THE INTERNET'S IMPACT ON POLITICAL PARTIES AND CAMPAIGNS

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THE INTERNET CHANGES EVERYTHING

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As the Internet age dawned in the late 1990's, it became cliché to suggest the Internet would "change everything." Now, more than twenty-five years after the birth of the worldwide web, the Internet has become a central part of the daily lives of people across the planet. It has quickly developed into the hub through which individuals communicate, maintain social relationships, conduct commerce, acquire knowledge, and even entertain themselves. Moreover the empowerment provided to individuals, via the Internet, has forced organizations and individuals to rethink, revamp, and revise the strategic and tactical approaches they undertake in conducting their activities. Thus the Internet revolution has changed how groups, and the individuals who comprise them, interact both internally and externally. Not surprisingly these changes, resulting from the Internet's evolution, are impacting all things political. In fact one could argue the Internet has had a greater impact on politics than any technological invention since the invention of the printing press nearly six hundred years ago.

Aristotle pointed out around 350 B.C., that "man is by nature a political animal." Today the average political animal has access to more information, via the Internet, than at any point in history. Moreover the speed at which information moves about the Internet is nearly immediate. Yet it is not simply access to the vast amount of information available via the worldwide web, or the speed at which information can spread that makes it such important

political tool, rather, it is the capacity the Internet creates for any individual who has access to the web to respond immediately to information – whether received online or offline – that changes the way the political world operates. Moreover, in responding to information via the web, individuals can spread their beliefs not only to audiences in their own neighborhood, community, or state, but also across long distances to people throughout their nation or even globally! Equally important they can do so at little or no financial cost to themselves. Thus, the vast amounts of information available on the web, the speed at which this information moves, and the capacity of any individual to communicate with broader audiences is truly "changing everything" in the political universe.

Since the emergence of the Internet in politics beginning around 1996, a great deal has been written about how it is changing the science of political war. Much of this focus has centered on tactical uses of the web (e.g. fund-raising via email or organizing via social networking). Less material has focused on how the Internet's emergence as a political tool impacts the art of politics in the form of strategic decisions made by political strategists and political leaders. The remainder of this article looks at how the Internet has and will continue to change the strategic decisions that impact the efforts of political parties, candidates, and the campaigns they wage.

THE INTERNET'S IMPACT ON POLITICS

THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

In all democratic societies around the world political parties exist for a single reason – to contest (and theoretically win) elections. While the electoral and governing systems, historical contexts, cultural norms, and political traditions within each country differ, the processes by which individuals come together as active members or passive supporters of political parties are universal. Thus, in order to understand how the Internet has, and will continue to, change politics across the globe it is imperative to understand its impact on this process.

Political parties and organizations are built by bringing together individuals – who share a common set of values – into a common political effort. In going about this process political parties undertake a four-step course of action. First, they inform individuals of the common set of values they share. Second, they persuade an individual that through working together, within the democratic system and united around values, the political party can address the common problems and concerns they share. Third, political parties take the individuals they have persuaded and organize them under a single banner to participate within the political system. Finally, once organized, political parties attempt to mobilize supporters to take political actions (e.g. vote in an election, make a contribution or canvass others for support). Not surprisingly the emergence of the Internet has had a substantial impact on this process.

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Traditionally, political parties organized themselves through a process that was primarily driven from the top down. A core group of leaders would form the party's strategic and tactical management components around a common set of values. Once formed the core group would go about managing the process of informing, persuading, organizing, and mobilizing individuals under a common political banner. The principal vehicles of informing and persuading individuals were via national media (e.g. electronic or print media either through earn or paid media) and word of mouth efforts (including activities such as door-to-door canvassing or brochures). Likewise, organizational and mobilization activities were primarily driven from the core group on top of the party pyramid to the individuals on the local level at the bottom. For example, on the organizational side the top level provided the necessary financial and structural resources by which the local party units were organized. On the mobilization side the top-level leadership was in near complete control of the party's messaging given the high cost of producing and distributing advertising and the expertise and access need to conduct national earned media efforts. Meanwhile those on the local level could attempt to utilize word of mouth activities or local media to spread political messages, but they were limited in terms of their geographical reach.

The emergence of the Internet, combined with low cost information technologies (e.g. cameras in smart phones connected to the web) has to a large degree turned the entire process upside down. In today's world, individuals who share a common set of values are just a few clicks away from finding other individuals – both those whom they know and those who they do not and both geographically near and far – who share their common values and points of view. They no longer need in our world of social-networks, news aggregators, blogs, youtube, and Tweets to have a core group on top of the political pyramid driving the information, persuasion, and organization processes. In addition, the low cost of peripheral technologies (e.g. a video camera, a laptop, and video editing software) coupled with the power of the Internet to disseminate information (e.g. Youtube) has created an environment in which any individual can potentially find and motivate those of like mind to undertake political action. Moreover, if the information they are conveying is interesting enough to others their reach via the worldwide web is no longer geographically limited.

An excellent example of the power of the Internet to transcend geographical political boundaries and quickly change political dynamics comes from the 2006 United States Senate race in Virginia. Incumbent Republican Senator, George Allen, was seeking reelection. On August, 11, 2006, at a campaign stop in rural Virginia, Senator Allen twice used the word "macaca" to describe a tracker, (a person from the opposing campaign who video tapes a candidate). Within hours a copy of the video had been uploaded to Youtube and within a day the video had migrated to coverage on cable news. On Election Day 2008, Senator Allen lost his bid for reelection by less than 10,000 votes. Two years later, the Washington Post summarized the impact of this misstep by suggesting that if it were not for this single utterance, Senator Allen would have been a strong candidate for the 2008 Republican Presidential nomination.

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For strategists charged with managing political campaigns or leaders of political parties, this shift in the power structure has significant repercussions. These include:

- It has become increasingly difficult – if not impossible – to have total control over narrative and messaging.
- While the amount and access to political information has increased exponentially the ability of individuals to consume political information has not increased to the same extent.
- The pace at which information moves, and thus the speed at which political debate occurs has increased exponentially.
- The capacity of individuals who share a common set of values to acquire information and self-organize creates opportunities and challenges for political organizations.
- Once a piece of information has reached the worldwide web it is in the public domain forever.
- There is always the potential that any document, action or event – positive or negative – could end up on the worldwide web and thus be accessible to anyone with an Internet connect.

Finally, and potentially most importantly for political strategists, the Internet's empowers individuals to take direct action outside of traditional political structures, which requires political parties to rethink how they respond to organic political action.

POLITICAL RESOURCES

Political parties and the campaigns they wage have four basic resources at their disposal to impact elections. These resources include time, money, people, and talent. Just as businesses deal with limited economic resources, political parties deal with limited amounts of political resources. Thus, parties must go about the process of acquiring resources to build their operations and then allocate the resources they have acquired to achieve objectives. Not surprisingly, the emergence of the Internet has impacted the acquisition and allocation of political resources just as it has fundamentally changed how economic resources are acquired and allocated in the broader economy. The following is an examination of each type of political resource and how the Internet is changing both its acquisition and allocation.

TIME

Political parties in democratic societies operate in a world where time is simultaneously a diminishing and unlimited resource. On the one hand, there is always less time between now and the next Election Day. Each hour that passes before an election leaves one less in which to raise money, drive message, or convince voters that a party's candidates are superior choices to the other options on the ballot. On the other hand, successful political parties are built to exist beyond the next election, whether they are successful in an individual election or not. As such, parties have the ability to take a long-term approach too building support over a time frame that spans multiple elections.

The evolution of the Internet in politics impacts both the short term and long term equation. By design the Internet, via worldwide web, moves information at the speed of light. It allows individuals and groups of individuals to work more efficiently, to share information more broadly, and to mobilize individuals more quickly.

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A good example of how the Internet impacts the political resource of time is to examine the process of raising money. Prior to the emergence of the web the majority of funds raised by political parties in the United States came either through major donations which were given at fund-raising events or in low dollar amounts which were typically contributed by individuals who received a letter by post (or a phone call) and who returned a check also by mail to the party. In both cases the process of putting together the fund-raising effort took a substantial amount of time.

In the case of a fund-raising event a political party needed to create a list of potential donors including addresses; reserve a location for the event; design, print, address and send out invitations via the mail; make the necessary arrangements at the location; and finally hold the event where checks would be delivered at the door. In the case of direct mail solicitations the process included: creating a list of potential donors; drafting a letter, which would have to be printed, addressed and sent via mail; after waiting

several days for the letter to arrive, donors would then have to open the mail; read the letter; decide to make a donation; find the check book; write out the check; find a postage stamp; and send the check via the mail. Yet, even then the party would have to wait for the postal service to return the check so they could cash it and deposit it in the bank.

In the age of the Internet, the process has become exponentially faster. Today, if a party wants to raise money it, has to pull a list of email addresses; draft an email with a link to a donation page; and click "send".

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Nearly instantaneously the potential donor receives the message; decides to make a donation; clicks on a link to a webpage, and a few keystrokes later they can deposit their contribution directly into the party's account. Thus, through the power of the Internet, a party or campaign is able to accomplish within hours what would have previously taken days or weeks.

Thus, on the one hand, the Internet allows political parties to acquire and commit resources more quickly. In the short run this increase in efficiency creates more time to acquire additional resources to achieve its political goals. However, the Internet also creates substantial obstacles for political parties that want to take a long-term approach to thinking beyond the next election. Because the Internet allows individuals to find others who share their values and to self-organize around those values, a party which makes a decision to focus on the long-term may find that its ability to attract individuals has been diminished as they have found competing political organizations that are occupying their value based political space. Moreover the speed, at which political activities can be undertaken, such as the fund-raising example above, increases the pace at which the political contest of ideas occurs. Thus, while the Internet can be a tool through which parties create more time by increasing the speed at which they undertake tactical operations, it also decreases the amount of time they have before others undertake similar operations in a direct values based competition.

MONEY

An old political saying says "money is the mother's milk of politics." Political parties and political campaigns require financial resources to undertake the various tasks required to implement their strategic and tactical efforts. As pointed out the Internet has had a dramatic impact on fund-raising. Yet, the power of the Internet in terms of political fund-raising is not simply a matter of decreasing the amount of time it takes to put money in the bank. The power of the Internet for political strategists and party leaders who want to raise money is also a function of the scope and reach of the Internet combined with the ability to make value based appeals based on real time events.

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Prior to the dawn of the Internet age, political parties and campaigns seeking to raise money would need to start with a core group of dedicated supporters. These individuals, who were likely to be party members, would be asked to both contribute themselves and also to try and find other individuals they knew who shared their values and who might be willing to make a donation. While the strategies used to actually raise money might vary on a tactical basis (e.g. direct mail, event driven fund-raising, or party membership dues) the audience of potential contributors was limited to individuals who were identified as prospective donors.

In the age of the Internet those who are most likely to give money to a political party or a political campaign are still those individuals who share a common set of values. However, the scope of the audience of potential donors has increased exponentially beyond individuals who have some sort of direct link to the political party or an individual candidate. Today, political parties have an expanded set of tactics where- by they can find individuals who share their values and who can be potentially leveraged into giving political support in the form of a monetary contribution.

Some of the online tactics which political parties and political campaigns are utilizing includes:

- Search advertising that targets individuals who demon-strate an interest in a given topic while conducting searches on the web.
- Banner advertising on websites that would be typically viewed by those who might support a given political party.
- Contextual advertising that monitors the websites a user has visited and targets advertising based on these patterns.
- Social-Network based fund-raising that asks individuals who already support a political party or campaign to directly encourage their friends to donate to the cause.
- Email based fund raising that prospects for donations through the purchase of lists of individuals who have demonstrated potential as donors; encouraging activists and donors to appeal directly to their address books for donations; and direct solicitation from the party or campaign to past donors.

With each of these fund-raising tactics the underlying strategy is still the same – to demonstrate a shared set of values that compels individuals who believe these values are threatened to take a concrete action by contributing money. Thus, while the Internet has certainly changed the tactical approach of how political parties raise money, and the speed at which financial resources are acquired, the underlying strategic premise that parties employ to raise money has changed very little. Even in today's Internet age, successful political fund-raising is predicated on getting message driven requests for resources to potential donors with a call to mobilize them to action (a donation). As political strategists and party leaders look for new and innovative ways to acquire financial resources it is critical to remember that successful online fund-raising is based on these same principal as successful offline fund-raising – demonstrating a value based connection.

PEOPLE

On their most basic level political parties are groups of individuals who have come together around a common set of values to foster political action. Successful political parties, and the campaigns they conduct, rely on individuals to undertake organized actions that are perceived to be beneficial to the party's goal of successfully contesting

elections. Obviously, political parties that win elections have been more successful in acquiring people based resources that are supportive and willing to take action (the most important being voting) than those that lose elections. As such successful political parties devise strategies to attract individuals to support their effort and implement tactics that motivate these individual supporters to take varying degrees of action.

Traditionally organizing individuals to support political parties and the campaigns they conduct has focused on building generic support for the party and through aligning with existing groups who are united around similar values. During elections, political campaigns attempt to fuse individuals from both groups together into a viable electoral bloc. For example, in the United States, the Democrat party works closely with union groups – such a labor organizations, teachers, and government workers – to organize, mobilize and activate their membership during campaigns. At the same time, Republicans work with business organizations, gun-rights groups, and pro-life organizations to do the same. Typically these groups, like political parties, have been organized in a top down fashion and are unified through similar values. As such, the national leadership of organizations makes strategic decisions and tactical plans which filtered down the memberships about why they should support one party or the other.

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Such a strategic approach is based on the idea that members of a particular organization share a common set of values and that these values are critical in determining how individuals chose to vote. While this is most certainly the case, the emergence of the worldwide web complicates such a top down drive organizational approach. Today, individuals using the Internet have access to nearly unlimited amounts of information and have the ability via the web to organize themselves with other individuals organically around the values they hold. Not surprisingly, this evolution between individuals, the political information they have at their disposal, and there ability to seek out and unite with like-minded people has major consequences for political parties that are focused on unifying the political resources of people into an organized political effort

Successful organization of people around a political campaign effort in the Internet age requires the political strategist to understand how to build simultaneously from both the bottom up and from the top down. An excellent example of how utilizing the self-organizational capacities of the worldwide web can be both bottom up and top down driven is the 2008 Obama Presidential campaign. On the macro level the campaign messaging was predicated on the idea of a "change." Such a narrative, of course, means that it is out with the "old" and in with the "new." On the organizational side of their campaign, the Obama campaign team made a strategic decision to promote a message of individual Obama supporters coming together via "new media" (a.k.a the Internet) to unite around a candidate with new ideas.

While Obama supporters were going about the process of "self-organizing" via web based tools such as Facebook and "mybrackobama" they were also being channeled from the top echelons of the campaign down as part of the campaign's broader narrative and messaging. Moreover, while the campaign didn't have complete control over the activities that individual supporters were taking as part of their self-organizational efforts, they did have the ability to shape the actions they were taking by providing Internet based organizational tools that steered them towards achieving political goals. To their credit, the Obama campaign team was highly successful both in terms of developing an unprecedented Internet based organizational effort and in developing a narrative about how this effort was a "change" from politics as usual.

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Ultimately, the idea that individuals on the local level can organize themselves behind a candidate's campaign was neither new nor novel – this something campaigns have always strived to accomplish. What was unique is that in 2008 the Obama campaign was more successful than any prior campaign to harness the power of the Internet to shape how individuals were self-organizing and to utilize this self-organization to initiate progress towards achieving the campaign's broader political goals (a message of "change"), rather then simply creating motion. For political

parties attempting to harness the power of people for their campaigns the Internet is an incredible tool when individual organizational efforts occur within the context of the broader campaign strategy. Political strategist who are successful in building Internet based organizational platforms have the power to reach and organize individuals who, more than likely, would never have become engaged in eras prior. The key to success is predicated on providing supporters with the necessary tools to seek out and activate others while doing so within the broader strategic plan of the campaign.

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TALENT

Political parties rely on the resource of talented individuals to implement the strategic and tactical aspects of their campaign plans. Whether the skills of these individuals are being utilized to organize, communicate, raise money, or operate the party or its campaigns, talent is a limited resource for any political effort. The power of the Internet in relation to political talent is based on creating greater efficiency and providing information that can be utilized to make strategic decisions or to implement tactical actions.

An excellent example of the power of the Internet to increase the utilization of talent comes in the form of the creation of extranet tools. An extranet is a private Internet based website used internally by an organization. At the most basic level an extranet allows for information to flow in multiple directions, both vertically and horizontally, across an entire organization. For a political party or a campaign an extranet is a powerful tool because it enables those at all levels to have access to the information they need to complete their tasks or to make informed decisions.

A good example of the power of Internet to increase utilization of talent by insuring information is flowing both vertically and horizontally via an extranet can be demonstrated by a membership drive. The talent of the individuals on the local level who are responsible for recruiting new members for the party will be best utilized if each person understands what the others are doing and whom they are approaching to join the party. An extranet

can provide those responsible for implementing the drive for new party members on the local level with tools to track what individuals have been approached.

As individuals are asked to become members of the party the information can be enter into the extranet, via the Internet. When another local party member decides to approach someone about becoming a party member they can log on to the extranet to see if others from the party have made an approach and what type of response they received. Obviously, such information can be critical in not only in determining if such an approach is appropriate, but also what strategies might work best in the recruitment effort.

Unlike previous technologies, such as television or the printing press, the Internet is an ever-evolving tool. As more software based tools come online and more websites are developed the political uses of the Internet evolve, change, and expand.

At the same time local party activists are using the extranet to share critical information vertically, the party's national leadership can be using the information to make informed strategic decisions about the effort. If, for example, the party is not having success in recruiting new members and the information flowing up from the local activists via the extranet indicates it is due to a lack of organizational resources an informed decision can be made to dedicate additional resources or to divert the membership drive efforts to some other location.

Ultimately, the Internet allows political parties and campaigns to maximize the talent it has available by creating tools that allow individuals to share information and to work more efficiently. Just as with other political resources the power of the Internet in terms of talent rests on the speed at which information can flow both vertically and horizontally.

CAPITALIZING ON THE POWER OF THE INTERNET

The central challenge for political strategists and political parties of any new technology is how to effectively utilize it to achieve the central objective of all political parties – to win elections by getting more votes than the competition. Unlike previous technologies, such as television or the printing press, the Internet is an ever-evolving tool. As more software based tools come online and more websites

are developed the political uses of the Internet evolve, change, and expand. Moreover, the Internet is unique as a technology in that its uses in a political context span nearly every strategic and tactical segment of modern campaigns.

While there is no magic Internet political dust that can simply be applied to win elections, the following are ten useful insights political strategists and party leaders can use when thinking about how to integrate the Internet into their efforts:

1. The Internet is a political resource multiplier – it enables political parties and political campaigns to utilize the resources at their disposal more effectively, at great speeds, to larger audiences, at lower costs.

2. The Internet is an ever-evolving platform whereby new political tools can be created and utilized to achieve strategic political objectives and to reach strategic goals. Success on the Internet in politics is not only about using the tools that have worked in the past, but also about identifying new tools, or even building them, that achieve strategic political objectives.

3. For Internet based tools to be effective it is critical they are built with the party's strategic goals in mind and develop in such a way as to insure their utilization by the individuals who are charged with achieving the goals.

4. As the Internet has developed as a political tool it has crossed over from being primarily a messaging/communications tool to one that is part of every structural division of a political party or a campaign. Thus, it is critical to think of online activities not as a stand along part of your party or campaign, but as tool to connect and to be utilized by all facets of your effort.

5. The most important changes resulting from the Internet's emergence, as a political tool may be how it impacts the internal workings of political parties and campaigns, rather than how it impacts they campaigns and party's interact with voters. Capitalizing on the power of the Internet often times requires devising

ways in which its power can be harnessed to improve how parties or campaigns work internally to achieve external objectives.

6. The global reach and speed at which information moves via the Internet requires that political parties and campaigns must always be in rapid response mode.

7. The power the Internet creates for individuals to organize themselves to political action means political strategists must constantly remember they are not only managing their campaign from the top-down, but shaping how it occurs from the bottom up. At the same time, political parties and campaigns must also be aware that if they are not filling a value based void the Internet provides other individuals, groups, or parties with the power to quickly fill this void.

8. Finding and exploiting new web based technologies is critical for political parties and campaigns to be successful in leveraging the Internet into political support. At the same time, however, it is important to remember it isn't the candidate or party with the most Facebook friends or most Tweets that wins an election; it is the one who gets the most votes on Election Day.

9. The Internet has become the permanent opposition research repository of everything a political party and its candidates have done or said and this information is available to your opponents on a moment's notice. Having political success in the Internet age requires politicians and their strategist to recognize everything they say or do is potentially in the public domain and can be used for or against them at anytime.

10. Just because another party or candidate is using an Internet based tool or tactics as part of their effort doesn't mean that it is part of your winning strategy. While it is often tempting to try and do everything your opponents are doing via the Internet, it is critical online activities are being undertaken as progress towards achieving specific political goals and not simply creating motion.

Ultimately, political strategists and political party leaders who have success on the Internet realize their tactical approach is not simply about taking what has worked someplace else and attempting to replicate it. Each political party and each campaign operates or occurs within a unique political environment. As such, successful use of the Internet to build a political party or to acquire political resources requires political strate-

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gists to understand how the online tactics available via the Internet can best be utilized to achieve their objective. For leaders of political parties and political strategist it is true the "Internet has changed everything." Yet, even as every-thing has changed the most important thing in politics has remained the same – to win elections you need a strategic plan that is tactical viable to insure your campaign get more votes than your opponents.