FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND BARACK OBAMA: NEW MEDIA AND THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Political strategists and analysts have dubbed Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential victory as the “Twitter election,” a “triumph of new media in politics,” and “the election decided by Facebook. But, does the reality match the rhetoric? This paper examines the role of new media in the 2008 Presidential election, asking the question of whether the consumption of both new media and old media in the 2008 Presidential election have a significant effect on a person's likelihood to engage in the political process by voting, or whether disparities exist by type of media.

Through a quantitative analysis based on data provided by the Pew Center’s Internet and American Life project, this study finds that contrary to the popular rhetoric, old media consumption still remains dominant in explaining voting behavior. This study characterizes new media as that which is two-way in communication and has low barriers to entry and virtually zero marginal cost of
participating -- as contrasted with old media which remains cost-prohibitively
expensive.

After controlling for a number of demographic variables, the paper utilizes a
probit regression model on the likelihood of a person voting with independent
variables representing both new media and old media consumption patterns and
actions. The model shows that, holding all other variables constant, getting most of
one’s information about the election through old media sources such as television,
radio and newspapers has a statistically significant and positive effect on the
likelihood of a person voting. Similar new media variables -- including “friending” a
candidate on a social networking site and discussing the election on Twitter -- fail to
have significant explanatory powers.

The implications for this manifest themselves both in political strategy as
well as campaign finance reform laws. On the political strategy side, this paper
suggests that campaigns -- contrary to popular discourse -- cannot simply rely upon
new media to engage voters. As a corollary, these results show that because the
much more expensive old media remains dominant, campaign finance laws need to
be reconsidered. By reducing the financial barriers of entry -- which as this paper
shows are prohibitively high as a result of the importance of expensive old media --
greater competition will be introduced for elected positions. Through greater

iv
competition, a marketplace of ideas is strengthened, resulting in a more efficient --
and ultimately more representative -- government. This paper concludes that in an
examination of new media and the 2008 Presidential election, the rhetoric simply
does not match the quantitative reality.
To My Parents: for everything.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Even as early as the 2000 US Presidential elections, scholars have debated the role that new media has played in influencing voter participation.\(^1\) These discussions have since intensified, and, thanks to the proliferation of internet access nation-wide, the impact of different types of media in the 2008 elections became a central issue. Especially at the national level, the media has referred to Barack Obama’s historic electoral victory as the “Facebook election,” the “Twitter election,” and even the “new media election.”\(^2\) But, does the reality match the rhetoric? This paper examines the role of new media in the 2008 Presidential election, asking the question of whether the consumption of both new media and old media in the 2008 Presidential election have a significant effect on a person's likelihood to engage in the political process by voting, or whether disparities exist by type of media. Through a quantitative analysis, this study finds that contrary to the popular rhetoric, old media consumption, rather than new media consumption, still remains dominant in explaining voting behavior.

The paper examines the hypothesis that the consumption of both new media and old media in the 2008 Presidential election had a significant effect on a person's likelihood to engage in the political process by voting. The alternative hypothesis,

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then, is that differing consumption patterns of new media relative to old is associated with a disparate likelihood of voting.

The data come from the “2008 Post-Election Voter Engagement” survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Data analysis is then performed using a probit regression using whether or not one voted as the dependent variable, and media consumption patterns and actions as the independent variables -- after controlling for demographic data.

This paper examines the explanatory power of different media to take a non-voter and convert them to a voter. It does not, however, address the ability of media sources to encourage a specific voting behavior -- i.e. voting for a specific candidate rather than another. Its focus is on explaining the role of various media in getting a person to the ballot box who, in the absence of a specific pattern of media consumption, would not do so.

Though the popular narrative states that new media is fundamentally changing the way in which candidates and citizens engage in the political process relative to old media, this paper will provide the quantitative analysis through which such rhetoric can be judged. The implications for this study are pivotal in two areas: political strategy and campaign finance reform. Politically, this study will inform whether or not future

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campaigns would be wise to eschew much of their focus on old-media in favor of concentrating on voter engagement through new media sources such as Facebook and Twitter. Secondly, following the United States Supreme Court’s recent decision rejecting corporate spending limits in elections, the issue of campaign finance reform has once again reached the national consciousness. The consequences for whether or not new media holds strong explanatory power in voter engagement are crucial for the future of campaign financing. If the results show that, in fact, relatively inexpensive new media is much more salient than costly old media in engaging voters, this would be a strong argument that campaign finance laws are not necessary moving forward as candidates would be able to compete in elections more fairly as a result of a decrease in media budgets. However, if the data prove that new media is less salient than the rhetoric surrounding it suggests and that expensive old media is still dominant, this would provide a strong argument in favor of the need for campaign spending limits to reduce the financial barriers of entry in campaigns, encourage competition and allow a marketplace of ideas to flourish.

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Chapter 2. Background

In providing a context in which to understand how new media play a role in elections, this paper begins by providing definitions and examples of new media as a phenomenon as well as ways in which new media was utilized in the 2008 Presidential election -- before showing why this is a pertinent and important issue in American electoral politics.

Though just forty years removed from the first electronic message being sent on the internet from Leonard Kleinrock’s lab at UCLA, and just twenty years removed from Tim Berners-Lee proposing the World Wide Web, the internet has fundamentally changed the world in myriad ways. Whereas decades ago it would be unheard of to consume media from so many different sources, today it is commonplace to rely upon various media for information and entertainment.

However, while many may associate any internet-hosted content as new media, this paper argues that a more narrow definition of new media is appropriate. Whereas print and television media once confined their content solely to print or the airwaves, today virtually all major media outlets have a web presence as well. Analyzing the data from the Pew Center’s Internet and American Life show that even people who do not spend a lot of time on the internet still feel comfortable using the internet for

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gathering news and information. New media -- also often referred to as Social Media -- is different, however, in its collaborative and interactive nature that extends beyond simply reading an online version of an article previously written with ink on paper.

This study characterizes new media as that which is two-way in communication and has low barriers to entry and virtually zero marginal cost of participating -- as contrasted with old media which remains cost-prohibitively expensive. Whereas old media depends upon expensive advertising revenue for sustainability, candidates and campaigns are able to participate in new media such as Facebook and Twitter with virtually no upfront cost, with a marginal cost of becoming heavily involved that is virtually zero as well. During the 2008 campaign, 14.5 million hours of campaign-related videos were watched on YouTube. While the cost of this was virtually free due to utilizing new media models, to attain the same viewership levels on television would have cost campaigns $45 Million.6

Because of the interactive nature and extraordinarily cost-effective model of new media, candidates and their staffs can engage with supporters and potential voters in ways previously unthinkable through old media. The data set, for example, captures whether people surveyed have “friended” a candidate on Facebook -- allowing them automatically to receive updates from the candidate embedded within the social

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network -- as well as if people discussed the election on Twitter -- allowing anyone to broadcast a message visible to potentially millions of users around the country (and, for that matter, the world). New media fundamentally alters the power balance between content creators and content consumers, and, as a result, can have important implications for how these online behaviors impact offline voting characteristics.

Whereas old media sources such as radio and newspapers have a single author broadcasting their opinions and stories to multiple people, new media allows for anyone to share their thoughts and news with others, transforming the paradigm from that of a “one to many” structure to a collaborative and interactive model of media and information consumption.\(^7\) This means, in the example of the 2008 election, that people could discuss -- with both friends and strangers -- their thoughts on the candidates and election-related news. Further, through “friending” and following candidates, people immersed in the new media world could interact with, ask questions of, and stay up to date in real-time with the candidates -- directly from their campaigns -- rather than relying upon an intermediary source.

This paper seeks to quantify the explanatory power of different forms of media to compel a person who otherwise would not vote to do so as a result of their media consumption. Certainly it is possible that media consumption patterns may influence the decision to vote for a particular candidate; however, this analysis lies outside the

scope of this paper. This paper, then, focuses on the difference between voting and not voting which may be different from the decision to vote for a particular candidate.

Having established a groundwork for understanding how new media differs from old media -- both on levels of interaction as well as costs of entry (crucial for this examination) -- the paper now turns to a background in existing research in this area and how this paper is unique in providing analysis that has not been conducted previously.
Chapter 3. Literature Review

Though scholarship exists that is tangentially related to the intersection of new media and voting behavior, the rapid pace at which the field is evolving and the recency of these changes result in a dearth of literature directly related to the topic. The lack of scholarship -- especially quantitatively based analyses of new media and politics -- means that this paper is uniquely positioned to contribute new and heretofore undiscovered analysis to the discourse.

Following an election where the popular rhetoric indicated a strong positive impact of new media on the 2008 Presidential election, both the timing and significance of the issue warrant an analysis of the phenomenon. Crucially what is missing in the debate over new media’s effect is firm evidence either in support of or refuting claims as to its efficacy. Through a regression model which controls for demographic variables -- including age, income, race, gender and education -- this paper provides the first quantitative measures of how new media consumption patterns in comparison with those of old media affect voting behavior. The results of this study help inform a burgeoning field at the intersection of technology, media and politics which thus far is in great need of contributions.

Despite the void in scholarly work around which this paper contributes, existing papers do help to inform a study of media consumption and voting behavior,
especially centered around two key poles. The first is the way in which new media is changing society as a whole -- fundamental shifts in the way in which everything from marketing to education is being altered as a result of the proliferation of new forms of media. Grounding the exploration of new media’s impact on society broadly helps provide a context for the stage in which to study its affect on electoral politics. The second area of scholarship examines the way in which political entities are utilizing technology and new forms of media to promote their ideologies and galvanize support. As a result, these studies do not directly treat the electoral impact of new media on voting behavior; they do, however, trace the dramatic shift in focus among disparate political groups towards applying new technologies towards politics broadly. Tracing scholarship centered around these two respective academic areas provides a staging ground for the analysis of media consumption on voting behavior to occur.

One of the classic texts addressing the shift in communication technologies to computer mediated communication (CMC) is “The Virtual Community” by Howard Rheingold. Even in 1993 when the book was published, Rheingold recognized the fundamental changes taking place in how we communicate -- just as other, revolutionary technologies had before: “new media attract colonies of enthusiasts because CMC enables people to do things with each other in new ways, and to do
altogether new kinds of things—just as telegraphs, telephones, and televisions did.”

Nye (2006) writes on questions to be considered when analyzing the way technology is conceptualized within a society, and focuses on the social construction of forms of media: “mass communication is not inherently democratic or hegemonic,” he argues, “its social construction can go either way.”

Benkler (2006) details the way in which the shift from an industrial-based to an information-based economy fundamentally alters not just economics, but political and cultural institutions as well. He provides, ultimately, a very positive view on how this economic shift -- where a single person and their networked computer become the most important node in an economic network -- affects society. He closes his book in arguing that through embracing new technological communications, “We have an opportunity to change the way we create and exchange information, knowledge, and culture. By doing so, we can make the twenty-first century one that offers...greater democracy...and human connection.”

In just a few years, blogs have been transformed from revolutionary to a socially accepted and even commonplace new media model. In an analysis of the way in which blogs affected the 2004 election, Drezner and Farrell (2004) claim that

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“Compared to other actors in domestic politics – specialized interest groups, political action committees, government bureaucrats, and the mass media – blogs do not appear to be either very powerful or very visible.”\textsuperscript{11} The reach and scope of blogs, of course, has drastically increased since that article was published, with popular blog database technorati claiming in its “state of the blogosphere” report that as of 2008 there were over 112 million blogs, and that 175,000 new blogs were created daily.\textsuperscript{12}

A main theme in the proliferation of new media is how a reliance upon new technology for information alters the interactions that take place outside of computer mediated communication. Nie and Erbing (2000) led a quantitative study of how increasing internet use affected other aspects of American life. Especially pertinent are their findings in relation to media consumption, where they found that for each additional hour spent on the internet, there was a reduction in up to 65\% in time spent using “traditional” media.\textsuperscript{13} They found, however, that the decrease was stronger in television viewing than in newspaper reading.\textsuperscript{14} The findings of Nie and Erbring, however, were not uncontroversial. A number of scholars, including Amitai Etzioni took issue with some of the conclusions drawn in the Nie and Erbring study, notably

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Defined in the paper as television and print media.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that using the internet led to greater isolation and withdrawal from community. In his response to Nie and Erbring, Etzioni (2000) argues that the data do not support Nie and Erbring’s claims. For example while some rely upon “virtual” communities for information and support, these online communities can be just as vibrant and important as in-person communities. He closes, “The internet, like other new technologies, changes our lives, and not all for the better. However, claims that it increases our social isolation are wholly unsupported, especially by this study.”

A number of scholars and historians, have written on the way in which forms of media have revolutionized society -- most notably the printing press. Notable works include Einstein (1979)\textsuperscript{16} McLuhan (1980)\textsuperscript{17} and Ronfeldt (1996).\textsuperscript{18} Many scholars on new media and the internet and society have built upon the work of these scholars in explaining societal change as a result of the printing press and have drawn analogies to today’s changing information and media landscape. Hauben (1995), for instance, explains “The Net speeds [these relationships] as the conversation is brought from the

\textsuperscript{15} Amitai Etzioni "Debating the Societal Effects of the Internet: Connecting with the World," Public Perspective, Vol. 11, No. 3 (May/June 2000), pp. 42-43.
\textsuperscript{17} Marshall, McLuhan., \textit{Gutenberg galaxy the making of typographic man.} [Toronto]: University of Toronto, 1980. Print.
print shop into a Netizen's home. “ In a piece summarizing the arguments connecting the printing press and the internet and new media, Dewar (1998) argues “…the Internet era is very similar in important areas to the printing press era, and, because the printing press had broad and profound effects on its age we should expect similarly broad and profound effects from the information age.”

This review of academic scholarship now turns to the way in which new media both impacts and has been affected by politics in America. 2004 marked the point in academic scholarship in which political scientists began to pay more attention to the “blogosphere” and its influence on politics. This timing, of course, is related both to Howard Dean’s 2004 Presidential campaign which ambitiously used online networking and fundraising, as well as the rise of “internet-mediated organizations” like DailyKos and MoveOn.org. Other academics, including Adamic and Glance (2005) used the upswing in interest among blogs in 2004 to look at the organization and characteristics of the political blogosphere during the 2004 Presidential elections. In comparing “A-list” political blogs, the authors in their study found that there was a stark difference in the online behavior of conservative and liberal blogs, with the former being more

likely to link to other like-minded sites, and a lack of bipartisan online communication among both sides.\textsuperscript{22} Perlmutter (2008) looks at the rise of blogs, but cutting against what many argue as the promise of them, claims that blogs “…are not that powerful by traditional political measures: while bloggers can offer cogent and convincing arguments and bring before their readers information not readily available elsewhere, they have no financial, moral, social, or cultural leverage to compel readers to engage in any particular political behavior.”\textsuperscript{23} He does, in the end, however, concede that blogs do succeed in enriching politics and improving democracy.

Shirky (2008) shows the power of new media to collect and mobilize political support through new media. He takes a broader look than does Perlmutter, analyzing not just blogs, but also other “Web 2.0” tools including wikis and Twitter, showing how politically-minded groups can be compelled to action far more effectively, and persuasively than in an “old-media” world.\textsuperscript{24}

Scholarship since 2004 has extended beyond blogs to examining the intersection of other forms of new media with politics. In studying the effect of YouTube on the 2008 Senate elections, Klotz (2009) found, “[t]he evidence does not

support the theory that democratized production, editing, and distribution of video content is markedly changing the formats and producers of political content.”25 This means that despite the explosion of user-generated content that was shared online thanks to the rise of new-media, the underlying distribution mechanisms did not change. Whereas there were many more videos being produced, those that were the most salient continued to be those produced by the campaigns themselves, rather than web-savvy citizens.

Finally, in the study closest to this one, authors Williams and Gulati (2008) examine the specific impact of Facebook on the primary and caucus results in New Hampshire and Iowa respectively, in the lead-up to the 2008 Presidential election. They find that, “Facebook played a role in the early 2008 nomination contests. [Their study] offers some initial empirical confirmation that social networking sites indeed have potential to transform campaigns and the electoral process.”26 In tempering their optimistic outlook on Facebook’s ability to transform elections, they note that the role of Facebook and similar sites is still evolving. “In 2006 only small numbers of Congressional candidates were experimenting with them in rudimentary ways; in 2008

all the presidential candidates are employing them, a few extensively and with specific strategic objectives in mind.” Thus, they conclude that further analysis is warranted.

Building on this academic literature, as well as the call for further analysis, this paper now turns to examining how Facebook – as well as other forms of new media – impacted the 2008 Presidential election.

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Chapter 4. Theoretical Model

This paper seeks to explain voting behavior as a function of patterns of media consumption, utilizing regression analysis.

The dependent variable used is one which measures whether or not someone voted in the 2008 Presidential election. It takes the form of an indicator variable, with a value of “1” if someone voted, and “0” if someone did not vote in the election. This variable was chosen as the best proxy for real-world engagement in the political process. Certainly people as a result of new media could be more interested in, or even engaged with campaigns and candidates, but this paper seeks to measure real-world outcomes of media consumption, and thus voting behavior serves as a good tool to assess this involvement. As citizens, the most fundamental act in a democracy is voting, and therefore using voting behavior as the dependent variable is the most direct way of quantifying new media’s impact on elections.

The model’s independent variables include controls for various demographic characteristics. The model controls for age -- which has been shown to be positively correlated with voting behavior, and is predicted to be negatively correlated with new media consumption. The model also controls for education -- breaking down one’s education into those that did not complete high school, those that received a high school diploma but no more education, those that attended some college, and those that
received a college degree or higher. Additional controls include gender, income and race.

The model then includes variables that measure crucial aspects of how one consumes media, such that voting behavior is modeled as a function of various media habits and activities. These media variables are broken down into four that represent old media as well three that represent new media. A first set of indicator variables are included to explain the source from which one receives most of their election-related news. These variables are broken down into those that say they receive most of their news from television, from newspapers, from radio or from the internet. These variables, coded as a “1” if someone receives most of their news from a given source, and “0” if not, provide the best proxy for one being a heavy consumer of old media.

Having used four variables to model the consumption of old media, the model then includes three dummy variables that measure ways in which people may consume new media\textsuperscript{28}, including:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Whether or not one used Twitter to discuss the election;
  \item Whether or not one started a political group on an online social network;
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{28} New and old media consumption are not mutually exclusive; for example, a person may indicate television as their primary news source but also engage with candidates on Facebook. The model, however, controls for this occurrence.
whether or not one signed up as a “friend” of a candidate on a social networking site.

Because the dependent variable is a dummy variable, the model takes the form of a probit equation, showing how different variables affect the likelihood of one voting or not. The model, broadly, therefore looks like:

\[
\text{Probability (voting)} = f (G, Y, e)
\]

This model shows the probability of voting as a function of different variables including demographic control variables (G), variables modeling media consumption patterns (Y), and an error term (e). By including the demographic control variables, this allows the model to show the specific effect of media consumption -- which are the independent variables over which citizens have control -- on voting behavior.

The paper’s thesis is that the consumption of both new media and old media in the 2008 Presidential election have a significant effect on a person's likelihood to engage in the political process by voting. Examining the coefficients on the media variables will show what impact a specific type of media has on either increasing or decreasing the likelihood of a person voting.

If, for example, the coefficient on becoming a “friend” of a candidate through a social network were both positive and statistically significant, this would show that, holding all other variables constant, engaging in new media in this manner makes one
more likely to vote. Conversely, if the model were to show statistically significant and positive coefficients on the old media variables, but statistically insignificant, or negative coefficients on new media variables, this would show that it is, in fact, old media that still explains most of one’s voting behavior, and that new media is relatively insignificant in affecting one’s likelihood of voting.
Chapter 5. Data and Descriptive Statistics

The data come from a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project. Pew defines the project as “a nonprofit, nonpartisan ‘fact tank’ that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world...(and) studies the social impact of the internet.”

The survey took place following the November, 2008 elections, with Pew staff conducting interviews via telephone from November 20 through December 4, 2008. The sample size is very large for a telephone survey with a total of 2,254 adults age 18 or over included in the results. The combination of Pew’s reputation as a non-biased producer of research, its stated margin of error on the survey of 2%, and its robust sample size result in a data set from which conclusions can be reasonably drawn.

There exist a couple of concerns about the data; however, none of them significantly affect the results or implications drawn. The first concern is that the sample population skews older in age; age has been included, however, as a control variable limiting the significance of this. Secondly, a relatively small number of respondents used Twitter for information in the 2008 election. However, given the sample size of 2,254 the number of Twitter users is not unexpected in relation to the number of television viewers and newspaper readers. A third concern is that as a result

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of the limits of the data set, some conceptualizations of new media are not accounted for. An example of this is the website my.BarackObama.com which was created by the campaign as a way to bring together Obama supporters. While this study cannot conclude anything about such a campaign-driven social network, the focus remains on the most popular commercial social networking sites that are most representative of the new media landscape. Finally, a higher proportion of respondents to the survey (85%) voted than did the general population. This may suggest that the respondents to the survey are more engaged in the political process and perhaps more aware of the political media landscape than the average citizen. This remains a minor concern, however, as it is an expected result that those that did vote would be more likely to participate in such a survey. Further research could include a more representative sample.
Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean/Count</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4.280654</td>
<td>1.545693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.834685</td>
<td>.9957841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White*</td>
<td>1.791</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male*</td>
<td>1.063</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>6.11535</td>
<td>2.885291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostnewstv*</td>
<td>1.536</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mostnewsnewspaper*</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostnewsradio*</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostnewsinternet*</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigntwitter*</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNcandidatefriend*</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNgroup*</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: For indicator variables, this column reports the number of observations that equal one.

Figure 2: Variable Descriptions and Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Less than HS Grad</td>
<td>&lt;$10k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
<td>$10-19K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>$20-29K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>College Grad +</td>
<td>$30-39K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40-49K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>65+</td>
<td></td>
<td>$50-74K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$75-99K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$100-149K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$150K+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6. Results

To examine the affect of consumption of old media and new media on likelihood of voting, I utilized the following probit model:

\[ \text{Voted} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{Education} + \beta_3 \text{Race} + \beta_4 \text{Male} + \beta_5 \text{Income} + \beta_6 \text{MostnewsTV} + \beta_7 \text{MostnewsNewspaper} + \beta_8 \text{MostnewsRadio} + \beta_9 \text{MostnewsInternet} + \beta_{10} \text{Campaigntwitter} + \beta_{11} \text{SNcandidatefriend} + \beta_{12} \text{SNgroup} \]

The results of this model can be seen in figure 3 below.

Figure 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Robust Standard Error</th>
<th>T Score</th>
<th>Marginal Effects (dF/dx)</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>T score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.1688</td>
<td>0.0238</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>0.0336</td>
<td>0.0047</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.3695</td>
<td>0.3889</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0.0737</td>
<td>0.0074</td>
<td>9.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-0.0922</td>
<td>0.0893</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-0.0981</td>
<td>0.0708</td>
<td>-1.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.0129</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MostnewsTV</td>
<td>0.673</td>
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Key:
* = significant at alpha = .10
** = significant at alpha = .05
*** = significant at alpha = .01
The model is robust, with an r-squared of .1165 which is reasonable for cross-sectional data. The model has an LR Chi Squared value of 207.26, and a Wald Chi Squared test score of 166.7, showing that it is a significant and robust regression. This paper now examines each variable of interest, its significance, and its relation to the paper's thesis.

**Control Variables**

**Age:** Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient on age of .1688, with a standard error of .0238. This results in a t-score of 6.48 which is strongly significant at alpha = .01. This shows that age has a significant effect in explaining voting behavior such that a one-unit increase in age -- moving from one age-bracket to another -- is associated with a 16.88% increase in likelihood of voting. The marginal effects of age on voting is .0336, showing that its instantaneous rate of change is positive, such that the older a person is, the greater the likelihood that they will vote.

This is the expected result, as both academic literature\(^{30}\) as well as popular rhetoric suggests that older people are more likely to visit the polling stations than are younger people. While there are plenty of explanations for this -- from more political clout, to membership organizations such as AARP -- the reasons for this behavior lie outside the scope of this paper. Of major import to the paper, however, is that in


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including age as a variable it controls for differing patterns of media consumption that are likely strongly correlated with age. While the millenial generation are "digital natives" -- growing up with and being adept at using new technologies -- older Americans, such as the Baby Boomer generation are "digital migrants," being forced to adapt to new technologies which they have managed without for decades. As a result, younger Americans are likely more comfortable with consuming new media, while older Americans -- as evidenced by demographics on viewership on evening news programs -- tend to consume old media. As a result, this model takes into account age as a control variable, and, as such, allows for differences in media consumption to be unaffected by date of birth.

**Education:** Holiding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient on education of .3695, with a standard error of .0383. This results in a t-score of 9.67 which is strongly significant at alpha = .01. This shows that education has a significant effect in explaining voting behavior such that a one unit increase in education (for example the effect of being a college graduate versus a high school graduate), holding all other variables constant results in a 37% increase in a person’s likelihood of voting. The marginal effect of education on voting is .073, showing a positive relationship between education and voting.
This is the expected result, as we suppose that the more education someone has received the more likely they are to vote. There are numerous causal factors for this -- greater education may lead to a greater understanding of politics broadly and the importance of voting specifically, for example. It is important to include levels of education received in the regression model as it controls for any differential in media consumption patterns associated with education.

**Race/Ethnicity:** Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient on being white of -.0922, with a standard error of .0893. This results in a t-score of -1.03, which is not significant at alpha = .10. This means that I fail to reject the hypothesis that race/ethnicity has no significant effect on voting behavior.

The variable race/ethnicity is an indicator variable, with a value of 1 if the person is listed as White, and a value of 0 for any other race/ethnicity. That the t-score of the coefficient is so close to zero tells us that a person’s race/ethnicity has no significant explanatory power. Including the race/ethnicity variable, however, is important as it allows for any media-consumption patterns that are highly correlated with race to be controlled for in the regression.

**Male:** Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient on being male of -.0981 with a standard error of .0707. This results in a t-score of -1.39, which is not
significant at the alpha = .10 level. This means that I fail to reject the hypothesis that
gender has no significant effect on voting behavior.

The variable Male is an indicator variable, with a value of 1 if the person is
listed as a male, and a value of 0 if they are female. That the t-score is negative is no
surprise -- as literature suggests that women are more likely to vote than men. What is,
perhaps, surprising, though, is that it is not statistically significant in this model.

**Income**: Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient on income
of .0310, with a standard error of .01294. This results in a t-score of 2.40, which is
significant at the alpha = .05 level. With a marginal effects coefficient of .006, this
variable shows that income has a statistically significant effect in explaining voting
behavior such that an increase in income results in a greater likelihood of voting.

This is the expected result as there are many causal reasons for those with
higher incomes being more likely to vote. One simple, but robust, explanation is that
those with higher incomes have the luxury of making the time in their schedule to vote
on a Tuesday workday -- whether through flexible work hours, power at their
workplace, availability of childcare, or other factors -- while those with lower income -
- as a result of fixed work schedules, a dependency on transportation, or working
multiple jobs -- are less likely to engage at the ballot-box. Including income as a
variable of interest in the model also allows for correlations between income and consumption of different types of media to be controlled for.

**Media Consumption Variables**

This paper finds that, contrary to the popular rhetoric of the 2008 election being one decided by Facebook, in reality old media still completely dominates new media when it comes to enrolling people in action at the ballot box. The model shows that all “old media” variables are statistically significant in converting non-voters to voters, while the effect of new media on voting behavior is either not significant or explainable through other non-media-consumption means. This paper shows through quantitative analysis that old media convinces people to vote whereas new media fails to do so.

This model includes multiple media-consumption variables to reflect a diverse media landscape facing voters in the 2008 election. Included are four variables that are considered “old media” and three variables that are considered “new media.” The defining factor between what makes a media source old versus new is the cost of entry. Whereas advertising on television or in print is extremely costly, participating in new forms of media -- such as creating a Facebook profile for a candidate, or establishing a Twitter account for the campaign -- cost virtually nothing. This model, then, examines the four main sources of political news -- television, newspaper, radio, and Internet
(considered broadly) -- all of which are dependent on advertising for revenue and a “one-to-many” top-down broadcast model. The model also includes “new media” variables that reflect common ways in which citizens interact with politicians and campaigns in the social media space. This paper now examines the seven media consumption variables, explaining their effect on voting behavior.

Old Media Variables

MostNewsTV: This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they received most of their news about the 2008 election from television sources. 1,536 respondents in the survey indicated that television was their primary source for election news. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .6730, with a standard error of .1690. This results in a t-score of 3.98, which is significant at the alpha = .01 level. This robust result states that holding all other variables in the model constant, consuming most of your election news from television results in a 67.2% increase in your likelihood of voting.

This result shows that television is statistically as well as practically significant in explaining people’s likelihood of voting. While some may argue that television is a

31 In addition to these three selected new media variables, over thirty different regressions were run with differing “new media” variables -- including commenting on political blogs, broadcasting one’s voting behavior on facebook, and watching campaign videos online. Through all of these variations, the effect (or lack thereof) of new media on explaining voting likelihood remained consistent. Thus, the new media variables included in the final model provide a consistent summary of the findings of many more, related, new media variables.
passive form of entertainment, this result shows that relying on television for a majority of news and information related to the 2008 campaign explains a significant amount in a person heading out to vote. For politicians, the results are clear: television coverage still matters -- and in fact it matters quite a lot in elections.

**MostNewsNewspaper:** This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they received most of their news about the 2008 election from (non-online) newspaper sources. 245 respondents in the survey indicated that newspapers were their primary source for election news. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .6153, with a standard error of .1961. This results in a t-score of 3.14, which is significant at the alpha = .01 level. This robust result states that holding all other variables in the model constant, a person consuming most of their election news from television results in 61.5% increase in her likelihood of voting.

This result, again, shows a statistically and practically significant impact in explaining a person’s likelihood of voting. It is especially interesting in today’s age where much of the rhetoric suggests a waning in the importance and sustainability of traditional newspapers. That those people who get a majority of their election information from newspapers, holding all other variables constant, are 61.5% more likely to head to the ballot-box shows that newspapers remain a media fixture of importance to campaigns and voters.
**MostNewsRadio:** This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they received most of their news about the 2008 election from traditional radio sources. 153 respondents in the survey indicated that radio was their primary source for election news. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .7737, with a standard error of .2162. This results in a t-score of 3.58, which is significant at the alpha = .01 level. This robust result states that holding all other variables in the model constant, a person consuming most of their election news from radio results in 77.3% increase in his likelihood of voting.

Like the other traditional “old media” sources television and newspaper, radio consumption of news also has a statistically significant effect in explaining a person’s likelihood of voting. These results are especially interesting given the competition that traditional radio is currently facing from multiple sources including premium subscription satellite radio like XM-Serius; online and personalized radio sources such as Pandora and Last.fm; and iPods and personal music players -- complete with podcasts and other audio -- all of which, one would think, dilute the traditional radio market. This result, however, shows that despite a rhetorical trend towards other audio sources and away from traditional radio, candidates and political campaigns must still engage with the radio as a key media source, as those who depend on it for electoral information are quite likely to vote.
**MostNewsInternet**: This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they received most of their news about the 2008 election from online news sources. 245 respondents in the survey indicated that the internet was their primary source for election news. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .7953, with a standard error of .2033. This results in a t-score of 3.91, which is significant at the alpha = .01 level. This robust result states that holding all other variables in the model constant, a person consuming most of their election news from the internet results in 79.5% increase in their likelihood of voting.

Though some may consider receiving political information on the internet to be a form of “new media,” it is not considered such in this paper. By 2008 the internet in American life had become ubiquitous enough to be a part of most households and most daily-lives. Further, merely consuming news on the internet -- whether through text, audio or video -- does not, in-and-of-itself, fundamentally differ from consuming text from a newspaper, audio from the radio, or video from the television. Reading USAToday.com, for example, is more similar than dissimilar to reading the physical USAToday paper, and therefore is treated as such in this paper. Further the barriers to entry to many internet sources through the cost of advertising are more similar to traditional “old media” than to “new media.” In contrast, the new media variables
included in this model are distinct both in altering the paradigm for interaction between campaigns and potential voters as well as for their cost structure.

What is highly significant, though, is that someone consuming most of their news on the internet goes a long way in explaining their likelihood of voting.

**New Media Variables**

**CampaignTwitter:** This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they used “Twitter to post (their) thoughts or experiences related to the (2008 Presidential) campaign.” There are 22 respondents to the survey that indicated they used Twitter in such a manner. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of -.2327, with a standard error of .3754. This results in a t-score of -.062, which is not significant at the alpha = .10 level. This means I fail to reject the hypothesis that using Twitter does not have an affect on a person’s voting behavior. Thus, I conclude that Twitter does not have significant explanatory powers on the dependent variable of voting.

This result is the first strike against the popular rhetoric that the 2008 election was the “election decided by Twitter.” The story composed around Twitter as a campaign tool makes a lot of sense in theory: by reducing the barriers to entry for engaging with candidates and -- at least suppositionally -- creates the possibility for a better two-way communication between candidates and possible voters. Both Barack
Obama and John McCain’s campaigns maintained active presences on Twitter, with Obama’s account, for a significant period of time, leading all users in the total number of followers.

Despite this rhetoric, however, we see that using Twitter, in reality, is insignificant in explaining voting behavior. That we cannot conclude any affect -- either positive or negative -- on using Twitter in campaigns shows that in this case the rhetoric does not accurately reflect the reality.

**SocialNetworkFriend**: This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they used “signed up as a ‘friend’ of any candidates on a social networking site” in the 2008 election. There are 49 respondents to the survey who indicated friending a candidate on a social network. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .5442, with a standard error of .3246. This results in a t-score of 1.68, which is not significant at the alpha = .10 level. This means I fail to reject the hypothesis that friending a candidate does not have an affect on a person’s voting behavior. Thus, I conclude that engaging with candidates on Facebook does not have significant explanatory powers on the dependent variable of voting.

This result serves as the second strike against the rhetoric of the power of new media in the 2008 elections and the widespread notion that the Presidential election
was the “Facebook election.”  Befriending a candidate on Facebook is the best proxy available for engaging with a candidate through social media. The barriers to entry for the campaign are virtually zero -- it costs no money to join Facebook -- and potential voters friending a candidate have a non-existent marginal cost in adding an additional “friend.” While the term might be misleading, “friending” a candidate allows voters to receive information and updates directly from the candidate in real-time, and unmediated by “old media.” Though friending candidates became an extremely popular way of engaging with politicians and campaigns (Barack Obama’s Facebook page currently has over 7.3 million followers[^33]), the quantitative data show that it is not a statistically significant causal factor in explaining voting behavior. This result stands in stark contrast with old media variables which all are statistically significant in explaining the same behavior.

**SocialNetworkGroup:** This variable is an indicator variable for whether or not someone indicated that they used “Started a political group, or group supporting a cause on a social networking site” in the 2008 election. There are 66 respondents to the survey who indicated starting such a group on a social network. Holding all other variables constant, we find a coefficient of .6934, with a standard error of .2901. This


results in a t-score of 2.39, which is significant at the alpha = .05 level. This statistically significant result means that starting a political group on a social networking site, holding all other variables constant, is associated with a 69.3% increase in the likelihood of that person voting.

This is the first, and only, statistically significant result of all of the new media variables considered in this study. The data show that there is a positive relationship between creating a relevant group on a social networking site and the likelihood of voting; however, this is not an effect directly applicable to the power of new media. If someone is passionate and engaged enough to be creating a group pertinent to the election, this is almost certainly a person that is already passionate and engaged enough in the political process to vote regardless of this new media behavior. In creating such a group, a person is declaring an allegiance for, and working towards the goal of electing their candidate of choice. It therefore goes without saying that a person displaying this level of commitment would almost assuredly also participate in the process of voting. Thus, while it is, indeed, a statistically significant result for a nominally new media variable, upon further reflection this variable and result do not suggest the power of new media to engage voters. Rather, it reflects a new way for already engaged voters to participate in the political process -- though it does not
fundamentally alter the paradigm of new media being far less encouraging of voting
than old media is.

**Results Summary**

This model clearly shows that the rhetoric that surrounded the 2008 election is
not reflected in the reality of the data. While all four “old media” variables,
representing the source from which people received most of their election news had a
statistically significant impact in explaining voting behavior, the same cannot be said
for the new media variables. Despite commentary to the contrary that suggests that
Facebook, Twitter and other forms of new media were crucial in the 2008 election, this
model shows that neither engaging politically on Twitter nor following a candidate on
Facebook are significant. While creating an election-related group on a social
networking site has a significant and positive effect on one’s likelihood of voting, this
is probably a function of external factors rather than directly attributable to new media
itself.

For decades traditional media like television and radio were the dominant
source of political information for Americans during elections. With the rise of
Howard Dean’s 2004 Democratic primary campaign which aggressively utilized
online-networking for information and fundraising, the focus of political candidates
began to shift slightly towards new media. In the four years following, both the
rhetoric around, and campaign adoption of new media strategies exploded. Coinciding with a rise in the everyday use of new media -- as of early 2010, Facebook reports having over 400 million users worldwide, half of whom log on daily\(^34\) -- has been a new concentration on how campaigns can utilize new media to garner votes.

The 2008 Presidential election especially accumulated lofty rhetoric as it was often referred to as the “Twitter election,” and Barack Obama’s victory called “one decided by Facebook.”\(^35\) Despite these claims, due to a dearth in scholarship in how new media influences American elections, little was known, quantitatively, about new media’s true impact in comparison with the established old media powers. This paper, then, sought out to examine the links between media consumption patterns and voting behavior to ascertain what role, if any, new media truly plays in American elections. Based on the quantitative analysis above, it is clear that in converting non-voters to voters, old media remains dominant.


Chapter 7. Policy Implications and Conclusion

Through an analysis of the 2008 Presidential election, this paper models various politically-related media behaviors and actions to see which ones are salient predictors of voting behavior among citizens. By creating and analyzing a regression model examining the 2008 Presidential elections, the results were clear: old media remains dominant in getting people to vote, while new media’s role is shown to be relatively insignificant.

These results -- showing that the tangible reality of new media’s role does not match the lofty rhetoric -- have far-reaching implications. From a political strategy perspective, it shows that despite grandiloquent claims and hopes, campaigns remain wise to continue strengthening their focus on “old media” rather than shifting to a new-media-centric strategy. While new media may have influenced people to vote for one candidate rather than another, it failed to have a statistically significant impact in getting a person to vote who -- in the absence of the media -- would not have done so. From a policy perspective, these results show that expensive old media dominates cheap and free new media in elections, and therefore substantiates calls for campaign finance reform.

This thesis provides a unique opportunity to eschew the typical politicized rhetoric of campaign finance reform and see, from an unbiased, analytical level, how
media consumption patterns influence voting behavior. The implications of this study are clear: if it is the case that new media -- characterized by extremely low barriers to entry -- have statistically significant explanatory power with regards to bringing people to the ballot box, then an argument can be made that as a result of this new paradigm that limits on campaign spending are quaint. Conversely, if it is shown that the expensive old media players such as television and radio remain far more powerful than new media sources of political information, this provides evidence for the need for campaign finance laws to introduce more competition and thus more efficiency into elections.\textsuperscript{36}

Not only has this paper shown that expensive old media dominates the much cheaper new media in electoral results, this finding comes at a time when spending on old media is growing exponentially. In the 2004 Presidential election, the Bush and Kerry campaigns combined to spend over $600 Million on television and radio advertisements -- more than triple the figures similarly spent in 2000.\textsuperscript{37} In the 2008 Presidential election, Barack Obama and John McCain combined to spend over $1

\textsuperscript{36} This is assuming that campaign finance laws are both effective in their stated purpose and properly enforced. Such analysis, however, lies outside the scope of this paper.

Billion dollars\textsuperscript{38} on their campaigns in a year when a total of $5.3 billion was spent on all American elections that year combined.\textsuperscript{39}

To be sure the Obama campaign utilized new media aggressively, to which many have attributed his victory. However, while the campaign did use free new media, it also had the benefit of hundreds of millions of dollars to spend: a prerequisite for participating in old media. This shows that while new media is used by campaigns, it alone does not allow entry into the political market which remains dominated by the big-money candidates. While the hope exists that a candidate could rely upon inexpensive new-media to engage new voters, this study has shown that it is old media -- and not new media -- that converts non-voters to voters. If new media could, by itself, convince people to vote it would allow low-cost entry into an election; however, as this paper shows, it does not do so.

These two factors in elections -- the rise in overall spending, and the dominance of expensive old media over free new media -- combine to accentuate the need for campaign finance reform in the United States. The implementation of campaign finance legislation placing limits on the total spending by political campaigns has the potential to reduce the unbalanced influence that money now has on the electoral process. By reducing the leverage of money in campaigns -- and thus increasing both

\textsuperscript{38} Note: this figure includes all spending, not just that on media.

the diversity of candidates and the competition for elected positions -- the opportunity for better and more representative governance emerges.

Campaign spending is far higher in the United States than in similar nations, stifling the competition through unduly high barriers of entry. For example, the Obama campaign alone spent more money to win just the Democratic nomination than did all Canadian campaigns combined in their 2008 national elections. With such high monetary stakes -- which are increasing exponentially -- it becomes increasingly difficult for a diversity of opinions and beliefs to be included in the marketplace of ideas of our electoral system. This paper recognizes the hope that new media holds for leveling the playing field; whereas television spots can cost millions of dollars each, a Facebook profile can be created for virtually no cost, videos can be uploaded to YouTube essentially for free, and creating a Twitter account takes just a couple of minutes and zero dollars. If new media could have significant effects on voting behavior, the barriers to entry for a candidate would be significant lower. This would result in a field of candidates more reflective of the diversity of the United States and would allow a true marketplace of ideas to exist.

However, having shown the relative failure of new media respective to old media in encouraging voting, the promise of a more diverse and competitive electoral

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system through new and social media is delayed if not damaged. As a result, this paper shows that candidates will continue to rely upon the expensive and access-limiting old media rather than competitive and affordable new media. This reality, in combination with the United States’ strict two-party system and major corporate donors results in a reality in which the barriers to entry in major campaigns are prohibitively high -- resulting in a system where money has a disproportionate influence. Because this paper shows that old media remains crucial to candidates’ electoral hopes, by extension the importance of having the money to engage in television, radio and newspapers becomes a significant factor of a candidate’s viability. Thus, candidates with tremendous potential but small wallets struggle to compete with those that have the funds to utilize old media aggressively.

For a government to represent the will of the governed, it is imperative that those representing the people are chosen competitively. By instituting campaign finance laws, Economics guides us in understanding the market-based mechanisms that would occur. By lowering the barriers to entry into elections, more individuals will be able to participate. Through greater participation in the market, greater competition occurs, which promotes greater efficiency. By making the defining characteristic of a candidate the quality of their ideas and leadership, as judged through this more robust
marketplace of ideas -- rather than by financial resources -- a more representative
government results.

Campaign finance reform holds the potential to limit the influence of money in
American politics. By reducing the financial barriers of entry -- which as this paper
shows are prohibitively high as a result of the importance of expensive old media --
greater competition will be introduced for elected positions. Through greater
competition, a marketplace of ideas is strengthened, resulting in a more efficient -- and
ultimately more representative -- government.

Though much has been written historically about the intersection of media and
politics, up until now virtually no scholarship had addressed how new media influences
political campaigns. Inherent in Barack Obama’s Presidential victory were the hopes
of many that through his campaign’s use of new media, a more egalitarian and
democratic form of politics had come to America. However, as this paper has shown,
despite lofty claims to the contrary, old media remains far more salient than new media
in engaging voters at least in terms of convincing people to vote at all.

This paper finds that, holding all other variables constant, people receiving
most of their political and election-related news from television, newspapers, radio, or
the internet resulted in a strong increase in their likelihood of voting. Conversely,
engaging and interacting with candidates through new media venues -- including
Facebook and Twitter -- failed to elicit any statistically significant increase in a person’s likelihood of voting.

Despite the rhetoric surrounding the 2008 Presidential election suggesting that a candidate could tweet and Facebook friend their way to victory, the results of this study are clear: despite lofty claims to the contrary, in political campaigns old media still reign supreme.
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