this continues when the candidate is no longer a candidate, but as President. Other times, the press is kept at arms length. Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton demonstrated this during their presidencies, respectively (Stephanopoulos 1999). With the exception of McCain, the old-time access is largely absent from campaign reporting in 2008.

The candidates with the most to lose tend to keep the press corps at bay because their trust in the press is developed through good press, and not the negative press reporters bestow upon them. Barack Obama’s campaign, which by all accounts is disciplined and consistently on message, is known to keep the traveling press corps and Senator Obama more or less isolated from one another. As the 2008 campaign wears on, the press’ access to Obama is limited. *Politico*’s Carrie Budoff Brown states, “The traveling media has been tussling with Obama aides to keep conversations with the candidate on his campaign plane on the record,” (Brown 2008). David Axelrod, a senior adviser to Obama, said the barriers were at the, “Behest of the Secret Service,” (Steinberg 2008).

*Newsweek*’s Howard Fineman suggests Obama has suffered little at the hands of the press during the early stages of the campaign. “For the most part, the treatment has been more hagiography than hit pieces. Maybe it’s that smile, or the inspiring, we-are-the-world story (which he essentially constructed in his own words in a best-selling book) or the fact that most of the media is simply tired of the Clintons (Fineman 2008).
In the beginning of the 2008 primary cycle, the Hillary Clinton Campaign enjoyed little to no press scrutiny. Clinton previously navigated through the 1992 election, travel-gate, Whitewater, and Monica Lewinsky. After the October 28, 2007 debate in Philadelphia, when Senator Clinton defended giving drivers licenses to illegal immigrants, the tables turned on the candidate and her campaign. The press became increasingly more pointed in their reporting and questioning. Michelle Cottle, of *The New Republic* and others wrote about the inner workings of the campaign which showed cracks and weaknesses on a once-thought-to-be tough façade. Cottle writes, “The campaign still needed shaking. The percolating trouble brought to the surface in Iowa could not be ignored. But how to accomplish this without damaging the campaign's miraculous new momentum? Especially when much of the discord, say multiple insiders, flowed from decision-makers at the very top of the pyramid (Cottle 2008).

From January 2008 onward, including Senator Clinton’s loss in the Iowa caucuses and win in the New Hampshire primary, the press took aim on Clinton for better or worse. According to Carlson, other journalists, himself included, felt that the Clinton’s were at the ready to wage a “permanent war” on the press. Carlson explained:

I found them [The Clintons] relentlessly dishonest and mean as Hell. I mean, all campaigns are like this. McCain is like this. Republican, Democrat; they are all like this. They [campaigns] all become convinced of the rightness of their cause and anything that gets between them and their cause must be destroyed and crushed. That’s just the attitude. That’s
why they call it a campaign. It’s a [General George] Marshall term. It is a military term, for a reason. But I always found the Clinton people unusually willing to impugn the motives of their critics, to imply you disagree with them because you are evil in some way. Rather, you have a legitimate question. “Why did you do this?” They would be very quick to suggest you had some illegitimate reason for asking the question. I hated that. I really resented that. I resent it to this day. I don’t like it (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

The Clinton Campaign’s relationship with the press became increasingly strained. On a campaign conference call in February 2008, the Clinton Campaign’s Communications Director, Howard Wolfson, attacked the press because of what he saw as playing favorites to Senator Obama. “I think it is true that every time the Obama campaign in this campaign has attacked Senator Clinton in the worst kind of personal ways, attacked her veracity, attacked her credibility, said that she would say or do anything to get elected, the press has largely applauded him,” said Wolfson (Halperin 2008).

Tucker Carlson, who for 15 years has covered both Bill and Hillary Clinton, believes the press had pent up aggression towards the campaign and her husband’s legacy. I had the following exchange with Carlson:
John Marullo: Do you think the press was waiting for that type of moment [For Hillary Clinton to make a mistake]?

Tucker Carlson: Absolutely. There is no question. There was latent hostility in the press towards Hillary Clinton. It comes from her behavior and from the behavior of her husband [President Clinton]. It was left over from the 1990s. A lot of people [journalists] who voted for the Clintons disapproved of the way they campaigned and governed, but felt like they couldn’t say anything about it because the Clintons were always under attack from the right (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

On the GOP side, Mitt Romney sparred with the Associated Press’ Glen Johnson. Romney stated that no lobbyists worked for his campaign. Johnson interjected and said, “That is not true Governor! Ron Kaufman is a lobbyist,” (Conroy 2008). Kaufman, a well-known lobbyist was not a “paid” advisor to Romney, but was seen at the Governor’s side during and after events.

Journalists who cover campaigns have the same bite and fire, but those in power realize the press have increasingly more tools to both help and destroy their ambitions. The press is similar to a machine that performs better with age. I make the argument that because of new technologies, an expanding workday, and a desire to report the facts, journalists are making some inroads in covering presidential campaigns. The same expanding workday has the ability to
dehumanize the process that exists between witnessing the facts and reporting on
the facts. While they are not all on the bus, there are more individuals then ever
covering campaigns for major networks, cable networks, websites, and blogs. It
is unlikely the proliferation will stop. For every inroad however, there is a
setback. For example, there are journalists who feel bloggers, who can post blog
entries multiple times, in rapid succession can lack the seasoned restraint to report
fairly about a candidate or an issue. Tucker Carlson explains, “It’s important to
have perspective. Not everybody deserves to have their face bashed in all the
time. A lot of bloggers don’t get that because they don’t have any experience.
They have no idea what they’re doing. They know the fastest way to get attention
is to be cruel,” (Interview by Author 21 February 2008). In the next chapter I
examine how journalists are being affected by cost restraints publications endure
when sending journalists on the road to cover campaigns.

*New York City, February 6, 2008. This is the home of the Super Bowl
champion, New York football Giants. I’m headed to Sunset Park, Brooklyn to rest
for the night. The most anticipated Super Tuesday in primary history is over.
There are effectively 3 candidates left who are ready to wage a two-headed war;
the general election and the message. Both battles will determine the winner. A
constant theme throughout the election is getting the United States of American
back to greatness. Where will journalists and the press corps be in this equation?
On the sidelines? Of course not. Those in the press were derided for their*
performance post September 11th 2001 coupled with the chaos that accompanied the election results in 2000. What will happen if the next President does in fact lead the United States to a new, more positive chapter and the press go along for the ride? Will the press corps be scrutinized for biased coverage? Will the press scrutinize a President with high approval ratings? Will the candidate who becomes President of the United States suffer at the hands of the press regardless of his or her accomplishments? Simply put, none of us know what lies down the road during the first 100 or 1,000 days of the new Administration. The press, like candidates, is fallible creatures. When any one of us try to examine the situation further we will need to take into account the existing narrative according to the political landscape, domestic issues, homeland security, the individual personalities, and the overall mood of the country. Will the past ghosts inform the future? Will the future pan out in simple fashion? How will technologies affect elections in 2012 and beyond? We do not know the future implications, but we do know a role will be played by all actors. There are so many questions. Right now I am just some guy on a subway at 1:30am pontificating about the future. Now it is time for a lonely walk home. Or, is it a walk into the future?
Chapter 4. Where Are We Now?

“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. He who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or decisions possible or impossible to execute.”

-Abraham Lincoln, August 21, 1858

Cancelled. The rumors had been circulating throughout the weekend, but like most rumors that linger for days, it turned out to be true. Those closer to the situation (looking around the room...) know the situation existed for quite a bit longer, dating back to 2006 and 2007. On a (not so) cold day in March 2008, Tucker Carlson’s MSNBC show “TUCKER” ended. In an election year where networks are adding many bells and whistles to their political programming for the biggest presidential election ever, TUCKER remained steadfast in its simple approach: a discussion about politics. It is important to remember: it is okay that the show is finished. In terms of shows, nothing will ever outlast The Simpsons.

One year from now, the 2008 presidential election will also be no more. After 2008, will networks who call themselves places for politics, or the best political teams in the universe, matter? While we focus on the future, whether it is which man or woman will lead the United States, or who is using interactive new media to analyze voter turnout, we mustn’t forget the past. Politics are more than interactive graphics, flashing screens, and up to the minute blogs.
According to the dictionary, the term politics is described as:

politics | pälts|
plural noun [usu. treated as sing. ]
the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, esp. the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power
• the activities of governments concerning the political relations between countries
• the academic study of government and the state
• activities within an organization that are aimed at improving someone's status or position and are
• a particular set of political beliefs or principles

Without basic discussions and debates, one would find it difficult to flesh out opinions, problems, and emotions associated with candidates, policy, and partisanship. After more than a full year of coverage from almost every angle imaginable, it is hard to pinpoint “where we are.” Is it possible that we hit a wall? It was Luke Skywalker, a great ambassador of hope in his own right who said when asked, “Where are you going?” responded with, “Looks like I’m going nowhere.”

If Luke Skywalker were discussing the cable news industry in his galaxy far, far away, he might have been on to something. MSNBC has struggled since its inception to find a solid identity. After playing with their format for some time, MSNBC seem to have found themselves and their magic. Cable television shows come and go. These shows are then replaced with other shows. Sometimes a new show is similar, and other times it can take the viewer in a completely new direction. In the end, the reason cable shows come and go so fast is because the personalities and ideas are being beamed up
through television. Newspapers can be delivered everyday. Television is a fluid medium where the viewer has the ability to turn on, off, and change the channel at the click of a button. Working in television and watching television is somewhat similar. Your job or show can be gone the next day. *One should develop a thick skin before entering the doors of any given network. You can go from hero to zero quite fast.*

In his own book, *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites*, Tucker Carlson expresses his views on working and surviving in television. Carlson states, “In an environment like this, it’s best not to link your sense of self too closely to the success of whatever show you happen to be working on. It could all end tomorrow and likely will,” (Carlson 2003). When working on a television show, there is always a level of uncertainty. Someone may ask themselves questions like, “How will we improve our ratings?” “Do we need a better lead-in? “Should we really say this on air?” Carlson goes on to say, “Yet everything hangs on ratings…why do network entertainment divisions immediately churn out cut-rate clones of their competitors’ successful sows, even though most of the copies will fail miserably? Because they don’t know what else to do,” (Carlson 2003).

Working off an existing model is easier than starting from scratch. Unfortunately, few shows are allowed to mature over time. MSNBC has in fact let shows such as *Countdown, Hardball*, and *Tucker* all mature and change during their runs. *Hardball* started on CNBC and eventually moved over to MSNBC. *Countdown* started as *Countdown to Iraq*, a nightly show that aired during the up to the 2003 Iraq invasion. Recently, a new trend amongst the cable networks is airing supplemental political
coverage that falls under the banner of a show, but it not a show in the vein of a *Tucker, Hannity and Colmes*, or *Anderson Cooper 360*. CNN added *Ballot Bowl* to their programming. Fox added *America’s Election HQ* and *Strategy Room*. MSNBC added *Race for the White House*, hosted by NBC’s Chief White House Correspondent, David Gregory. It is hardly surprising that in a year where the presidential campaign is getting the same amount of attention as *American Idol*, new political shows are popping up daily. What happens when the election is over and there is no need to detail the race, or have an election headquarters? Mostly likely, the networks will ask, “What’s next?”

The proliferation of content is good for political junkies who cannot get enough information about politics, but what happens on January 21, 2009 when the new President of the United States is sworn in? That is where we are now. Uncertainty and a battle for ratings supremacy dictate what type of programming hits the airwaves. *Yeah, but it always has.* If someone desires to work in television, it is best if that individual can deal with uncertainty. *Even though I was an intern, because we had such a small staff, I would anticipate the ratings report from the previous night. No one is forcing you to care, but everyone needs a sense of fulfillment and reassurance that they are performing their duties well. It is not wrong to care about such things, but when ratings drop, or you were expecting more out of a show you helped plan, it is a huge letdown. Fortunately, I subscribe to the school of thought that no one should take himself or herself too seriously.* Carlson details an encounter with Larry King at the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, California that expresses a similar sentiment. In what Carlson calls King’s Law of Detachment, King tells Carlson, “The trick is to care, but not too much. Give a
shit – but not really,” (Carlson 2003).

According to The Project for Excellence in Journalism’s *The State of the News Media* 2008 report, “MSNBC, at least in terms of time spent, was indeed the place for politics in 2007 — by nearly double over its rivals in the percentage of time studied (28% vs. 12% on CNN and 15% on Fox News).” By nature, cable networks are not meant to be political channels, like C-SPAN. Besides politics, crime, celebrity, and economic news are part of hourly packages presented throughout the news day. According to PEJ, if an individual were to watch five hours of a cable news network, the individual would approximately see:

- 35 minutes about campaigns and elections
- 36 minutes about the debate over U.S. foreign policy
- 26 minutes or more of crime
- 12 minutes of accidents and disasters
- 10 minutes of celebrity and entertainment

The study also indicates, the 2008 presidential election made up approximately 15% of the news hole on the cable networks, combined. The closest contender was Iraq Policy Debate. The Iraq share made up just over 10% of the news hole. When broken down by network, MSNBC’s coverage of the 2008 presidential election registered at just under 25% of the total subject matter (PEJ). Roughly a quarter of everything talked about on MSNBC had to with who will be the next president.

For the purpose of the study, the PEJ profiled MSNBC’s primetime lineup. To recap, MSNBC began as a joint venture between NBC and Microsoft in 1996. During
August 2007 through October 2007, MSNBC relocated to 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York, the NBC News world headquarters from Secaucus, New Jersey. The strategy behind the move brought the networks under one roof where organization could be streamlined and resources can be shared. In addition, shows such as Harball and Tucker were moved from NBC News Channel located in the Hall of States building on 400 North Capital Street, in Washington, DC across town to the NBC News Washington Bureau on Nebraska Avenue near American University in Washington, DC.

The network has gone through several changes en route to the current broadcast line up. This lineup changed several times through out the 2007 broadcast year and into 2008. Scarborough Country was cancelled when the show’s host, former Florida Congressman Joe Scarborough was chosen to anchor MSNBC’s new morning show, Morning Joe. Scarborough Country was replaced with Live with Dan Abrams. Live with Dan Abrams began as a replacement for Scarborough Country during the final months of Abrams tenure as MSNBC General Manager, and continued throughout the year. The show was eventually renamed Verdict with Dan Abrams in March 2008. Tucker was cancelled in March 2008 and was replaced with Race for the White House hosted by NBC’s Chief White House Correspondent, David Gregory. If an individual were to rely on PEJ’s numbers, Tucker’s cancellation comes as no surprise. According to the PEJ report, Tucker focused on, “The game of politics,” and devoted more airtime to politics and the upcoming election, than other shows on the network. Carlson’s show was built around the idea of having face-to-face conversations with those who knew about politics. Even though the show produced substantive debate, when a network is competing, they
make decisions that can take even proven shows off the airwaves. *Race for the White House* is in line with MSNBC’s direction: A focus on politics with analysis through live interviews and reporting. *Race for the White House* is simpler than most shows on the network because the show focuses on analysts, and not newsmakers. The show is meant to move fast, never concentrating on one subject for too long.

*For me at least, presidential debates were exciting. Not only are debates a change from regular routine, but debates are a genuine opportunity for the public to watch the contenders debate issues out in the open, standing next to one another. Our floor at MSNBC seemed to have a different feeling when any network was conducting a debate between the Democratic or Republican candidates for President. For example, when CNBC hosted a GOP economic debate from Dearborn, Michigan on October 8, 2007, everyone’s televisions were tuned into CNBC, watching intently, waiting for the afternoon’s political theatre to commence.*

Debates are exciting and debates also pull in viewers. MSNBC was the first network to televise a presidential debate during the 2008 cycle, hosting a Democratic debate in South Carolina, on April 26, 2007. According to the Nielsen and PEJ numbers, 2.16 million people tuned in to watch the cycle’s first debate. By February 2008, MSNBC enjoyed its biggest night in network history when 7.8 million people tuned in to watch Senators Clinton and Obama debate in Ohio. Not only was the debate MSNBC’s most watched program during the cable network’s 12 year history, but the debate was the third most watched debate during the 2007-2008 cycle. Phil Griffin, Senior Vice President of NBC News and executive in charge of MSNBC, was quoted as saying,
"Voters are incredibly engaged and passionate about the presidential election; it's one of the most exciting in history. I'm proud that millions of viewers were able to experience the most anticipated debate of the season on MSNBC. This is an exciting time for MSNBC, and numbers like these show that our work in establishing the network as the place for politics over the past two years has paid off," (Gay 2008).

Presidential debates have also been profitable for major news networks. When ABC held a Democratic debate on April 16 2008, 10.7 million viewers watched according to Nielsen Media Research (Seltzer 2008).

While cable television has been pouring additional resources and technology into presidential election coverage, the reporters on the buses and trains are sliming down to a few major newspapers covering the campaigns. According to Jacques Steinberg’s recent article entitled, “The Buzz on the Bus: Pinched, Press Steps Off,” the prices for journalists to travel with a campaign are high. After the Ohio debate, the same one with 7.8 million viewers, the price to ride on Senator Obama’s charter plane was in upwards of $2,000 dollars. A large number of prominent newspapers have not sent journalists on the buses and planes to cover the candidates in 2007-2008. Amongst these newspapers are, USA Today, the nation’s largest paper, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Dallas Morning News, and The Boston Globe (Steinberg 2008). Steinberg notes that campaign reporters try to not just repeat the events of the day, but they attempt to, “Track the evolution and growth (or lack thereof) of candidates; spot pandering and inconsistencies or dishonesty, and get a measure of the candidate that could be useful should he or she become president (Steinberg 2008).
Unfortunately, money is the main concern of newspapers and media organizations. Tucker Carlson, who covered John McCain’s 2000 campaign remarked in his book *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites* that *Talk* magazine sent him to cover McCain, “For months on end, at incredible expense,” (Carlson 2003). $2,000 is a large expense, especially if it is being doled out every 24 hours. Lee Horwich, senior editor at *USA Today* and who oversees political coverage stated, “We’d all like to be able to be out there. Given the reality of the costs and various priorities…It just isn’t realistic for us.” Similarly, William K. Marimow, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*’s editor explained, “Pulling out all the stops on a presidential race,” is a service that is of, “a core purpose of the First Amendment.” He concluded that pulling out all the stops must be defined by the resources available,” (Steinberg 2008). Jon Meacham, the editor of *Newsweek* views the costs from a different angle. While it costs *Newsweek* $30,000 a month to keep one journalist with a campaign, Meacham believes the magazine has a, “Commitment to getting as firm an understanding as we possibly can, as nuanced an understanding as we possibly can, of these candidates and their staffers. The only way to do that is to be there with them,” (Steinberg 2008).

What the public is missing says *The Los Angeles Times*’ Mark Z. Barabak who has covered campaigns on buses since 1984, are multiple perspectives. “What we have lost is the benefit of getting 6, 12, 15 different perspectives. Now you may get three or four, adding, they may be very good,” (Steinberg 2008).

No longer are buses, trains, and airplanes needed to serve as offices on the road. If desired, an individual could blog from just about anywhere. Steinberg makes an
important point when he states, “The kitchen is often their [bloggers] bus. They pick up information from conference calls with campaigns and surf the Internet looking for more information (Steinberg 2008). Operating from a kitchen is a more, dare I say streamlined type of journalism. Gaining perspective into who will be the next President of the United States is important to the national narrative. If the number of perspectives keeps falling and the absurdity of costs determines coverage, the truth will be harder to discover. In an election year dominated with the proliferation of new technologies, it is disheartening that not sitting on a bus or airplane could very well be keeping the public from learning pertinent information about their next president. On the other hand, it is possible that new technologies are making an attempt to fill the void left open by the empty seats on the bus. Even though there are fewer journalists on board, ordinary citizens are inundated with a plethora of information. If a candidate makes a statement in 2008, it is entirely possible a casual web surfer will hear the candidate’s words in a podcast, blog, or web-based column in a matter of hours or even minutes.

“That’s it. That’s the end of our show. We won’t be joining you on Monday. I want to thank you for tuning in all these years and to say that, if nothing else, I have sincerely enjoyed it. In a moment, we’re going to roll the names of the many people who have put this show on the air every night, and I’m grateful to all of them.”

-Tucker Carlson, March 14, 2008
Chapter 5. Controlling your Environment: Technology and Politics

On Board US Airways Flight #1712, Somewhere over North Carolina,
January 25, 2008

“Politics is the art of controlling your environment”- Hunter S. Thompson

I wish I had a blog. A child’s wish to their mother or father, perhaps even to a stranger on the street. These sorts of demands usually present themselves around the holidays and birthdays. This however was not a gift request. This was a wish.

Sometimes, I really wish I had a blog. Yes, a blog. It would have a nifty, perhaps self-deprecating sort of name. When I was boarding the plane, I saw The Washington Post’s Perry Bacon, Jr. I wonder if he has a blog. (Bacon Jr. does not have his own blog, but regularly posts on Washingtonpost.com’s "The Trail- A Daily Diary of Campaign 2008.") Hunter S. Thompson had a blog. Well, it was not a blog by definition, but he wrote an online column for ESPN.com’s Page 2 in the later part of his career. Blogs have many functions. Some are journals. Others deliver respectable news. Authors are both passive and active participants in their environment. I realize why Thompson embraced the” blogging format.” Blogs are Gonzo journalism 2.0. Blogs are living documents where information is added, deleted and altered. Why not always true, the blog enables those previously without a voice, to be active participants in the political process. This is not to say that blogging, or technology for that matter is the most glorious achievement of mankind. Technological
advancements present a double edge sword for both the expert and casual user. There may be information out there, in the ephemeral land that is not pertinent to the advancement of a political or personal education. In other words: welcome to the Wild West.

Politics and technology are inextricably linked. Presidents of the United States and candidates for the Presidency are aware that there is one spot left on the face of Mount Rushmore. Naturally composed of granite, the sculpture includes the faces of four widely respected Presidents. In order to have their likeness carved a top the monument in Keystone, South Dakota, it is in the best interests of future and current candidates for the Presidency not only to develop an understanding of technology, but to be aware of the power and potential pitfalls. This is not to say that only politicians should be made aware of the dangers that lie out there, in terms of both old and new technologies. In fact, not at all. The journalist is responsible for informing their fellow citizens about pertinent information relating to those who lead their towns, districts, states, and countries. Technologies foster the relationship of gatekeeper. It is not the citizens’ responsibility to look out for the powerful.

If technology can democratize the political process, journalists and the media are inextricably linked to the process. When I spoke with Townhall’s Matt Lewis, a conservative blogger, I asked him if he thought politics and technology were inextricably linked. Lewis stated, “Yes. FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] mastered radio. [John] Kennedy and [Ronald] Reagan mastered TV. It’s essentially an arms race. Whichever
side masters an emerging technology can have an advantage that lasts for a generation (Interview by Author 30 March 2008).

American society was comforted by the FDR’s fireside chats. It is widely thought that John F. Kennedy won the 1960 Presidential election because he could manipulate the television medium in a way his opponent Richard Milhous Nixon could not. Theodore White’s, *The Making of the President 1960* details the events leading up to the September 26, 1960 presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon. Before delving into the debate itself, White explains, “The screen dissolved to three men who were about to confirm a revolution in American Presidential politics…It was a revolution born of the ceaseless American genius in technology; its sole agent and organizer had been the common American television set (White 1961). White goes on to explain how each candidate looked to the audience at home:

The contrast of the two faces was astounding. Normally and in private, Kennedy under tension flutters his hands, he adjusts his necktie, slaps his knee, strokes his face. Tonight he was calm and nerveless in appearance. The Vice-President [Nixon], by contrast, was tense, almost frightened, at turns glowing and, occasionally, haggard-looking to the point of sickness. Probably no picture in American politics tells a better story of crisis and episode than that famous shot of the camera on the Vice-President as he half slouched, his “Lazy Shave” powder faintly streaked with sweat, his
eyes exaggerated hollows of blackness, his jaw, jowls, and face
drooping with strain (White 1961).

Potentially, technology places candidates on an even playing field and democratizes the political process. This statement rings true even for those who may ultimately hold power. In Kennedy and Nixon’s case, television, or technology shrunk each candidate’s environment. Instead of merely controlling the policy debate, Kennedy and his advisors were better equipped to handle the television medium than Nixon. Those who listened to the debate on radio believed Nixon controlled the debate, but the television viewers saw a much different picture. Thus, the Kennedy campaign was able to decrease their candidate’s narrative and intangibles to the point where how Kennedy looked made a sizeable impact on Election Day, November 8, 1960. Nixon did not forget his experiences with technology during the 1960 presidential campaign. Joshua Meyrowitz in No Sense of Place states, “After his [Nixon’s] problems in the 1960 televised debates, Nixon became weary of television. Indeed, one factor that may have helped ease Nixon into the White House in 1968, was his decision, not to appear in many of his campaign ads; only his voice was heard,” (Meyrowitz 1985).

While technology may limit the intangibles between candidates, new technologies have made it both easier and harder for the media to disseminate information and vet candidates. Technologies have made it easier for candidates to connect with potential voters. The playing field for journalists and campaigns alike has opened up because, “Electronic media have changed the significance of space, time, and
physical barriers as communication variables.” (Meyrowitz 1985). Developing an online strategy is more important than ever for a candidate. It gives the candidate and their team an opportunity to establish a different kind of relationship with voters and the press corps. No more is campaign information only available via television, radio, or pamphlet.

It is not a completely static process, but the fluidity that exists between politicians, journalists, and citizens is increasing. In September 2007, I had the opportunity to attend a forum at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The subject of the forum was the Internet and its affects on the 2008 campaign. Representatives from both Democratic and Republican 2008 presidential candidates were present at the forum. While the forum made no big news, the words that were being discussed during the forum were telling. Phrases such as, “conversation,” “relationships,” “integrate, don’t separate,” “E Strategy,” and “2008- The dominant medium,” were spoken out loud.

Politics, in the most stripped down form, is about a conversation. The conversations taking place are changing. There is not a complete change, but there is an amending of the conversation. Conversations that once would fall under a sender/receiver relationship are slowly falling out of favor.

Meyrowitz’s use of William Jennings Bryan is useful to illustrate the changing conversation. Bryan’s famous “Cross of Gold” speech was practiced many times before Bryan delivered his speech on July 9, 1896 at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, Illinois. In the years leading up to the convention, Bryan could be heard reciting different parts of the speech to multiple audiences across the Midwestern United States. Bryan had stated in his memoirs that he recited the passage during previous occasions. Upon
realizing it would make a great conclusion, he saved it for another, more important occasion, such as the 1896 Democratic Convention. Bryan would end the speech stating, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold,” (Meyrowitz 1985).

In the modern, media-dominated 21st Century, Bryan would not have been able to practice these lines until the point of perfection because journalists could potentially scrutinize Bryan’s message the moment he uttered the first lines. Words do not carry the same zest when they are dissected and diluted via the media. While candidates now recite different parts of their stump speech in numerous cities and towns, they must cater it to different audiences. Journalists and the media are able to decrease the amount of anonymity that exists between a candidate and the electorate. Technology can act as a weapon for journalists. Journalists operate in an age where they can record and report information almost immediately. Even though he may disagree with the premise, MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson told me, “I understand that there is a market for it [immediate information]. People want immediate, up to date coverage of everything. I get that,” (Interview with Author 08 February 2008). The Hill’s A.B. Stoddard told me she worries about providing too much information to her readers and viewers. Stoddard feels that when the busy election cycle ramps down, her readers could potentially become disappointed with her journalistic output. Stoddard fears her readers and viewers would find their content elsewhere. Stoddard told me:
I’m on TV 5 times a week. I have a column every week. I have a lot of work to do. The problem for me is that in the excitement of this very intense election [2008], I [could] have ramped up to more posts, more videos, videos with special guests, interviews with people about the 2008 cycle. Then, when we ramp down in 2009 it would be so disappointing. I have to keep that in mind that it’s very important not to over market, [because] then you can’t deliver,” (Interview with Author 04 April 2008).

Carlson’s and Stoddard’s opinions are not indicative of how every journalist feels, but they do represent a segment of the industry. Because there is such a large proliferation of blogs, Matt Lewis needs to keep his readers up to date. If Lewis is not up to date, the readers will go elsewhere. The audience has an array of choices. Carlson chooses what he calls a more, “contemplative” approach. Stoddard wants to give her readers a factual and contemplative account, but is able to pull back because her blogs are offshoots of print journalism; her trained profession. There is also a desire to pull back in terms of a business approach. If technologies can drive ad revenue for a company like The Hill, it is important that the technologies used to cover campaigns are driving viewers to their newspaper and website. Since The Hill’s competitors are using many of the same tools, news organizations that implement a pragmatic approach may reap the rewards at a later point.

The representatives for campaigns at the forum realized that in order to succeed, a relationship between the candidate and technology needs to be fostered. It is not so much
“us versus them,” but incorporating “them” into “us.” Presidential politics is about crafting a compelling narrative for a candidate. Technology allows for narrative creation, but also allows narratives to be destroyed. "Presidential campaigns are about storytelling," says John Harris and Mark Halperin, authors of 2006’s The Way to Win, “A winning presidential campaign presents the candidate's life story to voters. A losing campaign allows someone else to frame that story," (Halperin and Harris 2006).

Technology allows for framing, but also allows for the destruction of compelling narratives. Meyrowitz states, “There is a limit to how long a person can play out an idealized conception of a social role,” (Meyrowitz 1985). The journalist has a greater amount of tools. In turn, candidates maintain less control. Because new technologies and media reveal so much information, so fast, it is difficult for a candidate to function if they employ a traditional approach. The traditional approach is all but finished.

Historically speaking, technology is a tool that facilitates an individuals’ ability to construct and deconstruct a candidate. These individuals range from reporters, campaign operatives, consultants, and now more than ever, ordinary citizens. Often, this building up and breaking down is for the greater good, but it is also about the game of politics. There are several facets and players involved in the so-called game. The main objective of a political campaign is to vanquish the other team, and ultimately win.

Television is a proven commodity in terms of how it helps candidates win and lose elections. From debates, to advertisements, television has left its mark on the political landscape. The first television advertisement to make a sizeable impact on a presidential election was President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s 1964 “Daisy Girl” ad.
The ad depicted a young girl pulling the pedals off a daisy. When the young girl reached the number 9, the camera zoomed in on the little girl. Then, a menacing voice initiated a missile countdown. When the countdown hit zero, a bomb was detonated and a mushroom cloud filled the screen. As the firestorm raged on the screen, President Johnson’s voice can be heard stating, “These are the stakes. To make a world in which God’s children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die,” (Wolf 2007). The ad was run on the NBC once (CBS and ABC aired the ad during their newscasts) on September 7, 1964, but was successful in Johnson’s reelection win over Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. The “Daisy Girl” ad was the beginning of a long line of campaigns using technological advancements to spread campaign messages.

In February 2008, Hillary Clinton’s campaign released the “Children,” ad. The ad, which ran in the days prior to the Texas Democratic primary, was meant to highlight Senator Clinton’s experience and readiness. Reid Wilson of Real Clear Politics even called the ad, “Clinton’s Daisy ad,” (Wilson 2008). The script for the ad read:

It’s 3 a.m. and your children are safe and asleep. But there’s a phone in the White House, and it’s ringing. Something’s happened in the world. Your vote will decide who answers the call. Whether it’s someone who already knows the world’s leaders, knows the military. Someone tested and ready to lead in a dangerous world. It’s 3 a.m. and your children are safe and asleep. Who do you want answering the phone? (Hillary Clinton for President)
The difference between Clinton’s ad and Johnson’s ad is that Clinton’s ad was run many times in the heat of a historical presidential primary election versus the sole time the “Daisy Girl” ad ran. Goldwater did not counter “Daisy Girl” with a response ad. Barack Obama and Republican John McCain issued response ads adopting the same visual theme as Clinton’s ad. Within a day of the ad’s release, news outlets representing both Old and New Media were analyzing Clinton’s ad. MSNBC’s political blog, First Read kept viewers up to date on the ad and the eventual responses. Immediately after the ad was aired, CNN’s political blog, Political Tracker published a story providing details about the ad, including the ad’s script.

Several transactions took place after Clinton’s ad was released. Hillary Clinton’s ad was run originally run on television and on her campaign’s web site. Reports and commentary of the ad spread via television, Internet news sites, and blogs. Within hours of the ad’s release, journalists and bloggers started a running commentary about the “Children,” ad, the implications, and what it meant for all parties, including the campaigns, Texas voters, and the national electorate. After the ad debuted, ordinary citizens interacted with bloggers and journalists through their columns and/or blogs leaving commentary in response to their columns and posts. This commentary was in relation to the ad, and showcased the individual’s feelings towards a blog post, column, or the candidates in general. If the individual felt so inclined (as some did) the individual could use Clinton’s original ad to create parodies or mash-ups involving the original ad. Clinton’s ad symbolizes a new hyperactive conversation.
Figure 4.1 Hyperactive Conversation/Communication Model

Whether all participants are aware or not, there is a multi-tiered conversation taking place between candidates, their campaigns, news organizations and the journalists employed by them, bloggers and their affiliates, and ordinary citizens. Senator Clinton and other candidates are addressing a single audience, but the issue is more complicated than viewing the audience as a single, monolith unit. Audience members can view political information from candidates and journalists from a variety of conduits including, but not limited to television, computers, and cellular phones. Politics has always been an active
process. Now, all players have an ability to interact in processes in ways once not thought possible. The new conversation includes equal parts power and responsibility. There is more power on the part of all parties in terms of how their messages are delivered. Pathways are opened up for the actors to reach a greater amount of audiences. Responsibility is coupled with power. Because there are more communicative avenues, each party should be aware, in terms of their individual responsibility. The utterance of a single word can frame an individual as either the messiah or a pariah.

The Internet has led to changes in how candidates and journalists complete their jobs. It is a forgotten fact that in 1988, then-Senator Albert Gore Jr. was the first candidate to reference “weekend passes for convicted criminals” in Massachusetts. The comment was directed at his rival Michael Dukakis. While Gore did not refer to Willie Horton name by name, Jim Pinkerton, then a campaign operative for George H.W. Bush thought the weekend passes issue would be divisive in the 1988 election. The identity of Willie Horton was discovered soon after (Noah 1999). If up to the second coverage, blogs, and YouTube were flourishing in 1988, Dukakis’ presidential run would have ended in the primaries, and not in the general election. Stories that are damaging to a candidate now, would not necessarily be damaging 20 years ago. *The New York Times’* David Carr in 2008 remarked:
Gaffes...Now enter a supercharged ecosystem of cable, bloggers and digitally enabled mainstream media outlets. A slip of the tongue — or a clear view into a candidate’s soul, depending on your politics — can be game-changing because there are so many other people covering the game in so many ways. And nothing is more viral than a screw-up (Carr 2008).

If a journalist has a potentially damaging story, campaign operatives will still beg the reporter to kill the story, but there is a greater chance it will be posted on the Internet before it will hit the airwaves. The Internet has become the newest battleground. Recently, The New York Times published a story that alluded to a relationship John McCain may or may not have had with a female lobbyist. It was reported that McCain tried to persuade the paper not to publish the story. The story was first leaked online in late 2007 and eventually published in 2008. As on May 2008, the story is all but forgotten (Rutenberg et al. 2008).

Bloggers may have helped award George W. Bush another term as the President of the United States. Conservative bloggers were the first media members to ask if the documents in question regarding President Bush’s National Guard service were fake. Matt Lewis from Townhall states, “The mainstream media wasn’t going to break the story- bloggers did,” (Interview by Author 30 March 2008). After Michael Isikoff’s story was killed by Newsweek executives, Matt Drudge, the proprietor of the Drudge Report, a political and entertainment website that mixes facts and gossip was the first media member to break the Monica Lewinsky story. Mark Halperin and John Harris in their
2006 book, *The Way to Win* explain how Drudge affected the 2004 Presidential race, "Drudge, with his droll Dickensian name, was not the only media or political agent whose actions led to John Kerry's defeat. But his role placed him at the center of the game - a New Media World Order in which Drudge was the most potent player in the process and a personifications of the dynamic that did Kerry in," (Halperin and Harris 2006). While some praise Drudge, others are not so kind. Michael Isikoff explained that Drudge was, "A menace to honest, responsible journalism," (Sappell 2006).

Another recent example relating to how fast technology can alter the political narrative centers around comments Senator Barack Obama made at a fundraiser in San Francisco, California on April 6, 2008. Senator Obama’s comments were recorded as follows:

But the truth is, is that, our challenge is to get people persuaded that we can make progress when there's not evidence of that in their daily lives. You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are going to regenerate and they have not. And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant
sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations (Fowler 2008).

Obama’s comments first appeared on The Huffington Post, an online news and blog website. Within hours of the posting, news organizations both terrestrial and ephemeral had pounced on the story. Typically, stories are forgotten by the public when they are reported at the end of the week. The weekend news cycle was filled with commentary related to Obama’s comments. What were the primary election implications? What are the general election implications? Hillary Clinton on CNN’s Compassion Forum slammed Obama for the comments. Editorials in Sunday newspapers also questioned Obama. In No Sense of Place, Meyrowitz mentions the fact that, “The great leader image depends on mystification and careful management of public impressions.” (Meyrowitz 1985).

Starting in February 2007, when Obama entered the presidential race, Obama was framed as a change agent by his campaign, journalists, bloggers, and the candidate himself. In the same breath, other campaigns, journalists, and bloggers attempted to frame Obama in other ways. The candidate has been able to navigate through a difficult campaign, in terms of technology. Now, Obama has opened himself up to criticism, thanks to technological advancements. Obama’s former pastor Reverend Jeremiah Wright also caused Obama headaches because of controversial remarks he made. One clip of Rev. Wright delivering a sermon was downloaded over 800,000 times. Obama’s campaign will attempt to move forward and hit back, while his detractors will insist
Obama’s comments illustrate the fact that he is participating in a careful game of impression management. Obama’s comments bring into question what Erving Goffman calls front stage and back stage behavior. Any “onstage” performance is dependant on the existence of a back stage area. If Obama is the actor, anything an observer witnesses during a performance is Obama’s front stage behavior. How Obama acts in private is his back stage behavior. Because the audio of his comments was released, Obama’s supporters and opponents may have witnessed his middle region behavior, which is what happens if an audience member is exposed to what is thought to be back stage behavior during an onstage performance. His detractors want to frame his comments in the following way: the audience saw how Obama really thinks; he is liberal, elite, detached, and out of touch. His supporters who are personally close to him will say he is not detached and aloof from the plight of the middle class, and that he does not look down on them. Is Obama a Harvard-educated liberal elite or is he a community organizer who can bring real change to the United States? Did Obama misspeak? The audience does not know. The audience knows what they see. The mental images and sounds are propagated through all electronic media available. Even though new technologies may report what is seen (i.e. audio of Obama making comments), media outlets may not in fact be accurately reporting what is in fact taking place. A new direction of information flow threatens to undermine the former authority and control of Old Media (Meyrowitz 1985). The most important part of the equation is that the comments first appeared on the Internet, on a blog affiliated with an online news site. Because the San Francisco fundraiser was held behind closed doors, Obama’s comments may have never surfaced.
Will technology hamper Obama’s presidential ambitions, or will Obama, through rapid response via the airwaves, in person, and the Internet be able to weather the media storm? “Bittergate” is another important technological lesson thanks to the 2008 presidential cycle.

Whether or not there are partisan concerns when bloggers broke these stories is up for debate. What is not up for debate; however is the influence of bloggers and other technologies. Technology is not only amending the political rules, but also writing new ones.

Journalists are both weary and positive about where the narrative is headed in terms of campaign coverage and technology. Some journalists are starting to use their blogs and video blogs to record and report both harder and softer news. Respectable Old Media publications such as Washingtonpost.com, Newsweek, and Time have blogs and video blogs on their websites devoted to campaign coverage. A.B. Stoddard, who is the associate editor of The Hill newspaper, started using a video blog in 2007. “Ask A.B.” is a forum where readers can submit questions at their heart’s desire, but for now is mostly devoted to the 2008 Presidential election. During a personal interview Stoddard told me:

There is a temptation, a pressure to move into the new technology realm, because it’s a money maker…I said how about I answer people’s questions. Then, it’s kind of a conversation. The person will be there, but [is not]. What I found was that the first four months of it [the video blog] were horrible. But now it’s gotten more fun. I am more at ease it because
I have worked so hard to engage the readers,” (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

I asked Matt Lewis from *Townhall* to explain what drew him to the blogging format. Lewis stated, “In late 2003, I ran a Congressional race. This was right about the time when Howard Dean was making a lot of waves, so I decided to catch the zeitgeist and start a blog on the campaign site,” (Interview by Author 30 March 2008). For Lewis, who by training is a political media consultant, blogging gave him an opportunity to openly discuss his political views and report from the road. Because reporting or sharing his thoughts in a newsworthy way were new, Lewis is not as worried about how technologies affect his craft. For Lewis, the positives out-weight potential negatives.

In a series of interviews with MSNBC’s Tucker Carlson, I asked Carlson to discuss his thoughts regarding being a trained print journalist in a world inundated with blogs and new technologies:

They’re [blogs] great! But for me, when I write something, I’m not writing to inform people. I’ve got a TV show. I can inform people. I’m writing because I love prose. I like to write. I like clear, crisp, clever writing. If I don’t have the time to produce that, I’m not going to produce anything. I don’t want to produce crap. “Here’s what I think, brain droppings.” I’m not interested; I’m just not interested. I’m not going to write something [in the] 20 minutes I have between getting makeup and finishing editing the scripts. I’m not going do that. It doesn’t fit with my
personal feelings about writing. I wrote everyday and filed a story
everyday, at least once a week for 10 years. Usually, when I was with the
paper, I filed everyday. I did not push send or print until I was ready to
go. I never filed a story that needed editing, from my point of view.
Other people thought it may have needed editing, but I never thought it
did. I still feel that way. I’m a perfectionist; a total perfectionist when it
comes to writing. Even now, it is one of the hardest things for me to come
in and see scripts that I don’t think are very good. The point is, I’m a total
perfectionist and unless I can make it perfect from my point of view, I’m
not going to make it all. It’s not like television. I guess I still take writing
more seriously (Interview by Author 08 February 2008).

Carlson did write a blog for MSNBC.com entitled “Untied,” but Carlson ceased posting
entries in 2005. Carlson is concerned with the proliferation of technology on several
levels, but in terms of the above quote, Carlson worries about how technology affects
writing, journalistic integrity, and the legacy left behind by writers and journalists. Crisp,
clear narratives and well thought out feature stories are still desired by individuals
looking for a contemplative take on pertinent issues. Problems arise in terms of the
longevity with the physical works themselves. Many publications keep online records of
published pieces, but Carlson and others are concerned about the aura of their original
works being tarnished because of newer electronic media. Carlson told me:
I’m not going to find musty copies of it in my attic 30 years from now. My children aren’t going to be able to go through my old clips online. Moreover, someone could change it. It is not real. Once something is in print, on paper, its immutable. It exists. It is there. If you spend your life writing magazines, books, or newspaper articles, whatever you are writing, you are doing it partly because you believe it will endure, and people will read it not just this week. It makes you immortal; you hope someone is going to read your written words (Interview by Author 08 February 2008).

Technology has made politics into an industry in that it has professionalized the process in regards to how politicians and journalists function. I asked A.B. Stoddard if she thought technology and politics are linked together. Stoddard, whose background is in covering the Congress uses her experiences covering the Congress to answer the question. Stoddard told me:

Partisanship and technology has helped fuel the professionalization [sic] of politics. When people used to be in Congress, they actually did compromise. They couldn’t go home and get reelected unless they produced legislation. Now, when you get into the Congress, all you do, the minute you walk in the door is start going to the DCCC or the NRCC and try to defend your seat. All day long, all you do is work to defend
your seat. You’re not going to risk defeat, by forging some fragile, shaky compromise across the aisle that could lose you votes at home. Through email and everything else, you can micro-target your different constituencies and get out your vote. You can make up press releases about how you offered this amendment and the other side is…You can fire off these press releases through email. You can get all the right groups and all the right voters mobilized in ways you never could before. You don’t have to do anything because you can give the illusion you are. That’s what changed. These lists; voter lists, donor lists, and all these lists…Now, it’s a full throttle business in ways it was never 15 years ago. It has changed so much (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

If politics were solely about money, politicians would embrace technology with open arms. Raising money via the Internet has been a running theme of the 2008 presidential election. Barack Obama has relied on small donors, many through online fundraising, instead of the large donors whom Senator Clinton relied on earlier in the campaign. Both Democrats and Republicans have embraced online technology, but Democrats or left leaning organizations have been more successful. This is partly due to the Democrats being out of power for a sustained amount of time. The Democrats are more energized. Carlson told me he believed it was a, “Democratic moment,” (Interview by Author 21 February 2008). Their energy is manifesting itself in monetary ways. Stoddard explained:
The online fundraising has changed everything. The fact that Hillary Clinton came so late to it is such an example of their [Clinton Campaign] hubris and the fact that all along they were willing to under estimate Barack Obama. A year and a half ago, a year ago, 9 months ago, at every turn, they even pooh-poohed his online fundraising. [Hillary] had all the fat cats lining up to have big dinner parties. All of a sudden, they found themselves over a barrel and then they found that “Wow.” They raised all this money in February in online fundraising. It [technology] helped politics in many ways. You need to know, they’re [politicians] still adjusting. [Politicians are learning] to protect themselves from its [technology] power (Interview by Author 04 April 2008).

Technology is not new to politics. Elections in years past have not illustrated the type of change that has occurred since the turn of the 21st century. Presidents Reagan and Clinton were technologically savvy in terms of television manipulation. It remains to be seen if future presidents, candidates, and journalists master the new technologies available to them. Journalists, candidates, and ordinary citizens are becoming increasingly aware of technology’s benefits and pitfalls. This is evident in the new conversations initiated everyday. Beginning with television, politicians and the media attempt to foster relationships with viewers and voters. With the advent of newer technologies and multiple avenues for these technologies to operate on, the relationships
between actors are not as simple as a sender and a receiver. The conversation is multi-tiered and consists of multiple actors. With any device or tool, it is important for students to understand how it is operated, and the implications of the operation. Journalists, bloggers, ordinary citizens, and campaigns are learning about the implications everyday. There is no end to this process because it is fluid and on going.

Technology brings out the Jekyll and Hyde in me. On one hand, I embrace everything about new technologies. It will democratize the system! It will pull the political heroes down to the people’s level! On the other hand, I am weary of what some people call technology’s gifts. Is there an ending point for what can be developed? How much access can one person have to personal information? What credentials determine who is a respectable journalist and who is not? What credentials determine who is a respectable blogger and who is not? Is it left up to opinions or will there be some sort of Scantron-based test to enable ordinary citizens easier navigation through the convoluted, technologically, deep waters? So, while I wish I had a blog to report on everything I see academically, politically, spiritually, and of course sports, I pull back. Like Stoddard, I resist. Like Carlson, I worry about the longevity of what is produced digitally. But like Lewis, I want to throw caution to the wind and just get on the plane and go.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

It is unfortunate that, for now, the research for this thesis ends. Later, I explain how other researchers can pursue further work. First, it is important to discuss the findings of the research and what it means in a broader context.

Technology is shrinking and expanding the environment in which we live. If politics is about controlling your environment, technology is making control increasingly difficult for politicians, but easier for journalists and ordinary citizens to obtain. The technological tools available favor journalists. Because a journalist can report immediately on a campaign speech or breaking development, the text and context of a candidate’s speech can be scrutinized at a pace once not thought possible. A politician’s profession is about the notion of control. To ensure success, the candidate and their advisors must control their environment. Several examples in the text, such as Senator Hillary Clinton’s “Children” ad, Barack Obama’s “Bitter” comments, and former Senator George Allen’s “Macaca” comments illustrate the notion of maintaining and losing control.

Mastering new technologies is the next great challenge for candidates, journalists, and ordinary citizens. Matt Lewis said the battle to master technology is essentially an arms race. The actors are in a constant battle to develop strategy, maintain control over opponents, the press, and establish not just a connection with voters, but gain the support of those voters. If new technologies are a narrative, 2008 still represents the beginning of the story. Candidates understand that they need to engage with technology as a matter of
reaching out to voters. Technology can help a candidate win an election. A.B. Stoddard illustrated this point when she spoke to technology’s ability to professionalize politics. The 2008 presidential election saw several candidates announce their candidacies on the Internet. It is important for candidates to foster a conversation with potential voters. Conversations take place in a number of new places including, but not limited to social networks, text messages, and blogs. Television is not the only technological venue for candidates to reach out to voters and constituents. Candidates know this to be true and are attempting to use new technologies to enter these new arenas. Candidates are improving fundraising because of online donations, both large and small. Money is a crucial component related to technology and politics. The first item an individual will encounter on a candidate’s website is a link to donate money for his or her campaign. There is an attempt to maintain control, but at present time technologies have an upper hand in the relationship with candidates. Technologies are both pushing and pulling candidates in a new direction, one where control is harder to obtain.

For journalists, technology is also about control. The relationship is different than that of the candidate. Journalists, who would have had to file stories at a filing center in years past, can now upload the same story from a dinner table, runway, or cab through a Blackberry. How do we determine if this is a positive action or not? Journalists can publish their information faster, but are expected to embrace these new means of immediate communication. The interviewees provided thoughtful answers, but were the answers indicative of all journalists?
Take for instance, Tucker Carlson’s answers regarding the expanding workday. Carlson, who represents the Old Media category, does not endorse uploading information immediately. Even though Carlson does not endorse the practice, Carlson understands the industry is moving in that direction. The subject owns communicative devices that help him write, record, and research stories faster. Using these devices is not his ultimate desire. Carlson’s desire is to employ a contemplative approach to his craft. If it were up to Carlson, he would slow down the process. If the process is slowed down, the public has an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of issues and stories.

Carlson has a kindred spirit in A.B. Stoddard, who is cautious about her writing. Stoddard stresses reporting the facts. Both journalists take part in the same immediate analysis that they are weary about. Carlson displayed this through his television show, while Stoddard engages with readers and viewers via her blog and video blog. Carlson’s MSNBC show that is now cancelled, tried to employ a face-to-face conversational approach that Carlson hoped would inspire nuanced and contemplative debate. Stoddard’s blog entries read more like columns than that of a quick blog post. Stoddard’s video blog attempts to speak to viewers and start a conversation. Like Carlson, Stoddard uses new communicative devices, but tries to practice restraint.

While subjects engage in immediate analysis, each is conservative about their approach. Each individual prefers to practice restraint and contemplate what they are going to say. Carlson told me when he writes a feature piece, “I am writing the stuff you don’t have to read, but you are choosing to read because you think its good. The bar is higher, much higher for me because I am not necessary,” (Interview by Author 08
February 2008). Matt Lewis is not as hesitant as Carlson and Lewis. Lewis’ resume is smaller in terms of the time he has spent in the journalistic field. Because of this fact, Lewis is less likely to be apprehensive about how technology affects the political conversation. There is not as much resistance because Lewis’ personal narrative in regards to technology is smaller, thus he makes professional decisions with greater ease. The subject’s feelings may or may not change with the passage of time.

The immediacy of information has an ability to lead to oversights in journalistic integrity. Both journalists who are trained as print journalists are concerned that the proliferation of technologies could ultimately lead to an erosion of what is fair, what is balanced, and what is correct. In the same measure, technologies help expose the truth in a faster manner, which is good for the public and the journalistic profession as a whole. In theory, it is the journalist’s and now, the blogger’s responsibility to inform the public. Exposing corruption and lies are part of the press’ job. There is a certain amount of training and restraint that should be employed in completing this task. Carlson told me, “Sometimes, people are lying and it’s good to catch them in a lie; expose them as liars. That’s a good thing. They deserve it. The public deserves to hear the truth. I’m not saying you should be soft on people. I’m merely saying, it’s important to have perspective,” (Interview by Author 21 February 2008).

An increasingly connected world leads to new conversations. There is a battle between campaigns to control their messages on the Internet or the airwaves. Over the last decade, a new member of the press has entered the conversation, the blogger. There is a not battle of “Us and them,” in terms of journalists and bloggers. Rather, the
interviewees understand that there is an incorporation between the “Us and them.”

Bloggers are part of the journalistic landscape. These individuals help create the political narrative and are influential. Technology blurs hard definitions. Politics, in the United States is not a static process. Over the course of several years, more tools have emerged that have been useful to all actors taking part in a new conversation.

The Hyperactive Conversation Model presented in this thesis illustrates the shift in conversation. An increased amount of fluidity exists that did not exist before. 2008 is a time when we are looking inward in terms of how we operate with technology, on personal, political, and social levels. Technology is changing the way our representative democracy operates. Technology is both wanted and shunned because it increasingly acts as an intermediary. We are a society and country that is constantly hungering for more (Meyrowitz 1985). We are not yet fully conscious of the pros and cons associated with how leaders, gatekeepers, and citizens engage with these new technologies. We do know there is a shift in how journalists, candidates, and individuals are using technology. Understanding how this affects the actors is important for our understanding of our political and social processes.

**Further Research**

I interviewed several members of the media for this thesis. If I were to interview a different subject sample, it is possible I would have encountered different answers. New technologies are affecting how candidates, journalists, and ordinary citizens function. The proliferation of technologies is too great for there not to be a change.
If I or another researcher was to conduct another study associated with my research and findings, I would interview a greater number of journalists. I would attempt to commit all interviews to tape. Matt Lewis’ interview was substantive, but I would have been able to explain my questions in the way that I did with Carlson and Stoddard. I was fortunate that my interviewees represented different media categories including Old Media, New Media, and hybrids of both. Because this is a study that took place over a relatively short period of time, it was helpful that the interviewees had experiences in different modes of political communication including print, television, and New Media.

The true benefit of my research approach was that I gained a deep understanding of how journalists are operating in a technologically savvy world. The subjects work within the action. While their views may not be indicative of other journalists and bloggers, their insights are valuable to our learning. Having said that, one suggestion for further research would include conducting a survey intended for journalists. The survey would ask questions similar to my interview questions, but would be asked in a format that played to the strengths of a survey. Potentially, a survey could be useful in that the researcher would have a greater amount of responses to explore and could draw other conclusions. The problem with the survey method is that the researcher does not have face-to-face interaction with the subject.

The protracted election both helped and hurt my research. It helped in that the 2008 presidential election is one where technology is prevalent everyday. It hurt in that my access to subjects was hindered because some individuals could not meet with me,
others did not return my requests, or interviews were scheduled and rescheduled to and could not be completed because of time constraints.

Technology and politics are inextricably linked. There is a shift in the process regarding how journalists, candidates, and ordinary citizens function. The narrative will continue past 2008. Future elections will be a useful place to study how and where technology and human interaction intersect. There are immediate implications such as how fast news is available to society. Individuals are more informed. Pertinent stories are released to the public at a rapid speed. In contrast, how do we know the public is better off with this information? The information could be erroneous. The story may not the published by a legitimate journalist. Is there a game-change? I determine there is a rule change. The process remains the same, but is altered in different ways. Messages travel faster. There are more actors. The conversation is circular, not linear. We are not yet aware of the lasting implications, but the change is fluid and in progress.

This project was spawned from the two best kinds of thought: the early morning and late night clarity. These are the type of thoughts where the most difficult and abstract ideas are easy to realize. Solutions are hatched, but are rarely acted upon because by the time we are fully aware of our surroundings, the questions feel convoluted and the solutions that were once thought to be easy are now difficult. I tired to realize my thoughts of clarity on the trains, airplanes, desks, and computers. Usually, these thoughts seem too hard to decipher after the dawn fades and the day begins. There are points when you almost do not remember the
purpose of boarding the train or staring at a computer screen. There are moments of doubt, anguish, relief and joy. These are the reasons we study and strive whether the result is success or defeat. A friend of mine once told me that it is better to just get on the plane and go. Several people told me to board the plane in a matter of different ways. Thanks.
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