OBAMA'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE INTEGRATED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract. When Barack Obama won the 2008 US Presidential election he did so partly as a result of harnessing the power of social media to communicate with, and enlist the support of, millions of Americans who had never previously been active in the processes of an election campaign. As a result of Obama's invitation and his use of new media, some of the poorest members of the world's wealthiest nation found themselves able to make a critical contribution through a myriad of small activities starting from seemingly inconsequential choices such as the selection of a mobile phone ring tone. Although ‚people power' is not a new force in politics, the Obama campaign set a fresh benchmark for inclusive ways in which to communicate to and with a holistic cross section of the American people, including many who would not have been previously seen as a critical ‚target market'. This paper examines Obama's use of integrated communications and considers the potential implications for other campaigns which may have an inclusion agenda.

1.   Background to the US Presidential Campaign 2008

Obama's politically-driven social media based public relations campaign created a community movement that challenged the prevailing political, economic and cultural norms of America. By applying digital media tools to reach people who had previously never been enlisted into active engagement with the political process, the campaign team confirmed digital media's power as a means of transforming ways of communicating. Arguably, the use of such tactics also put the ‚public' back into contemporary public relations and made visible a commitment to Grunig's two-way symmetrical model of public relations where the communication professionals listen as hard to those on the periphery as vice versa (Grunig & Grunig 1992).

While previous political campaigns have employed the internet in innovative ways, Obama's team used it to stress the importance and value of community engagement on a massive scale. The campaign integrated mobile phones, social networking, micro-blogging, video gaming and video sharing sites as key communication tools that became at least as important as, and arguably more important than, traditional broadcast media. Through the use of these technologies, many of which are simultaneously private and public, the election revolutionized the process of campaigning, raising funds, organizing

volunteers, and the means by which voters learned about political issues. It offered the poor, the undereducated, and even those who were disenfranchised, as a result of legal or other impediments, a way to become involved in politics and make a difference.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, the 2008 presidential election was ―the first time a majority (55 percent) of voting-age adults engaged with politics online" (Davy, 2009, p.1). This engagement was more than a traditional one, however: it broke new ground in terms of its use of Web 2.0 and social media. It harnessed the power of the individual and their social networks to ―develop communication communities through multiple channels such as chat rooms, support groups, electronic mailing lists, personal Web pages, [social networking sites] and blogs" (Lawson-Borders, 2005, p. 552).

Obama's campaign engaged with the political sphere at a time when America was increasingly turning to digital media for information. This was evident in the new reliance that people placed upon internet connectivity. Aaron Smith, a research specialist for the Pew Internet & American Life Project commented, regarding US voters going online for information about the campaign, that ―fully 60% of internet users did this in 2008 [… while] some 38% of internet users talked about politics online with others over the course of the campaign." (Smith 2009, p. 3). This digital activity was both an indication of a proactive commitment on the part of tens of millions of people, and an outcome of the lessons Obama's campaign team had learned from the mistakes of John Kerry's unsuccessful 2004 campaign for the Presidency. The public relations strategy adopted was to ensure that all online tools prompted and reinforced offline action through individual empowerment. Instead of attempting to ―control the message from campaign headquarters, as traditional campaigns often do, Obama's public relations campaign organizers gave individuals the digital tools" necessary to control the message themselves in terms of who they shared their vision with, and the activity they generated (Tapscott, 2009, 244).

At the turn of this millennium, Mario Diani defined a social movement as a ―process whereby several different actors, be they individuals, informal groups and/or organizations, come to elaborate, through either joint action and/or communication, a shared definition of themselves as being part of the same side in a social conflict [or action]" (Diani, 2000, 156). This perspective emphasises the role of the social movement in supporting the development of a ‗shared definition' of the self in relation to the whole. Web based tools help translate this shared definition into shared action; and it was through accepting this shared responsibility for action for change that so many new followers were attracted to the Obama election campaign. As Dupuis and Boeckelman note (2008. p. 1), ―at the beginning of 2004, Barack Obama was an almost unknown state legislator and a candidate for the U.S. Senate whom a mere 15 percent of likely voters in the state's Democratic primary favored". From this base of 15% of Illinois' Democratic voters in 2004, Obama's campaign created a social movement that delivered the 69,456,897 votes gained by him in the 2008 US Presidential elections (FEC 2008). Social media communication tools played a significant role in this achievement.

Social media tools connect users with their friends, acquaintances, employers, politicians and individuals with similar interests. They also give network members the opportunity to continue building connections as their digital profiles expand. According

to Solis, ―Social media is [more] about sociology and less about technology. It's a mashup of new and traditional media that spans across advertising, PR, customer service, […] sales and community relations" (2007, 2).The Internet Safety Technical Task Force (ISTTF), which recently examined and reported upon (American) children's and young people's safety in terms of their interactions with social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Bebo and MySpace, defines _social media' as ―IM [instant messaging], chat rooms, social network sites, email, blogging" (ISTTF 2008, p. 21). The group of social media also includes microblogging application Twitter, and photo and video sharing sites Flickr and YouTube.

This is a dynamic arena for communications professionals: new opportunities constantly emerge to connect with different groups of people or to connect differently with groups pf people. The importance of social media in daily life continues to grow. For example, for the first time, in the week ending 13 March 2010, the proportion of all internet traffic using Facebook (7.07%) overtook the proportion of all internet traffic using Google (7.03%) (WAToday 2010). One way to interpret this is that people are now more likely to turn to the internet to connect with other people as they are to turn to the internet to look for information. As a result of continuing innovation and creativity in the that ways everyday people and media professionals use these communication tools, protocols for the integration of constituent social media remain constantly subject to updates and revisions.

Given the newness of many of the tools involved, the Obama campaign operated as something of a test bed for experiments with ways to reach hard-to-contact segments of the American population using social media. Obama's campaign included leveraging the power of video sharing in YouTube, photographs in Facebook and digital entertainment platforms such as video games. Not only did these strategies connect with more people from diverse social and economic backgrounds, they also recruited people from these backgrounds to become active campaigners for Obama.

Many of the volunteers involved in the Obama campaign were working class, and some were comparatively poor. The campaign ―attracted a remarkable percentage of its funding, 48 percent, in amounts of $200 or less" indicating the critical role played by Obama's grassroots supporters. The huge proportion of small donations did more than fill the coffers, however. As one commentator noted, ―at the individual level, small donors are also regarded as good for democracy because they are not just _checkbook citizens,' but campaign _investors' who become volunteers and spokespersons" (Cornfield, 2009, p. 221). In effect, Obama motivated a nation.

In a report for the Pew Internet & American Life Project, Raine and Smith commented that 10% of Americans ―used social networking sites […] to gather information or become involved" in the 2008 campaign (Raine & Smith, 2008, 1). The report also notes that ―two-thirds of internet users under the age of 30 have a social networking profile, and half of these use[d] social networking sites to get or share information about politics or the campaigns" (Raine & Smith, 2008,1). Given this demographic, and young adults' commitment to social media, some specific conclusions follow. According to Don Tapscott in his book *Grown Up Digital*:

> Having grown up digital, they expect to collaborate with politicians – not just to
> listen to their grandstanding speeches. They want to be involved directly; to
> interact with them, contribute ideas, scrutinize their actions, work to catalyze

> initiatives not just during elections but as they govern. And they will insist on
> integrity from politicians – they will know very quickly if a politician says one
> thing and does another. They are going to shake up both politics and government.
> (2009, p. 244)

Smith, for the Pew Internet & American Life survey notes that the 2008 campaign placed a new emphasis on sharing ‑or receiving campaign information using specific tools, such as email, instant messaging, text messages or Twitter. Fully 59% of internet users used one or more of these tools to send or receive political messages" (Smith, 2009, 3). Given that ‚mashups' can be hard to analyse, it is worth considering some specifics about the ways in which individual social media were integrated within the Obama campaign project of community building and social change.

2.   Innovating a future

Obama's team did not create any brand new digital applications but, rather, utilized social networking tools that were already in existence:

> Like a lot of Web innovators, the Obama campaign did not invent anything
> completely new. Instead, by bolting together social networking applications under
> the banner of a movement, they created an unforeseen force to raise money,
> organize locally, fight smear campaigns and get out the vote that helped them
> topple the Clinton machine and then John McCain and the Republicans. (Carr,
> 2008)

What the Obama campaign did create was a cause that everyone felt they could share in; an eagerness from citizens of all walks of life to be involved in politics. By creating an integrated digital media campaign, Obama's team motivated millions of Americans, including many first-time voters, to actively take part in the political process. He was the ‑first candidate to build profiles on social networks that targeted minority communities, including MiGente, BlackPlanet, FaithBase, and AsianAve" (Harfoush, 2009, 138), and his public relations strategy was simple: recruit volunteers, motivate them to get involved, give them tasks and then thank them for their effort. By superimposing this simple strategy upon an open network campaign, in place of the historically closed, non-transparent, quasi-governmental processes of the past, Obama challenged traditional politics to move towards participatory democracy and away from ‚one-way broadcast' methods of persuasion. He engineered new communication imperatives through which his campaign supporters could side-step traditional media and still deliver a message directly to Obama's supporter base at minimum cost. For these reasons, Graham Fox identified the integration of the use of social media and public relations campaigning as central to the ‚Obama effect' (Fox, 2008, 21). The effect of this integration was the creation of an inclusive social movement that brought Obama to power.

Obama's campaign organization encouraged his supporters to take an active role in the co-creation of change. The staffers on his team had realized that the old methods of political campaigning, including public speeches and rallies, would not be enough to connect with Americans in 2008. Therefore, the public relations strategy behind the ‚Obama effect' focused on conversations with individuals, and the conversations of individuals with their networks and their capacity to envision and work towards change.

The shared belief that all Obama's individual supporters could work together to create a momentum for change fuelled the differentiation and cohesion of the communication strategy and underpinned the co-opting of technology in the service of community. In this shared vision of collaboration, the Internet became the perfect tool to harness people's energy and enthusiasm with a view to creating change.

3.   MyBO.com

My.BarackObama.com, also referred to as MyBO, was the central digital media tool of Barack Obama's presidential campaign. The site was created by Chris Hughes, the 24 year old cofounder of Facebook (Talbot, 2008, 2). Even before it existed, its development communicated to a generation of young people that politics was changing and that youth were important to the campaign. MyBO was innovative in that it helped millions of Obama supporters and volunteers to organize themselves, meet other individuals who believed as they did, and link to their existing online communities, personal cell phone directories and email address lists to spread the word.

The campaign strategy was to reinforce personal connection with MyBO through the use of quotes. In the header of the site's homepage, and on all subpages, a quote from Obama read, ‒‛m asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington… I'm asking you to believe in yours." This simple quote communicated to the site user the belief that they, personally, had the power to effect change. In paying this compliment to their supporter base, the MyBO site was designed to actively unite individual users into a co-operative force for change. Obama was not the only authority quoted on the site, however.

Tapscott comments on one of the ways in which Obama's grassroots supporters knew they were implicated in MyBO's very fabric:

> When making a donation to the campaign, users are asked to write a short note
> expressing their feelings about Obama, the campaign, or anything that crosses
> their mind. Once a person donates, a confirmation is sent along with a thank-you,
> and [this] includes a randomly selected message written by another donor. The
> exchange boosts the connection that donors feel toward the campaign. (Tapscott,
> 2009, 250-1)

This strategy established a person to person connection based around philanthropic giving, and underlined the individual's active and shared participation in the gift economy (Mauss 2002) which underpinned Obama's election campaign. Further, utilizing the ‗voice' of other supporters encouraged individual action. This approach was very ‒different from the classic top-down political system of campaigning" (Tapscott, 2009, 251). Using these views expressed by everyday supporters, the site's pages and communications were filled with hope, encouragement and a sense of community: not only from Obama and his campaign team, but from the voters themselves. This effect created a mass level of community engagement.

There were many examples of the valuing of individual contributions on the MyBO site. For example, a strategy of personal empowerment was particularly applied to the fundraising endeavour. Individual fundraisers could create their own page, dedicated solely to their own efforts and achievements. ‒MyBO also made giving money a social event: supporters could set personal targets, run their own fund-raising efforts,

and watch personal fund-raising thermometers rise" (Talbot, 2008, 4). At the top of each customized fundraising page the Obama campaign team had written: ―Your own personal fundraising page will put the financial future of this campaign in your hands. You set your own goal, you do the outreach, and you get the credit for the results". Such statements motivated supporters to feel that each of them, as an individual, was an integral part of the campaign.

The MyBO site effectively dispensed with non-democratic methods of organizing a campaign, and put the power into the hands of the people who wanted to get involved. Further, it enabled Obama's new supporters to share their vision with friends, family and colleagues thereby helping to recruit them via the website. As Ganz commented: ―Social movements are dynamic, participatory, and […] outputs depend on the motivated, committed, and voluntary participation of members and supporters" (Ganz, 2008a, 1). By relying on the MyBO community's participation and action, the Obama campaign team was supplied with millions of volunteers who were willing to do the work that the campaign team did not have the time to do. As Delany, explained:

> MyBO was particularly important in areas in which the campaign did not have professional staff, since it gave volunteers the means to create their own local campaign structure — professional field staff could ‗parachute in' as elections approached and immediately take over a functioning organization. But all across the country, even in areas with a strong campaign presence, MyBO provided a productive conduit for supporter energy and a launchpad for supporter activism. (2009a, 9)

Delany's analysis explains the strategy behind the workings of My.BarackObama.com:

> The website actively pushed volunteers toward resources in the My.BarackObama.com toolkit, aiming to put them to work in their own neighbourhoods and social circles. The site was also vital for messaging, particularly through the official campaign blog, which distributed videos, talking points and other information to supporters, bloggers and the broader media world. (2009a, 8)

The MyBO toolkits were an essential component of the campaign because they helped people to create communities of support: support for Obama, but also support for each other in supporting Obama. Significantly, the communities on the MyBO site transposed online organization into offline activity. It was this combination of the online and the offline which resulted in the effectiveness of the social movement. As Rheingold had commented concerning the creation of online communities, ―virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (2000, p. xx). The personal relationships formed on MyBO.com translated through to myriad offline communities as a result of the shared discussions and the human feeling behind the momentum for change.

The MyBO networking site also had a blog. ―Blogs give individuals a way to express their voices in a way that is highly personal and controllable" (Gillin, 2009, 5). The blog served as a tool to inform users about local and national activities and perspectives, enabling people to post their own social narrative as it related to Obama. It also included news stories and links about Obama from newspapers and magazines around the world. These local-through-to-global stories helped brand Obama as the

candidate for change. Further, as part of persuading website users that they were part of that change Obama's blog homepage also had direct links to the homepages and profiles for his other social media connections: Facebook, Twitter, etc. Through this range of tools, Obama's support base were offered myriad ways to support their candidate and influence their friends and families to do so too.

As a result of the emphasis on a shared social narrative, MyBO encouraged new members and supporters to see themselves as part of the campaign. The site was easy to navigate and links were provided on almost every page to additional ways in which people could participate in the campaign. The site was so effective in generating a public narrative around a momentum for change that the Obama communications plan continuously steered conversations with supporters back to this website. As Monte Lutz explained

> The MyBO Web site served as the hub for electoral activities, with spokes that
> reached to an array of platforms, all of which drove conversation back to the Web
> site in order to engage the people, empower the voices, raise the money and get
> the boots on the ground needed to win the election. (Lutz, 2009, p. 8)

MyBO informed, involved, connected and mobilized supporters. It was much better for the campaign, as well as being more attuned to the rationale of social media, that millions of people were vouching for Obama in their own voices rather than having him stand on a podium and preach to the crowd himself.

4.   The power of email

Email is an effective means of communication because, outside the context of work requirements, it is a ‗trusted' and comparatively personal medium. People are generally eager to open and read emails that they receive from friends, family and known acquaintances. The power of email had already been harnessed in support of progressive politics by MoveOn.org which was to use its network of 4.2 million members (Move On 2008), up from 2.3 million in 2003 (Wolf 2004), to assist the Democrat campaign for the Presidency.

When someone concurs with an email and sends it on to one or more of their own personal contacts, they participate in viral marketing and effectively endorse the content of the email, whatever its origins might be. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to fully trace the impact of viral marketing on the web, but email communications are clearly a dynamic tool with profound potential for political campaigns. Adding to its attraction as a communication channel, each email is virtually free if the costs of technological hardware are discounted. My.BarackObama.com had a link on its homepage that asked voters to sign up to receive email updates. Email enabled Obama's team to constantly remind supporters to stay connected to Obama's campaign and remember that they were a central component of the movement for change. As Delany wrote:

> Email was the main tool used to build relationships with supporters and to raise
> money — if you talk to members of Obama's online staff, it tends to come up
> again and again. The campaign's (opt-in-only) list topped 13 million names, to
> whom were sent some 7000 separate campaign-written emails totalling roughly
> one billion actual messages. And of course, email was one of the main ways

individual activists spread the word among their own friends and family. (Delany 2009a, 8-9)

These thirteen million+ email addresses gave the Obama campaign team a huge resource that allowed them to harness the power of the Internet like no other political campaign before them. Further, in addition to its cost benefits, and its pervasiveness, email has significant capacity to prompt action and emotional engagement. Some emails pulled at the voters' heart strings, and encouraged donations and party support. ―One notable example was an email and [embedded] video appeal from Ted Kennedy following his endorsement of Obama. The campaign used this message and video to make the most of an emotion-filled moment, given Senator Kennedy's illness and his historic endorsement" (Wood, 2009, p. 3).

In itself, enlisting thirteen millions email users helped democratize the system. It was not only the names and contact information that the Obama team collected, but also details about issues important to supporters: details which led to hypersegmented emails. Through the utilization of ―hypersegmented emails that provided readers with customized messaging", the Obama team created a ‗wired' community that merged older methods of communication with the new (Harfoush, 2009, 48).

Almost everyone who has access to a computer has an email address, regardless of how old they are. ―Research from the E-Voter Institute published in the summer of 2008 found that people were significantly more likely to send or forward political email than they were to reach out via Facebook" (Delany, 2009a, 22-23). Although one of the drawbacks of emails is that it is impossible to measure how far the viral network of email spreads, this does not undermine its significance. As Delany comments, ―the campaign's fundraising workhorse was a combination of email and a website — some three-quarters of the money they raised online was directly attributable to an email solicitation" (Delany, 2009a, 34).

5. Reach out and touch NOW: the mobile phone

Possibly even more ubiquitous than email, and involving many with poor literacy skills and without access to the internet, mobile phones (cell phones in the USA) made politics particularly accessible to people at the grassroots level. While organisations such as MoveOn, GetUp! (Australia) and Avaaz (international) had proven emails to be an effective means of political communication, there was no guarantee as to when a recipient would get, open and read the message. The Obama opposition, the Republican National Committee, had found in the 2006 midterm elections that sending text messages offered an instantaneous connection that ―could boost email open rates, for instance, by texting supporters that they had a particularly important note waiting for them while at the same time reinforcing the communications theme of the day" (Delany, 2007, 1). The use of the mobile phone could multiply the power of other communications channels.

Mobile phones are also an innovative and practical campaign communication tool for people who have accounts on 3G (third generation) mobile networks: ―Some rural areas in this country are effectively leapfrogging a generation of communications technology, skipping past dial-up and even broadband internet directly to [web-enabled] cell phones" (Delany, 2009b, 1).

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 4% of Americans ―…exchanged political views via text messaging" during the 2008 election (Raine & Smith, 2008, 1). Barack Obama's public relations campaign team took advantage of this demographic by creating a text messaging program specific to the campaign. An Obama Mobile link was placed on the MyBO website to encourage supporters to sign up to receive text messages and campaign updates. ―Mobile phone users who indicated interest by texting the word ‗hope' to the campaign code number (62262) received follow-up messages seeking their zip code, so they assisted, however unwittingly, in the microtargeting process" (Cornfield, 2009, 228). The Obama campaign team registered over one million users for this service (Delany, 2009a, 10). By signing up, a supporter could expect periodic updates from the campaign team as well as advance notice about local events and public appearances. Subscribers were even notified of top news stories before the media were. Such top stories included Barack Obama's announcement that Joe Biden would be his running mate (Harfoush, 2009, 43).

The Obama Mobile link also provided downloadable ringtones from chants of ―Go Obama" to the will.i.am hit, ―Yes We Can." These auditory ringtones enhanced engagement with the public by broadcasting one's support to the world. For example, if a supporter was sitting on a packed bus and heard a phone ring, the voice of Obama might be the ring tone. The use of that ring tone allowed other supporters nearby to have an immediate connection with the individual and strengthened the sense of community.

This mobile focus was coupled with the first political iPhone application that made it possible for supporters to stay engaged with active campaign duties no matter where they were. ―The application enabled volunteers to organize their phone directory so that those [friends and colleagues] residing in battleground states appeared at the top of the list" (Cornfield, 2009, 228).

The use of mobile phones in the campaign was a powerful strategy because ―Ninety percent of Americans are within three feet of their cell phones 24 hours a day [and] people still read more than 90 percent of their text messages, while pages of e-mails sit unopened in inboxes" (Lutz, 2009, 10). The device also offered the campaign team the potential of reaching voters anywhere at any time of the day, and was also a cost effective way to mobilize voters. As Lutz explains: ―A 2006 study by the New Voters Project found that text-message reminders helped increase turnout by four percent" (2009, 10). Texting also provided the Obama campaign team with the capacity to connect with specific segments of voters, including those ―less likely to be on a computer regularly, such as young people, minorities and the poor" (Delany, 2009a, 10) and those in ―rural areas where people relied on the technology more heavily" (Harfoush, 2009 116). Among the less expected uses of mobile phones during the Presidential campaign was Obama's call to his supporters at his nomination acceptance speech at Invesco Field in Denver.

> The more than 75,000 in attendance were to be put to work (while they stood in
> line to pass through the security equipment, and while awaiting the start of the
> program) using their mobile phones to contact some of the 55 million
> unregistered potential Obama voters in the campaign database. […]
> Approximately 30,000 phones wound up being used for outreach that night.
> (Cornfield, 2009, 229)

6.   Envisioning success: uses of YouTube

The 2008 presidential race has been described as the ‗YouTube Election‘. ―With more than 81 million unique viewers a month and 13 hours worth of video uploaded every minute, the Google-owned video-sharing site has become the go-to portal for all clips political during this presidential election" (Ramirez, 2008, 1). According to Cornfield, at the end of 2007 ―one in four Americans had watched a political video online; by mid-2008, that percentage had risen to 35 percent" (2009, 211).

YouTube was one of Barack Obama‘s most effective campaign tools because it ―capitalized on one of [his] greatest assets: the eloquence and charisma of Barack Obama" (Harfoush, 2009, 148). It allowed Obama to share his vision in a direct and personal way and heightened community engagement through his hopeful messages of change. It also enabled Obama‘s supporters to present their own perspectives on the campaign through user-generated videos. Such user-generated content increased Obama‘s online profile, regardless of how many or how few the times they were viewed. Their existence and the recruitment of family and friends to the making and consumption of videos helped to further the sense of a community connected to the Obama social movement. As Delany explained, concerning the Obama supporter-created videos:

> even the ones that WEREN‘T viewed by millions mattered: the internet is an
> endless sea of niches, and not only was it impossible for the campaign to target
> every possible interest or audience, they didn‘t need to — their supporters were
> busy doing it for them, and in their own (authentic) voices. (Delany, 2009a, 20)

With the tools supplied on the MyBO website, supporters were empowered to create ―more than 400,000 pro-Obama videos […] The campaign could not possibly have generated this much content on its own. And it was better that it didn‘t" (Lutz, 2009, 7). The user-generated content and the creation of a public-sponsored narrative of hope and change were key elements in creating the Obama social movement. It was this ‗authentic voice‘ of supporters that was at the heart of the Obama effect. The grassroots medium of YouTube was an ideal way to encourage the communication of authenticity. Further, YouTube became the repository of evidence of progress, as indicated by the following milestones from the YouTube campaign.

On 16 January 2007 the Obama Campaign team posted a video entitled, *Barack Obama: My Plans for 2008*. This YouTube video was important because Obama used it to announce his presidential campaign plans prior to going to the conventional media. As part of the content, Obama explained the tough decision he had had to make and how it would affect both his family and himself. He also explained the corruption and the faults of American politics, and said how he planned to tackle them through using his experiences as a community organizer who listened and worked hard at a grass roots level to bring the community together. This use of new media demonstrated a break from the typical use of mass media as the means to convey a message to the electorate. Obama used YouTube to talk directly to the public. He thanked all of his supporters for their time, encouragement and suggestions, thereby enlisting them to his cause and encouraging them to continue contributing to the campaign.

On 2 February 2008 will.i.am from the Black Eyed Peas created the most popular song of the 2008 election, which went on to become one of the Obama-supporters‘ cell

phone ring tones. It used excerpts from the ―Yes We Can" speech that Barack Obama gave at the primaries in Nashua, New Hampshire, in January 2008. This video, while created by a famous musician who had many resources at his fingertips, was fashioned out of will.i.am's own desire to support Obama. He was not paid or persuaded to make the video. The collage communicated community by juxtaposing images of the famous with the unknown, black with white, young with old, male with female etc. It was a song that was so powerful that it has been viewed over a billion times since its creation.

―When the election ended, all YouTube videos mentioning Senator Obama had received a total of 1.9 billion views […] Had the Obama camp purchased the same amount of airtime on TV it would have cost them roughly $46 million" (Ramirez, 2008, 1). One great thing about YouTube was that these videos now act as permanent records of Obama's campaign. As Cornfield explains, the videos ―are now historical documents, but they are not squirreled away in a library, awaiting declassification and rediscovery. Instead, […] they will be recontextualized for use during the Obama presidency—by opponents, satirists, and the Obama team itself" (Cornfield, 2009, 219).

7.   Twitter: harnessing the ephemeral

Twitter, an effective public relations and micro-blogging tool developed only two years before the election, was utilized by the Obama campaign team in order to connect individuals in the spare moments of the everyday: queuing in a shop; waiting for a bus. Interactive Insights comment that ―microblogging is a form of *blogging* where users provide brief period updates (often on a frequent basis throughout the day) […] Microbloggers can submit their updates via the web itself or via text messages, instant message, or even email" (IIG, n.d., p. 1). As a relatively in-the-minute application, Twitter allows users to post short messages, link messages using hash-codes, post videos and share photos. Just as Facebook requires a user to create a profile page, so does Twitter and the Twitter-based community is reinforced when the user ‗follows' friends and allows friends to ‗follow' them.

Obama's public relations campaign team used Twitter to announce campaign updates and to post live streaming video. One of the admirable things that the Obama campaign team did was to ‗follow' its ‗followers'. Upon signing up to ‗follow' Obama on Twitter, Obama's team immediately returned the favour by signing up to ‗follow' you and let you into the shared community. As Tapscott explained, ―It's a small gesture that shows that Obama understands the grammar and the social grace of the medium […] Obama is using it as a tool for connecting with people on an individual level" (Tapscott, 2009, 252). This ‗small gesture' made Obama over 1 million friends on Twitter, and Tapscott argued that it ―makes supporters feel they've got an immediate connection with the leader" (2009, 255) regardless of whether they actually do in ‗real life.'

One innovative aspect of Twitter, given that it is a web-based tool, is the fact that it allowed Obama to connect with his followers while they were mobile. This is a significant matter because unlike other digital media sites, where people usually had to be in front of a computer or have an expensive 3G phone, Twitter allowed voters to use a range of digital communication technologies, including basic mobile phones, to connect with the Obama team at any moment of the day or night.

8.   Game on!

Barack Obama became the first Presidential candidate to utilize interactive entertainment systems in the form of video games as a public relations campaign tool.

> Recognizing that the Playstation3 and Xbox360 both connect to live internet feeds, Obama purchased ad space in popular EA Sports titles such as Madden NFL 09, NASCAR 09, NHL09, NBA Live 09, and Burnout Paradise. Ads were placed temporarily on scoreboards and billboards throughout all the games. Not only was the idea itself new, but given that the ad content was placed onto the game through the internet, Obama was able to target the ad placement to Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Indiana, Montana, North Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio and Wisconsin (all states won by Bush in 2004 and considered swing states in 2008) (Berbick-Graham, 2009, 17).

By focusing on video games as a medium through which to present his message, Obama was able to connect with a younger generation, ―mainly 18-29 year old males", and ‗speak' to them at a level they could understand (Berbick-Graham, 2009, 17). By doing this, Obama forged a new connection with the average 18-29 year old male gamer, and encouraged them to become a part of the Obama effect.

9.   The social network site

―By the summer of 2008, 65 percent of Americans ages 18 to 24 had a profile page on a social network site" (Cornfield, 2009, 224). A year later, by mid-September 2009, Barack Obama had 6,731,750 supporters on his Facebook ‗Fan Page' and 1,057,927 supporters on his ‗One Million Strong' Facebook page. ―The sheer size of this subpopulation, along with the traditional role of young people as enthusiastic campaign volunteers, made social networking sites valuable territory to stake out in this [election] cycle" (Cornfield, 2009, 224).

Facebook users create their own individual pages that proclaim their social context and showcase aspects of their individual lives. Andre Yee, a blogger on ebiz.net, comments that ―Facebook has a profile that screams ‗personal life' – featuring networks of friends and family members" (Yee, 2009, 1). As part of this, Barack Obama used his personal Facebook page to emphasize his own life and the ways in which his life and journey interacted with those of his followers. The personal nature of this communication and its specificity is made clear through accessing Obama's Facebook ‗Photos' section. Currently, Barack Obama has sixteen albums of photos on Facebook. His albums have titles such as, ‗Iowa Victory Headlines' (images of news articles), ‗Classics' (widely used pictures of Obama), ‗Winning the Democratic Nomination' and ‗Barack and Michelle' (pictures of Obama, Michelle and their children). The pictures on Facebook, specifically the ones from the album ‗Barack and Michelle,' allow supporters to connect with the everydayness of Obama in a very human way. The images communicate that he is not ‗just' a politician, but a down-to-earth ‗average American' guy-next-door. Communications such as the Facebook images, as Ganz explains, ―is a way to communicate our identity, the choices that have made us who we are, and the values that shaped those choices – not as abstract principle, but as lived experience" (Ganz, 2008a, 8).

When Facebook users create their own groups, or join a group in support of something that calls them to action, they sign up to participate cooperatively. One example of this is the ‗Students for Obama' group. The group was created in 2006, but by the time Obama officially announced his candidacy, Students for Barack Obama had approximately ―62,000 members on Facebook and [affiliated] chapters on over eighty college campuses across the country" (Harfoush, 2009, 8). This group served as an early indicator of the power of the Internet in enabling supporters to organize as active communities. Students for Barack Obama had gathered together around principles of thought, action and the political stance they shared with Obama, and they eventually became an integral component of the Obama campaign as the group's members were to ―host over 19,000 events, make 406,000 phone calls, knock on 4,500 doors, and raise $1.7 million dollars" (Harfoush, 2009, 8). Facebook groups, such as Students for Obama helped to expand the Obama staffers' outreach efforts and foster the Obama social movement with limited ongoing effort from his campaign team. By encouraging Facebook-connected supporters to generate volunteers and donors from their own social circles and profile pages, the Obama Facebook Fan page utilized every fan as a specific communications hub and triggered a constant increase in virtual support that was visible to all.

This visibility of growth is one of the greatest aspects of Facebook. Members can see how many friends, followers or fans each person or group has. The more flowers each individual has, the more likely they are to be followed, demonstrating a ‗snowball' movement. Facebook enabled supporters to use the tools that were already available to them, and with which they were familiar, to spread personal messages in support of Obama's candidacy. As Lutz wrote, ―The campaign leveraged participation on these existing networks to reinforce messages across platforms and create as many touch points as possible" (Lutz, 2009, 9).

10. Conclusion: and they all lived happy ever after?

In the end, Barack Obama managed to create the social movement he envisaged at the start of 2007. The Internet, and digital media tools in particular, helped Obama to secure a landslide victory by a ―margin of nearly 200 electoral votes and 8.5 million popular votes," having motivated millions of ‗everyday' people to become engaged and empowered volunteers, donors and advocates of change through social networks, microblogging, email, text messaging, online video and video games (Lutz, 2009, 2).

> By the end of the campaign cycle, one million people had signed up for Obama's text-messaging program. The e-mail databank had entries for more than 13 million people, who had received over 1 billion messages from the campaign, with more than 7,000 different messages. On MyBarackObama.com, supporters created 2 million profiles, planned 200,000 offline events, posted 400,000 blog entries, and started more than 35,000 volunteer groups (Cornfield, 2009, 229).

The U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, states that the total population in American, as of July 2008, was 304,059,724 (Google, 2009). Thirteen million equates to roughly 2.3 % of the total American population. It's a comparatively small proportion but Obama connected strongly with them via digital media. While this figure was a tiny minority in context, it constituted a huge workforce of individuals at the grassroots level,

knocking on doors, etc. No campaign had ever harnessed so many active supporters previously. Even so, Obama's team also had to rely on older methods of campaigning to reach offline communities. Those older methods were underlined and supported by digital engagement and by Obama's social movement.

―Social movements make a vital contribution to our capacity for economic, social, political and cultural adaption and renewal" (Ganz, 2008a, 16). Barack Obama's vital contribution includes his ability to infuse new energy into the tired processes of political life. As the leader of a social movement, he generated new roots of community engagement that called for a more open, transparent and democratic political system.

By harnessing the power of his message, which was successfully individualised then broadcast over a range of mainly-personal media such as videos, cell phones, emails, video games, social networking and microblogging sites, Obama was able to encourage voters to run his campaign, raise his funds and hold his events for him. As a result, Obama was able to use the power of millions to be everywhere at the same time. His ―extraordinary campaign was a feat of managing ideas, people, and technology" on an impossibly large scale, say Libert and Faulk (2008, 8) while it is Delany's view that ―without the internet, Barack Obama would still be the junior senator from Illinois" (2009a, 3).

Obama realized from the start that his main goal in the election was to get the majority of votes by going to where the voters are and meeting them on their own ground. If politicians wish to connect effectively with their constituents, they must speak to them in an arena and format that they currently use. Through the use of digital media, Obama's public relations campaign team created a two-way symmetrical dialog with the American voting public. In these ‚conversations,' the campaign team communicated reciprocally with over 13 million American citizens. The resulting exchange of information enabled the campaign team to generate effective, targeted messages via different digital media and created a foundation of trust.

While Obama will need more than a sophisticated digital toolbox to deliver on the hopes and dreams that he forged with his followers, no other leader has ever started out with such an extensive network of support, or with a better capacity to connect individually with the people who in 2012 will most hold him to account for his actions.

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