Text-based Interactivity in Candidate Campaign Web Sites: A Case Study from the 2002 Elections

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O VER THE COURSE of the past decade, the World Wide Web has played a progressively increasing role in political campaigning. Gary Selnow (1998) noted that 1996 was the first year that political campaigns used the Web for mass campaigning, since then its use has increased dramatically in local, state, and federal elections (Benoit & Benoit, 2000; Bimber, 1998; D'Alessio, 1997, 2000; Dulio, Goff, & Thurber 1999; Poupolo, 2001; Schneider & Foot, 2002; Whillock, 1997). By early summer 2003, for example, ten presidential campaigns had already established an active Web presence for the 2004 presidential race. Indeed, former presidential candidate Howard Dean's campaign Web site played a prominent role in Dean's overall campaign strategy.

The present study will focus on campaigns for U. S. House during Autumn 2002. As in other federal election categories, House candidate campaign Web sites have increased in number since 1996 when only 16 percent of House candidates had their own sites. That percentage increased to 40.6 percent in 1998; 53 percent in 2000; and 62 percent in 2002.[1] Many reasons exist for these increases. Candidates for Congress have discovered that their campaign sites provide a relatively low budget mechanism for soliciting campaign contributions and mobilizing volunteers. These sites also serve as points of origin for information about the campaign. And they are widely used by the press to identify candidates' stands on the issues, planned appearances, and responses to opponents' criticisms and issues raised by the public.

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As one political consultant observed, campaign Web sites have developed from "a token tool to an absolutely must have tool" (Williams, 2001, p. A17). This notion is widely accepted by political consultants and trade journals such as *Campaigns & Elections* (Cornfield, Safdar, & Seiger, 1998; Dorsey & Green, 1997; Faucheux, 1998). Web sites have made such an indelible mark on the campaign process that the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (IPDI, 2002) published *Online Campaigning 2002: A Primer.* Targeted at candidates and campaign managers, this primer offered instruction on how to strategically use the Internet in campaigns and outlined a set of "best practices" for Internet campaign Web sites. Ultimately, as Schneider and Foot (2002) suggest, most campaigns feel there is a need for some Internet presence.

Although political campaigns see the necessity of Web-based campaigning, campaign Web sites have yet to realize their full potential as a medium to improve communication between candidates and Web users and to influence voters. Their failure to do so is partly due to many candidates' inclination to treat their Web site as if it were a static campaign flyer. In contrast, the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (IPDI) advised campaign managers to avoid "brochureware" (by which they meant print campaign materials that are merely uploaded to a campaign Web site) because such an approach neither attracts and engages Web users nor effectively utilizes the Web medium. Foot and Schneider (2002) argued that although most campaigns in the 2002 election used basic features (termed brochureware), and adaptations of other traditional campaign practices (online donation, news and press releases), few campaigns used features for which the Internet is particularly well adapted such as interactive polls, alternate language versions, disabled access versions, and site specific search engines. We contend that an important element in the move away from brochureware will involve developing campaign sites that harness the interactive potential of the Internet.

In this essay, we offer a rhetorical perspective to what has been a largely media-based discussion of interactivity in political campaign Web sites. Drawing from previous literature in interactivity and Bakhtin's dialogism and heteroglossia, we argue for a new framework—text-based interactivity—through which researchers can attend to previously understudied aspects of interactivity (elements of rhetorical form, content, and design). Our purpose in this essay is to show how the use of text-based interactivity on political campaign Web sites complements Internet-enabled features (such as email links and interactive polls) and enhances user engagement with the site. Through articulating this concept, we hope to influence both the general understanding of political campaign sites and the specific Web-design choices made by political campaigns.

We begin with a discussion of interactivity. Next, we offer an articulation of the text-based interactivity framework. Third, we present a case study to illuminate the concept of text-based interactivity and demonstrate the value of such a framework in analyzing campaign sites. Our case study is a rhetorical reading of the uses of actual and text-based interactivity in Democratic and Republican candidate campaign Web sites from seven competitive races in the 2002 House elections (see Appendix for list of races and Web sites). We will conclude with discussion of the value and further applications of this framework for researchers of Web-based political texts.

Interactivity and the Web

The IPDI includes interactivity as one of the "best practices" for an online campaign strategy. They argue, "when a campaign extends interactive features to the public, it signals a willingness to listen and learn from the people. That is a good image for a campaign to live up to" (IPDI, 2002, p. 25). This is only one of the potential benefits of interactivity on campaign Web sites. Interactivity as a concept remains unclear, however, and is the subject of a vigorous conversation among new media scholars. While the potential for interactivity is considered a unique factor of new media, especially the Web, scholars are still trying to develop precise definitions of the concept (McMillan, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2000; Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003).

Sally J. McMillan (2002) attempted a move in this direction by tracing the history and emergence of the interactivity concept as it applies to new media. She identified three forms of interactivity in Internet environments—user-to-system, user-to-user, and user-to-document. Here we will describe each of these forms and place our own concept of text-based interactivity in relation to them.

User-to-system interactivity exists on all Web sites and refers to the interaction between individuals and the computer. McMillan explained it as "computer-controlled interaction [that] assumes that the computer will 'present' information to learners who will respond to that information" (2002, p. 174.) User-to-system interactivity includes clicking on hyperlinks, customizing site features (such as font size and image display), and some gaming operations. This form of interactivity is initiated by the user and occurs between the user and the system technology. Since we are primarily interested in communication-related aspects of interactivity, user-to-system interactivity will not be a focus of our study.

User-to-user interactivity consists of communication that occurs between users and is often referred to as computer-mediated communication. Examples include Internet chat, instant messaging, and discussion boards. On political sites, this form of interactivity also occurs in town hall forums and moderated discussions. Observers of online

campaigning advise candidates to use such forms with caution (IDPI, 2002). Indeed, such interactive forms are rarely used on candidate sites (Kamarck, 1999; Davis, 1999; Foot, Schneider, & Xenos, 2002). Jennifer Stromer-Galley (2000) inquired as to why these user-to-user forms occurred so infrequently. To do this, she interviewed campaign managers and staff, who reported that they did not use such features because using them was burdensome to the campaign. Furthermore, user-to-user features involved the risk of losing control of campaign discourse as covered by the media, as well as loss of strategic ambiguity on the issues, which is often an important part of campaign strategy. None of the 14 sites in our study included direct user-to-user interactivity, and so we will not discuss its use in this essay. (For discussions of a few candidate campaign sites in which user-to-user interaction occurred, see Stromer-Galley, 2000 and Puopolo, 2001)

Another form of "user-to-user interactivity" (more appropriately labeled website author(s) to users, or vice versa) exists but was not explicitly identified as such by McMillan. In this case "user-to-user interactivity" is somewhat of a misnomer because it brings to mind an image of site visitors *interacting with each other.* In regard to our sample of sites, the candidates and their campaign staffs functioned as the point of origin for website content and thereby played an authorial role. This form of actual interactivity—campaign-to-user or user-to-campaign interactivity—includes any feature that enables campaigns and users to communicate with each other, or which provides the potential to do so. "Actual interactivity" on political campaign sites as discussed in this study includes, but is not limited to features such as onsite polls, events postings, "contribute," "volunteer," and "contact" links, and sign up input forms for campaign newsletters or updates. Campaign-to-user and user-to-campaign interaction ("actual interactivity") was a frequent phenomenon in the sites we studied, and it will be a focus of our analysis.

The third and final form of interactivity identified by McMillan (2002) is user-to-document interactivity. In relation to new media, this form occurs when users modify site texts, or when real-time feedback collected from receivers is used by the source to modify the message. When users contribute material that is then posted on the site (e.g., book reviews by users on Amazon.com), or when user comments result in changes to the site text, user-to-document interactivity has occurred. This form of interactivity, in which users actively participate in co-creating website content, was found infrequently on the sites we studied. (For example, one candidate actively posted endorsement statements made by voters of the opposite party who were supporting his campaign.) User-to-document interactivity will not be a focus of our present essay.

In the "interactivity taxonomies" that have been thus far generated, one form of interactivity—text-based interactivity considered as a rhe-

torical dimension of the website text—has not been described or considered systematically. Since candidates avoid enabling user-to user interactivity (chat, IM, discussion boards) for the reasons described by Stromer-Galley (2000), text-based interactivity may be serving as an important surrogate for these direct user-to-user forms. For example, the IDPI's online campaign primer encourages candidates to use their sites to "extend a welcome greeting," to treat users as respected visitors, to communicate directly, and to use humor (2000, p. 10). Aligning with these forms of appeal, is what we call "text-based interactivity." This construct includes the rhetorical features of the *form of verbal and visual expression* in the site text. This would include, for example, use of active versus passive voice, direct address (1st and 2nd person), use of first name versus last name reference to the candidate, text boxes, captioned photographs, and use of accessible style and design. Interactivity in this sense does not denote actual feedback or communication between humans, participation in site content creation, or even the active, participatory nature of Web surfing. Rather, the interactivity in text-based interactivity is a rhetorical construct that engages users through emulation of dialogue between Web users and members of the campaign. Text-based interactivity is the major focus of this essay.

Text-Based Interactivity

Before illustrating the importance of text-based interactivity as it functioned on the 14 sites we studied, we will first define what we mean by "text" and "text-based interactivity" in the new media context.[2] "Text," as we use it here, refers to dimensions of expression that are strategic and rhetorically motivated. "Text" includes not only written forms of expression but also images (photographs and graphics) and multimedia texts. IDPI's online primer advised candidates to attend to such factors as consistent use of color, placement and captioning of photographs, and use of multimedia on their sites. Daley (2003) emphasized that the messages in new media environments are comprised of much more than print text.

Such principles as screen direction, the placement of objects in the frame, color choices . . . and morphing all do much more than make a screen communication aesthetically pleasing. They are as critical to the creation of meaning as adverbs, adjectives, paragraphs, periods, analogies, and metaphors are to text. (p. 38)

Designing website expression with a rhetorical purpose in mind therefore has as much to do with considered planning of the visual, aesthetic elements of the page as it has for what is said on the page.

Text-based interactivity engages the user through qualities of text construction. Text-based interactivity is distinct from actual user-to-user, user-to-document, and user-to-system interactivity in that elements of text-based interactivity are designed to simulate face-to-face

communication between the candidate or members of the campaign and their site's users. Text-based interactivity is not concerned with actual two-way communication between users or between users and the campaign. However, text-based interactivity can influence users to make the most of features that facilitate user-to-campaign or campaign-to-user interactivity. The two complement each other, since a site that is accessible, easily understood, and respectful of users would be more likely to motivate users to contact the candidate or the campaign staff. Additionally, campaign website content can simultaneously embody multiple forms of interactivity. Thus, while our goal is to provide a clear discussion of the concept of text-based interactivity, in practice the concept may co-occur with other forms of interactivity.

Text-based interactivity is based in a particular understanding of Web users. The Internet is essentially a "pull" media experience, since the Web user must seek out the candidate's Web site and choose what information to view. Web users who access candidate Web sites are likely to be highly motivated to seek out selectively and process the information (see D'Alessio, 1997). As with Web sites in general, the task of candidate campaign Web sites is to design a site that engages the user, provides pertinent information, and ultimately encourages users to return to the site. Text-based interactivity assumes that the more interactive a Web site is, the more engaging it will be to users. In its various forms, text-based interactivity may particularly engage those users who visit the site for different purposes. Some users might be hurriedly seeking specific information just prior to casting a vote, others might read all or most of a candidate site to get background information on the candidate and the campaign, other users (particularly members of the press) might be seeking current information on campaign developments. An interactive Web site might be particularly useful in engaging what Dorsey and Green (1997) call "motivated undecided" voters.[3]

What characteristics distinguish a campaign Web site as being textually "interactive" from one that is less so? We maintain that such sites possess characteristics that *open* deliberation and *engage* the user. In developing this idea, we draw on Walter J. Ong's (1982) prescient observation that, as society enters an electronic age, it may also be entering a period of secondary orality. Ong explained this phenomenon of secondary orality in terms of the forms of primary orality found in cultures untouched by any knowledge of writing or print. Ong observed that "this new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas" (p. 136). If Ong's predictions are correct, postings to the Internet should differ from print-based communication in how they address their audiences, the ways their discourse is structured, their potential for interactivity, their reliance on context for understanding, and their

emphasis on action and on effects (Chesebro & Bertelsen, 1996). In other words, discourse on the Web may be more effective to the extent that it resembles speech rather than print or mass media. Concretely, then, sites that directly address the user, provide external links enabling users to judge what the site says, and periodic updates in response to campaign events can be contrasted with sites limited to advertising the candidate's experience, qualifications, and stands on the issues.

Furthermore, forms of expression on sites high in text-based interactivity will be dialogized as opposed to being monologic in nature. This distinction is drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogic communication in which he differentiated discourse in which centripetal (centralizing) forces predominate from speech that is multivoiced (decentered). His studies of speech as represented in the novel led him to believe that all contextualized speech was heteroglossic in nature. That is, all situated expressions in their "being said" take their words, styles, and forms of expression from preceding talk and are, in a sense, "another's speech in another's language" (1981, p. 324).

Nonetheless, official depersonalized monologic forms of expression do exist, and they are couched in the manner of "it is said that." Utterances such as encyclicals, military commands, and official reports are highly conventionalized, depersonalized, and constrained in their manner of expression. These expressions are "maximally standard by nature and . . . the creative aspect is almost completely lacking" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 77). Markers of such speech include use of the passive voice, denotative words, and third person address. The passage below, for example, is taken from the candidate Web site for Buddy Darden (Georgia, 11th District).

Public service has marked the life of George (Buddy) Darden since early adulthood. Over the years, he has served as a state district attorney, state legislator and—from 1983 to 1994—as member of the United States House of Representatives. Buddy represented Georgia's Seventh Congressional District for six terms. In the House, he served first as a member of the Armed Services Committee and the Interior Committee, then moved to the appropriations Committee and its Defense and Treasure subcommittees. (*Dardenforcongress/About Buddy*, n. d., para 1)

This passage, though not in the passive voice, is expressed from a neutral, third party perspective, composed of a set of facts, and confined to listing Darden's offices and committee service. The reader gets no sense of voice or of the actions and thoughts of Darden himself as shown by his speech or by the speech of other people.

By contrast, expression that is dialogized is expression that is relativized, specific to its context, and inclusive of competing conceptions and points of view. Its inclusion of alternatives opens up a deliberative space and engages readers and listeners to think alongside the message. In dialogized expression, centrifugal (decentering) forces predominate, and expression manifests a diversity of characteristics, speech

styles, and even languages. In such expression, there is the "sense of the listener as a partner-interlocutor" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 66). To some extent, this emulates the actual life of speech where "primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle; it . . . prepares the ground for active and engaged understanding" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). Although it is difficult to illustrate all these characteristics in one brief passage, the following statement from Stan Matsunaka's (Colorado, 4th District) site is useful:

I am proud to say that I was born and raised in Colorado's Fourth Congressional District, and it continues to be my home today. I was born to Harry and Mary Matsunaka on November 12, 1953 in Akron, Colorado, and grew up in Fort Morgan—another small town on Colorado's eastern plains. . . . One of the formative experiences of my youth was talking with my Dad, who is a decorated veteran of the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most highly decorated American fighting unit for its size in American history. [Next to this statement is a photograph of Matsunaka's Dad, walking alongside his son and holding a yellow "Matsunaka for Congress" sign]. Their motto was "Go for Broke" a slang term that means to give everything you have to your cause. . . . I have been urged by my family and friends here in Colorado to "go for broke" and . . . I accept the challenge. (*Stan Matsunaka for Congress*, 2002, para. 1, 2, 4, 5, 20)

In heteroglossic expression such as this, one finds a textually interactive milieu where many belief systems circulate, where "the listener takes an active, responsive attitude toward [the meaning of what is said]. He either agrees or disagrees with it completely or partially, augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68). In this case, one hears the voice of the candidate, his supporters, his father's fellow soldiers, and his father by way of the sign. Since Matsunaka is Asian American, this account gives him an opportunity to affirm his ethnicity and at the same time the common cause he shares with his constituents. And by voicing the fighting unit's slogan, "Go for Broke," Matsunaka is able, as Bakhtin put it, to say "'I am me' in someone else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other'" (1981, p. 315). This form of expression in someone else's words is a rhetorical dimension of the website text.

The Web sites we studied generally did not fit clearly into either the high text-based interactivity or low text-based interactivity categories. Instead, they possessed this quality to a greater or lesser degree and thus fit at various points on a continuum between two hypothetical extremes. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify and discuss the aspects of these sites that made them either comparatively high or low in text-based interactivity, and that is the task to which we now turn.

2002 House Candidate Campaign Sites

The place at which a candidate Web site falls on the continuum of high to low text-based interactivity depends upon several characteristics such as spatial and temporal presentation of the candidate, construction of the candidate's persona, and the diversity of speakers and

voices represented on the site. In our reading of 14 competitive, open-seat House election campaigns with a web presence (see Appendix),[4] we found sites that presented the candidate as immediate in time and space and personally present to be more dialogic in nature. Such representation of the candidates engaged users in a personal conversation with the candidate by means of the text, while sites that represented the candidate as distant were flat and uninteresting. Sites that offered multiple perspectives, voices and speech styles emulated an active dialogue whereas brochureware-style sites tended to be more monologic, with detached, depersonalized statements about the candidates from unidentified speakers (presumably members of the campaign staff).

Additionally, Web sites that facilitated feedback between the campaign and user, such as the extent to which the campaign appeared to be responsive to user concerns and questions and to emphasize user-friendly design, tended to be more engaging. From our analysis of the sites, we found that highly interactive campaign Web sites combined elements of actual interactivity (user-to-campaign/campaign-to-user) and text-based interactivity. We found that actual and text-based interactivity tended to complement each other in creating an interesting, and inviting presence on the web. Both actual interactivity and text-based interactivity offer alternatives to user-to-user interactivity, a form that is impractical and risky for campaigns. We discuss these next.

Actual Interactivity on Campaign Web sites

As we have noted, McMillan's (2002) user-to-user interactivity category (e.g., online discussion boards that facilitate communication between web users) is not common on campaign web sites, and we encountered none in the 14 high profile sites that we examined. Candidates and website planners seemed to prefer controlling the discourse and limiting controversy so as to avoid negative repercussions during the campaign. In our analysis of campaign Web sites, however, we found that actual interactivity was fostered through feedback between the campaign (candidate and campaign staff) and Web users. We identified two characteristics of actual interactivity on the Web sites we studied: responsiveness and design accessibility. Sites that were more responsive and accessible were more interactive while avoiding the risks associated with open discussion boards and other user-to-user forms of interactivity.

Responsiveness is the extent to which mechanisms for feedback between users and website authors are constructed into the Web site. Campaign sites with a high level of responsiveness included features that facilitated actual communication between the user and the candidate, or between the user and campaign staff members. In our framework, actual contact between the user and the campaign requires

a feedback loop. Moreover, the contact often occurs independent of the Web site. That is, although elements of the Web site may invite actual interactivity, contact between users and the campaign would occur through an email exchange, phone call, or a face-to-face meeting at a campaign event. The Web site, therefore, provides a first step to facilitate actual contact between individuals. Responsiveness, then, pertains to features of the Web site that may or may not result in actual interactivity, but provide the opportunity for feedback.

Perhaps the most obvious example of responsiveness is shown in campaign sites' efforts to provide contact information for candidates and members of the campaign staff, including phone/fax numbers, postal addresses, and/or email addresses. Selnow (1998) notes that email contacts were standard on the earliest campaign Web sites in the 1996 election. There is an important difference, however, between sites like Jeb Bradley's (New Hampshire, 1st District) that listed generic campaign headquarter's information and other sites that provided a list of campaign officers, their roles, and how they could be contacted.

In addition, several sites provided information to contact the candidate directly through email or input forms such as Dennis Cardoza's (California, 18th District) "Submit Your Question" link that allowed users to submit a question or comment to Cardoza himself, or the administration and scheduling, fundraising, or media relations contacts. Opportunities for input were not limited to questions. Several sites had input forms for soliciting online donations and volunteers. After users filled out the forms, they would receive a response back from the campaign that could possibly lead to direct contact, especially in the case of online volunteering. Although this form of actual interactivity avoids the pitfalls of user-to-user interactivity, this characteristic is problematic, however, when we consider Selnow's (1998) point that posting e-mail addresses means that candidates will be expected to respond to e-mail, and if they do not, the effect could be more negative than not posting the addresses at all (see also Stromer-Galley, 2000).

A less demanding form of actual campaign-to-user interactivity invited users to send in their e-mail addresses so that they could receive periodic updates from the campaign. The resulting e-mail updates are a functional alternative to direct e-mail contact. Though not as responsive as direct e-mail exchanges, e-mail lists facilitate interaction between the campaign and Web site users. Email newsletters, such as Phil Gingrey's (11th district Georgia), might also encourage users to revisit the campaign site by referring them back to the Web site for more information. A highly responsive site is one that offers multiple opportunities for user-to-campaign interactivity while avoiding the pitfalls of user-to-user interactivity. This, in turn, might enhance the perception that the candidate is someone who wants to be in touch with voters, to hear their views, and to adjust his or her propos-

als and plans accordingly. Responsiveness potentially improves communication between user and candidates and engages users to become involved with the candidate and campaign.

Accessibility, the second element of actual interactivity, focuses on user access to the site itself. Accessibility includes smooth running multimedia; quickly loading photos, press releases offered in multiple formats such as pdf, msword, and text; and links in foreign languages where appropriate that allow for interaction between the campaign and users within the Web site. Matsunaka's site was highly accessible to users with a link to a Spanish language version of the site, and smooth, efficient design. These features are important to actual interactivity because they offer an entry point for interaction between users and the campaign. For example, a site without disabled access features or alternate languages may eliminate the possibility of user-to-campaign interactivity for users who are visually impaired or who do not speak English. Furthermore, sites that include essential content in the form of very large multimedia files may be very difficult for users on modem lines to access. For this reason, sites that kept their multimedia files small, used them only to support content, and designed them to be accessible by a range of software increased accessibility for users. For example, Matsunaka's television ads (thirty seconds in length) easily downloaded and played quickly over 56 K modems using Real player. Ensuring that multimedia components are calibrated to work relatively quickly and without problems when downloaded by various types of users means that the media artifact will be experienced as the designer intended. Accessibility, therefore, is a crucial prerequisite for actual interactivity, or contact between the campaign and the user.

Both responsiveness and design accessibility are crucial elements of campaign Web sites that enable actual interactivity between the campaign and users either in providing an entry point for access to the site or through providing a mechanism for users to contact particular members of the candidate or specific campaign staff. These forms for actual interactivity go beyond the user-to-user interactivity described by McMillan. These offer a viable alternative for direct user-to-user interaction and represent the campaign and candidate as being open to actual, albeit controlled, interaction.

Responsiveness and accessibility, then, were precursors or enabling features for campaign-to-user or user-to-campaign interactivity. As we have said, however, there is an additional form of interactivity that has not been previously discussed in the taxonomies of interactivity. We have labeled this form "text-based interactivity," and we include in it three specific dimensions to be discussed in the next section. These dimensions of the website text do not take the form of actual interaction, but instead are a rhetorical feature of the website text itself.

Text-based Interactivity on Campaign Web Sites

Three characteristics of text-based interactivity, when present, contributed to make communication seem more like conversation or live speech addressed to an audience. These are immediacy, personal presence, and multi-vocality. When site users are made to feel like they are geographically or personally near to the candidate, the candidate him or herself is made to seem less remote and more involved with the needs and interests of the constituency. The candidate seems more connected to the rhetorical context and to what is going on in the present. Web sites high in text-based interactivity, then, foster the communal sense and the emphasis on the "here and now" that we see in Ong's descriptions of secondary orality. Furthermore, such characteristics are well suited to electronic environments where users are actively seeking information and constructing the texts that they read. Highly textually interactive sites were welcoming, engaging and open, and they invited users to come back. The pages and sites we discuss here should be viewed as high in text-based interactivity to the extent that they exhibit these characteristics. Therefore, our intent is to conceptualize these characteristics through definition and example, thus providing a mechanism for the analysis and evaluation of other election candidate campaign Web sites. We maintain that such sites could be placed along a continuum of text-based interactivity by considering the presence of these characteristics on a site.

Immediacy refers to a sense of connection and importance to users' lives, both spatially and temporally. Web sites that were high in immediacy emphasized the candidate's identification with users' experiences and his or her geographical connection the district, and they maintained up-to-date information, thus fostering a sense of chronological immediacy as well. Web sites that were highly immediate featured or constructed candidates who identified with voters' lives by discussing the candidate's experiences in and connection to the district and its people. This aligns with Kenneth Burke's (1950) recognition of the importance of identification between a speaker and an audience:

a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his [or her] act of persuasion may be for the purposes of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself [or herself] and his [or her] audience. (p. 46)

Dennis Cardoza (California, 18th District) fostered identification with his users by discussing his agricultural roots in this farm-intensive central California region. The site noted that "Dennis has never forgotten his agricultural roots. His grandparents emigrated from the Azores Islands of Portugal in the first part of the 20th century to farm the rich Merced County soil. The Cardoza family raised dairy cattle and grew sweet potatoes, almonds, watermelons, wheat, oats and alfalfa" (*Cardoza—Congress/Biography*, n. d., para. 6). The biograph-

ical details and the enumeration of specific crops could make users feel as if the candidate could easily be the farmer next door, creating a relationship between the user and candidate that is less likely with a less personal and detailed presentation.

In addition to identification with local culture, candidates seemed more proximate to their constituents' life experiences by focusing on particular local issues as opposed to candidates who only discussed national issues or offered statements conforming to the party line. For example, Republican candidate, Steve Pearce (New Mexico, 2nd District) emphasized water rights, a crucial issue for New Mexicans. Furthermore, in his issue statements he discussed specific policies in New Mexico and how federal policies might affect his district and its people. Again, this shows the candidate to be close to the users, occupying the same space.

The impression that voters might form of a candidate who is closely connected to the region can be intensified if the candidate also features his or her physical presence in the region, including travels around the district and captioned photos of the candidate at local events. For example, Martha Fuller Clark (New Hampshire, 1st District) and Stan Matsunaka both featured on their Web sites their travels—Matsunaka in his neighbor-to-neighbor campaigns in eastern Colorado and Clark in her red campaign bus (the "Common Sense Express") in which her site displayed photographs of her in all of the cities and towns in her district. Constructing the web site text to reflect the candidate's actual spatial immediacy is a form of contextualized, dialogized expression because it gives the impression that the candidate is available in person to respond to constituent concerns.

A final element of immediacy refers to temporal as opposed to spatial connection. Sites that were more temporally immediate updated their content frequently over the course of the campaign season. One advantage of the Internet is the speed with which changes can be made; this simulates the dynamism of speech. As we have noted, under-maintained and outdated sites are, in many ways, no different from campaign flyers. A user who expected changes and updates on the Web site might be more inclined to visit often, learn more about the candidate, and perhaps develop a favorable opinion. In the three months of our study, most of the Web sites had changed to some extent including updating homepages, news, and events calendars. Some sites, such as Democrat Chris Bell's (Texas, 25th District) and Clark's, seem to have changed almost daily. The recency of information on a site was often also connected to attention to local issues. For example, Chris Bell's site was updated to reflect commentary on tropical storm Allison and Enron, two events that occurred in his district during the campaign season.

On the other hand, some Web sites like John Arthur Smith's (New Mexico, 2nd District) and Jeb Bradley's (New Hampshire, 1st District) barely changed over the entire course of the campaign season. Because the home page is often the first place to which people return, we argue that its updates are important to immediacy. If a user returns to a Web site and sees that the home page has not changed, he or she may conclude there have been no updates to the rest of the site. As a result, a site with a static home page is a site that may be less likely to be revisited as the campaign progresses. For example, although Steve Pearce mentions on his home page that the site is dynamic and urges visitors to check back often for updates, the "latest news" appearing on the home page in August was from July, nearly a month before we accessed and saved the site.

Sites appearing more immediate portrayed the candidate as "just down the street" or "in the next town over" from the user; they gave the impression that the candidate was involved in the region, in time and space. Candidates identified with users by showing they are "just like you," and concerned with local issues. Sites with a higher sense of immediacy demonstrated that the candidate was involved and present in the region.

A second characteristic, *personal presence* is related to immediacy, but concerns the question: Who is speaking? Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 117) emphasize the importance of presence and its impact on an audience. They note that presence is the sense that what is being portrayed seems actually present in the experience of the listener or reader. From our analysis, personal presence refers to a candidate's efforts to make his or her own persona present to voters. Web sites that display a high amount of candidate presence might engage undecided voters with a feeling that the candidate is "speaking with" them through the Web site (using 1st or 2nd person address and the active voice). For example, Republicans Pearce and Bradley used "I" and "you" on several pages of their Web sites as opposed to sites that were written almost exclusively in 3rd person address. This use of conversational voice seems to represent actual speakers, using their own words. Sites that do not communicate a sense of the candidate's personal presence express their discourses in the third person and provide dated, generic photos of the candidate.

Recent, captioned photos of the candidates *in situ* at local festivals, party gatherings, and cookouts fostered a high degree of personal presence with constituents and supporters. The photos on Smith's Web site featured campaign events and gave a sense of the down home feel of southern New Mexico by showing Smith interacting with locals at coffee klatches and posing with local farmers. Close up shots of the candidate *in situ* display more presence than distant shots. However, a distant shot of a candidate in casual attire interacting with the

crowd may at times be more present than a close up portrait or podium shot.

Elements of personal presence in a Web text engage users in a conversation-like browsing experience with a candidate with whom they feel they can engage in dialogue. Referring again to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's concept of presence, the Web user, or voter, is more likely to recognize and connect with candidates that are there in front of them. Aspects such as the style of speech and captioned photos add to a sense of personal presence.

Multi-vocality, the final characteristic, relates to the extent to which the site might be heteroglossic in nature (Bakhtin, 1981). Multi-voiced sites were highly contextual, decentered, and highlighted diverse voices, speech styles, languages, and speakers. These sites created a sense of an open deliberative space. Sites that focused on very few themes, repeated the same ideas over and over, included a limited number of voices or speakers, and rarely referred to anything outside the site seemed comparatively more monologic. Although we did not see candidate Web sites that included all of these aspects of multi-vocality, there were sites that were more heteroglossic than others.

Sites that were highly heteroglossic contained links that took voters to discussion of many issues in various sources. For example, Bell's site took its users to a wide range of media reports about his campaign, some of which were supportive and others of which were not. In addition, some candidates made use of external links such as Federal Election Commission disclosures or current news reports to corroborate their claims. Fuller Clark's site had numerous external links that helped the user, such as a link to a Social Security privatization calculator and "how to vote" guides. In contrast, some univocal sites had information that resembled print media, failing to take advantage of the opportunities the Internet offers for hyper linking and adding new information. External links on other sites, such as Monteith's, used information only to buttress the candidate's online message, such as links to the candidate's own government site or to polls financed by the candidate. Heteroglossic sites with external links to diverse views and voicing of various positions allowed for diversification of issues and a sense of open deliberation.

In addition to linking patterns, sites that were heterglossic represented different speakers, and they included candidate messages, endorsements, newspaper articles and press releases, and quotations from opponents. As opposed to a monologic site presenting a detached, 3rd person report of the candidate's qualifications, biography, and issue statements, multi-vocal sites were a pastiche of voices, speakers, conversational styles, and rhetorical forms. Fuller Clark's site was one of the more multi-vocal sites with a variety of links to outside sources

and a diversity of speakers on the Web site itself. On this site, Fuller Clark spoke directly to her constituents through personal messages that resembled oral communication, endorsements by her supporters embedded in multimedia radio and television ads, and externally-linked press releases to news reports. Candidate sites, such as Matsunaka's, that mentioned the opponent, or gave the opponent voice through quotations, promoted engagement with a range of views and ideas. Sites that compared issues of Democrats and Republicans were more multi-voiced at least in that they recognized opposition arguments. For example, a November poll on Cardoza's site asked users: "Do you think Democrats, rather than Republicans have a better plan to fix our ailing economy?" (*Cardoza—Congress/ Home Page*, n. d.).

Multi-vocality, then, implies a text that is constructed for open deliberation and user engagement. The inclusion of multiple perspectives, voices, speaking styles, and speakers creates a text that stimulates deliberation. Actual user-to-user interactivity might also be multi-vocal, but text-based interactivity offers a way to construct a site to be multi-vocal without while still maintaining control over the content of the site. Multi-vocal sites with extensive external links have access to a variety of sources of information about the candidate and campaign. Including multiple speakers, speaking styles, and languages on a site also creates a sense of openness on a site.

Sites high in textual interactivity included qualities of immediacy, personal presence, and multi-vocality as constructed within the text of the site. Sites that used these forms emulated spoken face-to-face communication between the campaign and users. These sites created a sense that the user was engaged in a conversation as she or he browsed the web. Of course, immediacy, personal presence, and multi-vocality fall on a continuum. Attending to these elements of campaign website construction allows for evaluation of the extent to which a site embodies text-based interactivity.

Conclusion

This essay has considered three forms of Web-based interactivity that have been discussed under various labels in the new media literature on Internet political campaigning. We have explained these three forms and added a fourth—text-based interactivity. While the three already-recognized forms—user-to-system, user-to-user, and user-to-document—play significant roles in Web-based communication, so does the fourth. This hitherto overlooked form of interactivity establishes a relationship between the user and the campaign by means of the forms of expression, style of speaking, representations of the candidate, use of humor, inclusion of various viewpoints, and other *rhetorical* dimensions of the website text.

Since how "what is said" is strategically represented on political campaign sites, we believe that this component of interactivity should receive sustained and explicit attention in future studies of political candidate campaign Web sites. It is particularly pertinent to such sites because they always involve a candidate communicating to users for persuasive purposes, and so a rhetorical approach to the study of their expression is called for.

In regard to text-based interactivity, communication on these political sites emulates in-person communication to the extent that it addresses users directly, seems to be recent and current, incorporates various viewpoints including those of users, makes the candidate seem personally present through representation, and seems concerned with local, "here and now" issues. Since the Web is a "pull medium" (one where users seek out information), the candidate sites' rhetorical challenge is to keep users attentive, engaged, and on the site. Our study of these sites indicated that sites high in text-based interactivity dealing with multiple issues from many points of view may be more inclined to keep users interested and engaged in deliberation than sites low in text-based interactivity.

Sites that were high in text-based interactivity also tended to be high in actual interactivity, suggesting that these two forms of interactivity may work together to create a site that welcomes, engages, and invites users to come back. We noted several examples of overlap and connection between actual interactivity and text-based interactivity. For example, when considering responsiveness, contact information and email lists that distribute online newsletters can engage users, but these features also add to an impression that the candidate is receptive and responsive to contact between the campaign and users. Moreover, elements of text-based interactivity may create an impression of the candidate and site that makes users more likely to use actual interactivity channels. On the other hand, text-based interactivity may also serve as a surrogate to actual interactivity. The Frequently Asked Question page, for example, may be constructed in such a way that the user finds that answer to his or her question in the content of the Web site, as opposed to contacting a member of the campaign in person. Ultimately, an engaging and interesting campaign Web site would incorporate both actual interactivity and text-based interactivity.

The text-based interactivity framework is intended as a heuristic framework. This framework may be useful to scholars of communication as a way to understand the connection between web-based campaigning and interactivity. This framework can be used to identify elements of interactivity in other campaign Web sites. Studies have already been produced that test the effects of interactivity on likeability of candidates and suggest a positive effect (Ahern & Stromer-Galley, 2000). Further study could also examine the framework with

actual audiences to see how text-based interactivity affects a potential voter's perception of the candidate. In addition to scholarly advances, the framework might also be helpful in the field, assisting campaign candidates and managers to develop sites that engage and ultimately persuade voters.

In our study, we found the construct of secondary orality developed by Ong (1982) to be highly appropriate for considering rhetorical dimensions of Web-based expression on the political sites we studied. It is appropriate because this construct begins with features of in-person persuasive communication (concern with the here-and-now, attention to listener response, emphasis on concrete action and effects), and it considers their role in a media specific environment. By viewing some aspects of Web-based expression as "speech," we have discerned a dimension of Internet interactivity of which future research should take note.

NOTES

[1]The first two percentages (for 1996 and 1998) are taken from D'Alessio (2000). The second is from Stromer-Galley, Foot, Schneider, & Larsen (2001); and the third is from Foot, Schneider, & Xenos (2002).

[2]Our conceptualization of text-based interactivity assumes the Internet medium and, in particular, candidate campaign Web sites. However, elements of text-based interactivity that engage users and emulate conversation are not necessarily specific to the Web. Traditional media, such as television and radio, also exhibit interactivity. Lombard and Ditton (1997) define presence as the "the perceptual illusion of nonmediation," that can occur in any mediated context from television to virtual reality (p. 9). Lombard and Ditton also use the term parasocial interaction to describe instances when media consumers respond to or have relationships with media characters, such that the character is perceived as a social actor. Both presence and parasocial interaction describe instances of interactivity in traditional media that create an illusion of nonmediation and simulate actual interaction between mediated characters and media users. Text-based interactivity describes phenomena that we observed in the Internet medium, but could also be applied to other media as well, depending on how broadly the construct "text" is defined. As the Internet continues to develop as a form of mediated communication, we see interplay between the Internet and traditional forms of media.

[3]Preliminary findings of an empirical research project suggest that respondents in some cases rated sites constructed with text-based interactivity as "more interactive" than those with actual interactivity or no interactivity. In addition, respondents were better able to recall the candidate's party, stayed on the site longer, and remembered the discussion of issues better on sites with text-based interactivity than on sites with no or minimal interactivity (Warnick, Xenos, Endres & Gastil, 2004).

[4]For this study we identified seven competitive House elections. We began by searching the politics.com database Election 2002 that indexes articles from the *Washington Post* and *Congressional Quarterly*. Our goal was to find controversial or highly contested House elections. To find these elections we evaluated the following criteria: open seats, redistricting changes, short term-incumbents, *CQ* and *Washington Post* predictions on the outcomes of the election, and Democratic Committee or GOP targeting. After searching the article database, state by state, we identified eighteen potential campaigns based on the criteria listed above. From this list of eighteen, we choose seven campaigns based on the Cook's report, availability of background information, and whether or not both candidates had Web sites. After

selecting these seven races, we performed three saves of each of the Web sites, about a month apart, in late August, late September, and early November (the weekend before the election). We chose to perform three saves so that we could monitor changes on the sites as the election neared. With each save, we took notes reflecting rhetorical dimensions of the Web sites.

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Appendix

Candidate Web sites

California, 18th District
  Dennis Cardoza (D). www.denniscardoza.com
  Dick Monteith (R). www.monteithforcongress.com
Colorado, 4th District
  Stan Matsunaka (D). www.stan2002.com
  Marilyn Musgrave (R). www.musgrave2002.com
Georgia, 11th District
  Roger Kahn (D). www.kahnforcongress.com
  Phil Gingrey (R). www.gingrey.com

Iowa, 1st District
>   Ann Hutchinson (D). www.annhutchinson.com
>   Jim Nussle (R). www.jimnussle.com

New Hampshire, 1st District
>   Martha Fuller Clark (D). www.clarkforcongress.com
>   Jeb Bradley (R). www.jebforcongress.com

New Mexico, 2nd District
>   John Arthur Smith (D). www.jas2002.com
>   Steve Pearce (R). www.stevepearceforcongress.com

Texas, 25th District
>   Chris Bell (D). www.chrisbellforcongress.com
>   Tom Reiser (R). www.tomreiserforcongress.com