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Voters, MySpace, and YouTube

The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond

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MySpace and YouTube have affected election campaigns in simple, but significant, ways. These social networking sites, which are used by a substantial segment of the U.S. voting age population, represent the next Internet generation, which is primarily user driven. They have created benefits such as increasing the potential for candidate exposure at a low cost or no cost, providing lesser known candidates with a viable outlet to divulge their message, and allowing campaigns to raise contributions and recruit volunteers online. In conjunction with these benefits, YouTube and MySpace have also posed a new set of challenges to campaign staff, the most important of which is the reduced level of control that campaigns have over the image and message of the candidate, which is of critical importance to election outcomes. This article discusses these benefits and challenges and the influence of YouTube and MySpace on the 2006 election and future campaigns.

Keywords: *YouTube; MySpace; election campaigns; fund-raising; social networking; volunteer recruitment*

YouTube and MySpace, two recently created social networking web sites, featured prominently in the discourse of how technology affected elections in 2006. Social networking sites have rapidly transformed from a niche to a mass phenomenon. Furthermore, a substantial segment of the U.S. voting age population is using YouTube and MySpace, which make them relevant and important for inclusion in campaign strategies. During the 2006 election cycle, MySpace made the news after it launched a voter registration drive for that election, and YouTube was widely covered in the media after Senator George Allen was caught on tape calling a college student of Indian descent a “macaca” and the video was “tubed,” causing an immediate media scandal and quickly becoming one of YouTube’s most viewed. These are just two examples of how MySpace and YouTube have affected election campaigns in simple, but significant, ways. These sites have increased the potential for candidate exposure at a low cost or no cost at all and the ability of campaigns to reach out to the public for campaign contributions and for recruiting volunteers. In addition, they have provided lesser known candidates with a viable outlet to divulge their message to voters, which is particularly significant for local-level elections with incumbent participation. In conjunction with these benefits, YouTube and MySpace have also posed a new set of challenges to campaign staff, the most important of which is the reduced level of control that campaigns have over the image of the candidate, which is of critical importance

to election outcomes. This article will discuss these benefits and challenges and the impact of YouTube and MySpace on the 2006 and future election campaigns in light of who uses these two sites and how.

Technology and Elections

The impact of the Internet on the conduct of election campaigns has been an issue of great interest in the past decade. The ways in which the Internet has affected campaigns include the use of candidate web sites in 1996, e-mail in 1998 (the Jesse Ventura campaign), online fund-raising in 2000 (the John McCain campaign), blogs in 2003 and 2004 (the Howard Dean campaign), net-organized house parties in 2004 (the Bush-Cheney campaign), and social networking sites such as YouTube and MySpace in 2006 (Cornfield & Rainie, 2006).

Previous research on the use of the Internet as a tool to promote and facilitate political participation has been conducted by Bimber (1998) and later by Bimber and Davis (2003), and the success of online social networks has attracted the attention of both the media (e.g., Arrison, 2004; Black, 2004; Leonard, 2004; Newitz, 2003; Sege, 2005) and researchers. The latter have focused on the existing literature on social network theory (e.g., Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Milgram, 1967, 1977; Watts, 2003) to discuss its online version. Hence, studies have focused on issues of trust and intimacy in online networking (Boyd, 2003), participants' strategic representation of their selves to others (Boyd, 2004; Donath & Boyd, 2004), and harvesting online social network profiles to obtain a distributed recommender system (Liu & Maes, 2005). However, no research has been conducted on the use and impact of online social networks on election campaigns, primarily because this application has just surfaced during the 2006 election cycle.

Research on the impact of social networking sites on the elections process is timely because Americans are turning more and more to the Internet as a source for political news. Although TV is the primary source for political news for approximately 70% of Americans, about 15% of all American adults said the Internet was their primary source for campaign news during the 2006 election, up from 7% in the midterm election of 2002 and close to the 18% of Americans who said they relied on the Internet as their primary source of information during the 2004 presidential campaign cycle (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007). In 1996, this figure was a mere 3% (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007). Furthermore, about 25% of all Americans said they got information online about the 2006 elections, and 10% of Americans said they exchanged e-mails about the candidates (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007). Overall, about 31% of all adult Americans were online during the 2006 campaign season gathering information and exchanging views via e-mail, and they constitute more than 60 million people, or a considerable portion of the U.S. electorate (Rainie & Horrigan, 2007).

Simultaneously with this trend, a small yet growing subset of people going online have turned to sources other than the mainstream media for political information. The Pew Center reported that about 9% of Internet users said they read political blogs "frequently" or "sometimes" during the 2004 campaign (Rainie, 2005). Traffic on blogs and other political sites skyrocketed on Election Day in 2004. For example, the Drudge Report, a blog

maintained by Matt Drudge since 1994 with links to stories from the U.S. and international mainstream media about politics and current events, had about 1 million visitors, or approximately 30,000 more than *The New York Times* on the web (Walker, 2004). In February 2005, 15% of Internet users and 12% of Americans reported that they read political blogs at least a few times a month (Saad, 2005).

It is in this environment of increased use of Internet services and of the expansion of broadband Internet access—a higher data-transmission rate Internet connection than dial up—throughout the United States that MySpace and YouTube have developed.¹ Both are social networking sites, but they provide different services. Social networking sites have “moved from niche phenomenon to mass adoption” (Gross & Acquisti, 2005, p. 71). The concept dates back to the 1960s, but its implementation was made possible only with the advent and growth of the Internet (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

MySpace and YouTube provide different services. MySpace, created in 2003, provides a place for personal profiles, blogs, groups, and photo, music, and video sharing. It is one of the most popular sites on the Internet, with more than 150 million user profiles, a monthly visitor count of 54 million, and an annual growth rate of 367% from 2005 to 2006 (Nielsen//NetRatings, 2006). It is also the leading web site in terms of user loyalty. YouTube is a video-sharing site created in February 2005. YouTube users can create user profiles where they upload video content. They can also search, watch, and leave comments on other videos and subscribe to the videos of other users. YouTube has a tagging system, which allows users to add keywords (i.e., “tags”) associated with the video, thus enabling keyword-based searches. The site delivers more than 100 million videos every day and has 65,000 new videos uploaded daily (Reuters, 2006). YouTube videos accounted for 60% of all videos watched online in July 2006 and had nearly 20 million unique users per month (Reuters, 2006).

Although MySpace and YouTube provide different services, they have several things in common: the extraordinary speed with which they became popular and the fact that they are representative of the next Internet generation, which is free and user driven, that is, users contribute as much as they consume (Boutin, 2006).

Use of YouTube and MySpace During the 2006 Election Cycle

The user-driven nature of social networking sites such as YouTube and MySpace is one of the factors that generate the importance of these sites for election campaigns. However, two other factors—how the sites are used for election campaigns and the demographic composition of their users—play an important role as well. These two factors are discussed next.

User Demographics

Defining the demographic characteristics of the users of both of the sites presents some challenges as it should be taken into consideration that such social networking and user-driven environments pose the same metric problem: demographic data are as accurate as users want it to be, that is, there is a reliance on users’ reporting their true demographic data. Yet

considering this limitation, there are very few stimuli for users to not report their accurate demographic data because both Internet sites do not place restrictions on age groups that can use them. YouTube has possibly the only stimulus for misreporting of personal data, which is that certain videos might be flagged as inappropriate for users younger than 18, in which case, if a minor wants to watch these clips, he or she would have to misreport his or her age.

A substantial segment of the U.S. voting age population is using YouTube and MySpace. User data show that about half or more of YouTube's users are 35 or older. Several studies conducted between May and August 2006, which used different methodologies, found that between 48% and 65% of YouTube's U.S. users were 35 to 64 years old: comScore found that 48% of users were between 35 and 64, and Quantcast found that 65% of users were 35- to 64-year-olds (Reimer, 2006). MySpace's user demographic data also show that half of its U.S. users (51.6%) are 35 or older (comScore Media Metrix, 2006). However, it is interesting to note that MySpace's age demographic has shifted. The most significant shift occurred among teens 12 to 17, who accounted for 24.7% of the MySpace audience in August 2005 but in August 2006 represented about 11.9% (comScore Media Metrix, 2006). Also, whereas in August 2005, the percentage of adult (age 18 and older) users was about 69.5, in August 2006, it was 86.4 (comScore Media Metrix, 2006). This was mainly due to increases in the percentage of users in the 25- to 34-year-old category (a 6.2 percentage point increase) and an increase in the percentage of users in the 35- to 54-year-old category (an 8.2 percentage point increase).

The users' demographic data suggest several conclusions with significant consequences for campaign strategists and for candidates: As social networking has become more mainstream, it has gained an appeal across generations. It also suggests that although it is often cited in the news that both venues cater mostly to young audiences (Jesdanun, 2006; Lizza, 2006), this is a misconception based on the assumption that their services do not appeal to other age groups (Jesdanun, 2006). In summary, the user demographics data show that a substantial segment of the voting age population is using both YouTube and MySpace and can be reached there by candidates and their campaign ads.

In addition, the 35 and older segment of the U.S. population, which constitutes about half or more of the users of MySpace and YouTube, is also more politically active than the younger voting age population: During the 2004 elections, the average turnout for the 35 and older segment was about 70%, or about 20 percentage points higher than the average for the 18- to 24-year-old and 25- to 34-year-old age groups (Holder, 2006). Hence, the sites are a promising venue where this politically active segment can be targeted by campaigns.

Use in the 2006 Election Campaign Cycle and Beyond

Both YouTube and MySpace became the focus of the media's and the public's attention during the 2006 election campaign cycle and were generally portrayed as the new technology fad to affect election campaigns (Dickinson, 2006; Fairbanks, 2006; Keen, 2006; Kiley, 2006; Lizza, 2006; Miller, 2006). Their use in the 2006 elections demonstrated the benefits and potential they have for political advertising, fund-raising, and volunteer recruitment as well as the challenges they pose to the ability of campaigns to control the candidate's image and message in these two venues, where content is user generated and still unregulated. These benefits and challenges will be discussed next.

YouTube

YouTube affects several critical areas in the planning and execution of election campaigns: access to voters, the advertising campaign, fund-raising, and the budget. The ability of campaigns to access voters through YouTube is potentially unlimited. "A democracy is a political system that rewards communications power" (Bryant, 1995, p. 85), and the communications power that YouTube has is hard to overestimate. The site increased the ability of campaigns to use videos as a political advertising tool, and those videos can achieve broad dissemination via the Internet. Campaigns have always used videos, but the practice of hiring staff to follow and film opponents has been further fueled by the advent of broadband Internet and video-sharing web sites, which are user friendly and have changed the use cycle by allowing the videos to be uploaded and circulated more rapidly (Jalonick, 2006). And as previously mentioned, the site's user demographics show that a substantial segment of the voting age population is using YouTube and can be reached there through video clips.

This communication power of YouTube was alluded to on several occasions during the 2006 cycle, when it generated controversy about the candidates by offering an uncensored look at their speeches on the election trail (New ScientistTech, 2006). The effect of the videos of these speeches was further augmented by the fact that the stories were picked up by the mainstream media. This is what happened to Republican senator George Allen from Virginia, who was caught on camera by one of his opponents' supporters using the racial slur "macaca." The video was "tubed," causing an immediate media scandal and becoming one of YouTube's most viewed. The incident was followed by a series of public apologies and media appearances by Allen where he had to explain his behavior on camera. Similarly, Conrad Burns, a Republican senator from Montana, was under the media's spotlight for videos on YouTube showing him dozing off at a bill hearing, joking about the legal status of the "nice little Guatemalan man" who works at his house, and a clip that has him warning constituents about a faceless terrorist enemy who is a "taxi driver in the daytime but a killer at night." These videos were recorded by Montana Democratic Party staffer Kevin O'Brien, who was hired to follow Burns around his public appearances and film them. Subsequently, the content of the tapes was used for press releases and YouTube videos (Johnson, 2006). This was not the first time that Burns was filmed on the campaign trail. During the 2000 race against Brian Schweitzer, cameraman Matt McKenna was paid to follow Burns. The Burns campaign also occasionally filmed Burns' Democratic opponent in 2006, Jon Tester, and recorded all Democratic primary debates, but it did not have a person devoted to that activity as the Democratic campaign did (Johnson, 2006).

Other election campaigns that featured on YouTube and provide further testimony of the communication power of this site were Connecticut's, Minnesota's, and Missouri's. YouTube hurt Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, who was defeated by Ned Lamont in Connecticut's Democratic primary. Pro-Lamont bloggers frequently posted flattering interviews with their candidate on YouTube and unflattering video of Senator Lieberman. The Lamont campaign even hired a staffer to coordinate the activities of the bloggers and video bloggers. Users in Minnesota posted critical clips of Democratic Senate candidate Amy Klobuchar and her Republican opponent, Mark Kennedy. In Missouri, several videos critical of Republican Senator Jim Talent, a runner-up for reelection in 2006, were posted on YouTube by a Democratic strategist.

Table 1
Campaign Spending by Media Outlet, 2002 to 2006 (in millions of dollars)

	2002	2004	2006
Broadcast TV	912	1,450	1,578
Direct mail	335	648	707
Radio	155	175	256
Public relations/promotions	128	43	254
Cable	35	103	144
Newspaper	34	58	104
Outdoor	25	34	55
Online	5	29	40
Other	1	2	2
Total	1,630	2,742	3,140

Source: Lieberman (2006).

Overall, there is no confirmation that there was an orchestrated effort by both parties to use YouTube in 2006. However, several Democratic campaign ads and news clips favorable to party candidates were posted there (Jalonick, 2006). In turn, Brian Walton, the National Republican Senatorial Committee spokesman, said the party had not made a specific effort to use YouTube (Jalonick, 2006), perhaps as a consequence of which Republicans had fewer postings on the site than Democrats during the 2006 election cycle.

In addition to its potential as a political advertising tool, as an alternative to TV and radio, YouTube provides free and broad dissemination of campaign messages and ads, thus affecting the campaign budget. In 2006, candidates and activists spent a total of \$3.1 billion on political advertising, about twice as much as they had spent just 4 years before. Given that the site lets candidates reshoot TV spots they have already produced without the expense of broadcast airtime, and considering the \$1.6 billion spent to broadcast ads on TV in 2006 (see Table 1), YouTube offers a cost-effective alternative to get the campaign message across. Its nearly 20 million unique users per month are also a considerable audience.

By providing low- or no-cost access to voters, YouTube also allowed lesser known candidates to divulge their political platforms during the 2006 election cycle. This is particularly important in elections with incumbents running for office, who might have the advantage of better access to campaign financing and the media because of their incumbent status. For example, the state assembly race in New York had incumbent David Townsend running against a tech-savvy newcomer—Dave Gordon. Gordon's 30-second spot cost \$350 to make and absolutely nothing to post online, which reduces the constraints of limited financing for new and lesser known candidates.

YouTube also has potential as a fund-raising tool. The Internet provides a way for campaigns to solicit funds from more people and makes giving more convenient. In 2004, John Kerry raised \$80 million in online contributions for his bid for the presidency. In addition, in 2004, about 5% of small political donors and 2% of large political donors said online videos prompted them to make their first contribution (Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, 2006b). Also, more than half of the Democratic contributors and a quarter of the Republican donors in 2004 made at least one online donation (whereas in 2000,

online donors were almost nonexistent). Furthermore, an analysis of response patterns to more than 300 online ad campaigns running from June to September 2006 showed that video ads generate at least twice the response (measured by clicks) as standard image (JPG or GIF) ads (DoubleClick, 2007). Hence, although there are no accounts of YouTube's having been used for fund-raising in the 2006 cycle, this role is worth considering for future election campaigns.

MySpace

MySpace also featured prominently in the 2006 campaign, although in ways somewhat different from YouTube's. It was used primarily as a tool to promote voter registration, recruit campaign volunteers, and achieve more public exposure for candidates.

One of the ways in which MySpace affected the 2006 election was by promoting voter registration among its users. In partnership with the nonpartisan group Declare Yourself, MySpace began running voter registration ads and giving members tools such as "I Registered to Vote on MySpace" badges to place on their personal profile pages. Members wishing to register were redirected to a web site where they entered their state and zip code, after which a PDF file was generated for them to print out and send to their state election officials. Although no data are available as to the proportion of registered voters who used MySpace to submit their voter registration forms, the site provides an additional outreach channel for this activity.

MySpace was also successfully used to recruit campaign volunteers. For example, in a Maryland election for state comptroller against a two-term incumbent, Peter Franchot's campaign recruited 80% of its volunteers online at MySpace and Facebook. Those volunteers made 15,000 phone calls and dropped 50,000 pieces of campaign literature, which helped Franchot win the September 2006 primary.

Like YouTube, MySpace provides a platform for political candidates to get their messages across to a substantial voting age population segment at a low cost or no cost at all. The demographic data for MySpace users show that 85% of them are of voting age (O'Malley, 2007). In addition, MySpace users 18 and older are 3 times more likely to interact online with a public official or candidate, 42% more likely to watch politically related online video, 35% more likely to research politics online, and 44% more likely to listen to political audio online (O'Malley, 2007), which suggests that if campaigns want to reach these voters, then targeting social networking sites like MySpace should be a crucial part of the election campaign strategy. During the 2006 election cycle, this fact did not go unnoticed to Democratic and Republican campaigns: Pages were set up for candidates from both of these parties, and each had more than 50,000 friends in September 2006 (Romano, 2006). Some candidates, like Democratic gubernatorial candidate Ted Strickland of Ohio, even integrated YouTube videos in their profiles.

MySpace, like YouTube, also has potential for fund-raising. Chuck Poochigian, a Republican senator from Fresno who ran for California attorney general, joined MySpace in early August 2006, and within 2 months, the number of online donations to his campaign jumped more than 50% (Lovley, 2006). Recognizing this potential, MySpace has launched a customized, viral fund-raising feature for the profiles of the presidential candidates for 2008.

During the 2006 election cycle, both MySpace and YouTube showed that they had substantial benefits for election campaigns such as increasing access to voters, disseminating campaign ads and messages for free or at a low cost, providing a platform for lesser known candidates, fostering voter registration, increasing fund-raising opportunities, and facilitating volunteer recruitment. Some of those uses were not fully explored in 2006, primarily because both sites had been set up recently.

However, the use of these two social networking sites also presents some challenges that need to be addressed, particularly in light of the general expectation that the 2008 elections will rely much more heavily on the services that YouTube and MySpace offer.

The Challenges of YouTube and MySpace

The advent of YouTube changed the way politicians communicate with voters. Political analysts predict that YouTube's impact on candidates will entail forcing them to be more natural, direct, and honest (Lizza, 2006) because they might be filmed anywhere and at any time, and that video can very easily be uploaded and widely distributed. It would also restrict the candidate's ability to test campaign messages from place to place to refine them, as was possible 80 years ago, and candidates would have to be prepared and camera ready before they go on the campaign trail, rather than be a work in progress (Lizza, 2006).

Both YouTube and MySpace challenge election campaign strategists in their ability to deliver a clear and consistent message and image of candidates. These sites weaken the level of control that campaigns have over the candidate's image and message since anybody, both supporters and opponents, can post a video and/or create a page on behalf of the candidates because of the user-driven content of social networking sites. At many campaigns during the 2006 elections, volunteers created MySpace profiles and/or YouTube accounts, generally without the knowledge of the candidate. The reaction of some campaigns, fearing an inability to deliver a unified message and lacking staff to monitor such sites, was to seek the removal of the profiles and accounts (CBS News, 2006). YouTube's impact on professional journalism is similar, as it devolves the media from the power to shape popular perception of candidates to anybody with a PC and an Internet connection.

There are other challenges to utilizing YouTube and MySpace for election campaigns. Both have an element of self-selection, that is, the people who use them for looking up political campaign videos or who join MySpace political networks have already been motivated to do so. Also, to fully utilize the power of video streaming, campaigns still have to get the right people to enter the right search terms and view the right videos at the right times (Cornfield, 2006). Furthermore, MySpace has a very loosely segmented audience, and proactively addressing large numbers of individual activists who share one particular concern or demographic is difficult (Goldsmith, 2006), which also applies to YouTube.

Also, both YouTube and MySpace have limited functions and need to be used in conjunction with other strategies. MySpace pages are not sites; each is just a single page, and there is no mechanism to engage visitors into opting for e-mail list development or to provide them with comprehensive content, so these activities would need to be carried out at a candidate's web page, to which MySpace visitors would need to be redirected (Goldsmith, 2006). In turn, YouTube hosts user profiles and their video clips and allows

users to subscribe to other users' clips. However, like MySpace, comprehensive content would need to be provided elsewhere, so profiles would need to redirect visitors to a candidate's web site.

These challenges underline the importance of blended networking, or incorporating online and offline networking, which has been emphasized by experts (Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, 2006a). For example, MySpace profiles can be used to recruit supporters who talk online and publish content, such as blog entries or web videos, to volunteer as door-to-door canvassers.

In addition to these challenges, the use of YouTube and MySpace could potentially be affected by federal regulation on political advertising. Currently, web-only ads, or ads circulated on a candidate's web site and/or via e-mail, are not subject to the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, which explicitly addresses the scope of broadcast advertising in political campaigns. However, web-first ads, or ads broadcast on both the Internet and television, are subject to Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act regulations. It remains to be seen whether the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act regulations will be extended to web-only ads in future election cycles.

Future Prospects

Considering the potential of YouTube and MySpace for increasing the exposure of voters to campaign ads at a low cost or no cost, their applicability for fund-raising and recruiting volunteers, and their ability to provide lesser known candidates with public exposure, these two social networking sites promise to be essential elements for political campaigns even in light of any challenges they may present now or in the future.

Online campaign strategists are predicting an explosion of video sharing during the next election cycle that will require campaigns to add online video experts to their staffs (Greenfield, 2007). During the 2006 election, many of the bigger campaigns already had Internet strategists, either on staff or as consultants, to maintain online communications, contact bloggers, and monitor social networking sites (Greenfield, 2007). Strategists also predict that bigger campaigns will be facing hundreds of rogue postings each month, which would require a strategy for monitoring them and deciding how to respond. Critical elements in the responses would be to have general videos prepared during the slower season, which could be quickly edited and used as rebuttals; to rapidly post a response; to find teams of online supporters to collect, produce, and spread the video that the campaign wants others to see; and to help fight unfavorable postings through content ratings (Greenfield, 2007). Recognizing the potential of social networking sites, some candidates have even created their own. For example, Barack Obama's social networking site allows users to help him fund-raise, to network with other supporters, to invite friends to join the site, to start and/or join groups, and to find and/or host events.

The impact of the online social networks on the 2008 election cycle is already being felt: Democrats Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and John Edwards as well as Republican Sam Brownback announced their runs for the White House not in network news interviews but in their own online videos (Jarvis, 2007). Within the first 48 hours after the Edwards video was released, 50,000 people had already seen it (Cillizza & Balz, 2007). For

Table 2
MySpace and YouTube Use for the 2008 Election Cycle as of April 30, 2007

MySpace Friends							
Democrats				Republicans			
	+/-	%	Number of friends		+/-	%	Number of friends
Obama	+	+23.10	161,720	McCain	+	+67.20	20,172
Clinton	+	+9.50	41,869	Romney	+	+40.80	11,971
Edwards	+	+35.70	27,481	Paul	+	+35.20	8,211
Kucinich	+	+89.30	10,279	Brownback	+	+1315.30	4,628
Richardson	+	+59.70	9,699	Giuliani	+	+30.30	2,999
Biden	+	+94.50	5,634	Hunter	+	+60.20	2,961
Dodd	+	+121.50	3,752	Tancredo	+	+7.50	1,321
Gravel	+	+0.00	2	Huckabee	+	+11.90	1,045

YouTube Statistics							
Democrats				Republicans			
	+/-	%	Number of views		+/-	%	Number of views
Obama	+	+0.60	2,791,315	Romney	+	+3.70	582,016
Edwards	+	+39.50	517,785	McCain	+	+672.60	304,388
Clinton	+	+7.30	128,170	Giuliani	+	+5.10	72,363
Kucinich	+	+15.80	36,218	Paul	+	+20.20	55,522
Biden	+	+12.70	29,316	Hunter	+	+24.30	7,744
Richardson	+	+10.70	29,180				
Dodd	+	+11.50	9,722				

Source: techPresident (2007).

Note: Trends reflect a one-week period.

the 2008 presidential election, YouTube also set up a special feature called You Choose, which is a subsite dedicated to campaign-related videos. Similarly, MySpace introduced a portal—The Impact Channel—featuring presidential candidate-created profiles, voter registration tools, job listings, videos, friends pages, and other political content, which it expects to play a major role in the 2008 election.

Furthermore, in February 2007, a new web site called techPresident was created to monitor and report on how technology and the Internet are being incorporated by candidates in the 2008 presidential campaign (see Table 2). Table 2 shows the number of views that each candidate with a presence on YouTube's You Choose channel has and the number of friends that Democratic and Republican candidates have on their MySpace pages. Although the percentage increases in views and new friends vary substantially across candidates, they are nevertheless indicative of the intense level of engagement that users of MySpace and YouTube have with the political ads and messages on these sites in anticipation of the 2008 election. All these developments suggest that whereas in 2006, having a presence in social networking sites was a tangential outreach effort for election campaigns, in 2008, it is going to be a necessity.

Note

1. By August 2006, 75% of U.S. Internet users had broadband access at home versus 51% two years earlier, according to Nielsen//NetRatings (2006).

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