
8. Digital campaigning

Daniel Kreiss

Political campaigning has often been the vessel for democratic hopes amid the vast changes in media that have taken shape during the past two decades. Since the emergence of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, scholars, practitioners, pundits, and the public have debated, forecast, hyped and celebrated the Internet's potential to revolutionize campaigning and speculated about the implications for civic engagement, citizenship, expression and ultimately power in a democracy. In the USA, John McCain's small-dollar fundraising during the 2000 primaries, Howard Dean's spectacular online grassroots mobilization, George W. Bush's online field organizing during his re-election bid, and the user-generated outpouring around Barack Obama's two campaigns have fueled democratic desires for a more participatory polity.

Despite apparent changes in the ways candidates contest elections, how and even whether networked media are reshaping electoral campaigning is a matter of considerable and long-standing debate among scholars. As Rasmus Nielsen (2013) has noted, many early scholarly perspectives that posited strong distinctions between the real and virtual and often saw revolutionary changes afoot have gradually given way to contemporary accounts that view electoral campaigning (and movement campaigns of all stripes) as being 'internet-assisted' (Nielsen, 2011) or 'digitally-enabled' (Earl and Kimport, 2011). This captures the idea that digital media are not creating a world separate and apart from the social and material contexts within which they are taken up. Citizens, campaigns, parties and other political actors create and use digital tools in the service of their political aims that take shape in institutionalized contexts. Rather than radically transforming them, digital tools often further existing electoral practices, from fundraising and canvassing to phone banking and attack advertising.

There are, however, changes in campaigning that have been enabled by the advent and widespread uptake of digital media. As the scale of contemporary campaign activities clearly demonstrates, the Internet has significantly amplified certain electoral practices. It is much easier and faster for citizens to donate to their favored candidates and causes online. Citizens now have a range of commercial and campaign-provided digital tools that enable them to more easily find those with similar political interests and organize and manage events for their favored candidates.

Volunteers can now access campaign voter lists online, canvass high-priority targets among their neighbors, and record the outcomes of these conversations back into the data-coffers of campaigns. Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, provide citizens with new capacities to express themselves politically, affording them the ability to create, share and remix political content with their friends and neighbors as well as global publics (Rainie et al., 2012). In other words, even if the formal legal codes of electoral institutions and political representation have not changed (which still require forms of geographic-based mobilization and the fundraising necessary to contest elections) there are still significant changes in the organization, practice, and experience of campaigning for many of the actors involved.

This chapter proceeds as follows, focusing exclusively on the thoroughly researched United States context. First, it details the major findings of the literature to date, traces the broad contours of scholarly disagreement, and discusses the limitations of the literature. Second, it outlines my approach to analyzing campaigning and offers some directions for future research, focusing on: exogenous shifts in digital platforms and applications that take shape outside of, but effect, the political field; the strategic action of political actors within particular technological contexts; and infrastructure building by campaigns, parties and other actors such as consultants that shape the capacities and contexts for digital campaigning. The chapter also offers additional readings for students of digital campaigning.

THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

A number of scholars have examined how the affordances of technologies have affected political campaigning and the electorate more generally.¹ At considerable risk of simplifying, within this literature there are two broad traditions of research into digital campaigning. One has looked at the organizational layer of politics through the lens of the types of collective political action in electoral contexts that new media afford. The other has examined the effects of digital campaign content and new media environments on political knowledge, attitudes and participation.

Collective Action and Political Organization

While digital technologies such as e-mail have been a part of governance processes at the presidential and congressional levels dating from 1992, it was the 1996 presidential election that featured the first candidate websites (Foot and Schneider, 2006). The Clinton and Dole campaigns

both provided e-mail updates to supporters and content that scholars have dubbed ‘brochureware’: generally simple HTML versions of printed literature providing information to voters, although the Dole campaign’s site also had some interactive features (ibid.).

During the 2000 presidential primaries the first contemporary uses of the Internet emerged, as campaigns began to focus on volunteer recruitment and mobilization, fundraising, and strategic messaging through social networks. In other words, campaigns began using the Internet to speak primarily to their pre-existing supporters, not undecided voters. Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis (2003) were among the first scholars to clearly identify these practices, arguing that campaigns used the Internet to shore up support, drive fundraising, and register and mobilize their voters. Political staffers themselves drove many of these changes, recognizing for the first time that the primary users of their websites were supporters, not undecided voters seeking detailed policy statements.² In response, the presidential campaigns of the cycle began explicitly encouraging supporter participation, in part through the design of dynamic, interactive pages for users.

The losing primary campaigns of Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley and Republican presidential candidate John McCain in 2000 provide two examples of the potential of small-dollar online fundraising. McCain raised record amounts of money online after his New Hampshire primary victory over George W. Bush. During the cycle, campaigns also began using the Internet to involve supporters in activities such as promoting the visibility of candidates through providing printable literature and signs for supporters to distribute in their communities, as well as tips for contacting local news outlets to promote the candidate. Candidates also increasingly used the Internet to fashion supporters into the conduits of strategic communications. Al Gore’s campaign enabled supporters to create their own customized webpages based on template policy content so that they could e-mail them to their friends and family.

These uses of digital media demonstrate that campaigns have largely taken up the Internet in ways that amplify existing electoral practices, given the stability of political institutions and the legal frameworks for political representation. This was true even during the 2004 campaign cycle, despite some real innovations in digital campaigning. The Howard Dean primary campaign was innovative on a number of levels, largely in response to the mobilization spurred by the then emerging anti-war, intra-party social movement known as the ‘netroots’ (Kreiss, 2012a). The netroots drove much early attention, money and volunteers to the Dean campaign. It also prompted many of the campaign’s technological innovations as staffers struggled to harness and direct this energy around

the candidate, such as by creating new social platforms that enabled supporters to plan events, donate money, network among themselves and contact voters (*ibid.*). And yet, while the Dean campaign was the product of the massive mobilization of supporters online facilitated by the lowered costs of organizing and taking action that digital media affords, this volunteerism was directed towards institutionalized ends: fundraising, voter contact, and messaging. As Matt Hindman (2005) pointed out, even on the Dean campaign the Internet's effects have generally come at the operational 'back end', enabling staffers to more efficiently perform routine electoral functions. While the Internet has certainly enabled more citizens to get involved and express themselves politically in public, digital media have not brought about revolutionary changes in institutionalized electoral practices, such as more radical forms of participatory policy-crafting that many observers had hoped for.

In the end, the Dean effort came up short precisely in those domains where digital media met the demands of electoral institutions. While the national online effort was exceptional at garnering financial resources and journalistic attention for the campaign, it failed to translate into effective on-the-ground voter identification, persuasion, and turnout efforts (Kreiss, 2012a). Although it has received comparatively less attention in the literature on new media and politics, the campaign of the 2004 cycle that most successfully incorporated digital media into larger electoral strategy and successfully harnessed database and networked technologies for the purposes of field campaigning was George W. Bush's re-election effort. Obama's campaign manager David Plouffe (2009) acknowledged as much, citing the Bush team's re-election effort as a model for the historic 2008 run. The Bush campaign created a 'virtual precinct captain' program, where online volunteers stewarded electoral districts in geographic areas that were a priority for the campaign. Bush's re-election effort also revealed that the Republican Party and its consultancies had far more robust online platforms, voter databases, and volunteer and voter mobilization efforts than the Democratic Party (Nielsen, 2012).

As I have shown in previous work (Kreiss, 2012a), the 2008 Obama campaign was an extension of many developments in digital campaigning that took shape across earlier electoral cycles, not a radical or revolutionary break with history. I focus on the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns here because practitioners on both sides of the aisle view them as the most technologically sophisticated electoral efforts to date, and the standards to be emulated. This has occurred to such an extent that the national Republican Party and its allied consulting firms have extensively studied the Obama 2012 effort and made considerable investments to match and

advance the campaign's digital strategies and tactics (see, for instance, Engage's extensive report on the 2012 Obama campaign, *Going Inside the Cave*).³

On the one hand, the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns were the product of extensive infrastructure-building efforts launched after John Kerry's defeat in 2004. As head of the Democratic Party, Howard Dean recruited his former staffers to steward the creation of a powerful new voter database and online interface system, called VoteBuilder (or 'the VAN' after Voter Activation Network, the firm that built the interface). At the same time, Democratic consultancies and progressive non-profit and advocacy organizations launched an extraordinary array of infrastructure-building efforts that laid the foundation for Obama's initial run. This included the development of the consultancy Blue State Digital's electoral platform rebuilt from the Dean campaign's toolset, which the firm provided to the Democratic Party ('Partybuilder') and the Obama campaign (My.BarackObama.com), among many other campaigns in 2006 and 2008.

On the other hand, the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns were products of the development of knowledge, skills, and practice around these database and electoral technologies. A number of Dean's former staffers including Joe Rospars, Blue State Digital co-founder and director of the Obama campaign's New Media Division in 2008 and chief digital strategist for 2012, carried with them their experiences from the failures of the 2004 bid. This resulted in a 2008 Obama campaign that made the organizational decisions and technological investments that supported an extraordinarily effective electoral effort. For example, one hallmark of Obama's 2008 effort was the integration of digital and on-the-ground field efforts, a strategy that paid dividends during the 23-state contests that took place on 'Super Tuesday' when Obama was able to remain competitive with Hillary Clinton. Again, while the 2008 Obama campaign was the vessel for many democratic aspirations by scholars, pundits, and citizens alike, the ethos of the campaign is best captured in the New Media Division's mantra of 'money, message, and mobilization'. While there was extraordinary popular participation around the campaign, particularly on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, at the end of the day the campaign sought to leverage this mobilization in the service of its electoral goals rather than providing supporters voice into the policy or strategy of the campaign.

The 2012 Obama effort, in turn, featured the extension of many of the digital practices of the 2008 campaign, especially the 'computational management' (Kreiss, 2012a: 144) style of organizational decision-making within the campaign. This involved the delegation of managerial, allocative, messaging, and design decisions to analysis of the campaign's multiple

data streams. As a number of journalistic accounts of the 2012 Obama campaign suggest, data was central to all aspects of the re-election effort, a development facilitated by the affordances of digital media. For example, extending the voter modeling efforts of the 2008 campaign, the re-election bid assigned numerical scores of likely political attitudes and behavior to every member of the electorate. These scores are the outgrowth of an enormous proliferation of data about citizens over the last decade and, as importantly, new analytical techniques that render them meaningful. The re-election campaign used four scores that on a scale of 1 to 100 modeled voters' likelihood of supporting Obama, turning out to vote, being persuaded to turn out, and being persuaded to support Obama on the basis of specific appeals (Beckett, 2012). These modeling scores were the basis for the entire voter contact operation, which ranged from making 'personalized' appeals on the doorsteps (Nielsen, 2012) and through the social media accounts of voters (Judd, 2012), to running advertisements on the cable television screens of swing voters (Rutenberg, 2012).

To date, there has been little systematic research focused on the diffusion, or lack thereof, of the 2008 or 2012 Obama campaigns' data and digital campaign tactics to Democratic campaigns at other levels of office or the Republican Party more generally, save for some limited work on why Republicans failed to adopt Obama's innovations after the 2008 cycle (Kreiss, 2014). That said, journalistic reports suggest both that the data-driven approach of the 2008 campaign was further developed in 2010 for the Democratic Party during the midterm elections (Issenberg, 2012b), and that since 2012 a host of new Democratic firms founded by alumni of the re-election bid carried similar data, analytics, and targeted media message strategies to gubernatorial races (Daileida, 2013) and Organizing for Action (Stirland, 2013). Republicans in turn have made large investments in their own data and digital organizing efforts since the 2012 cycle (Ball, 2014).

Given a two-decades-long trend towards mobilization-based campaigns featuring 'personalized political communication' (Nielsen, 2012) across many different interpersonal contexts and media platforms, it is likely that data and analytics, which increase the efficiency of voter contacts, will play more prominent roles in electoral politics in the years ahead. Even more likely is that the organizational efficiencies and resource gains that result from computational management will lead to these practices being more widely adopted across the two parties. That said, as Nielsen and Vaccari (2013) argue, while 'push' strategies of delivering campaign content to people seem broadly transferrable across campaigns at all levels of office, 'pull' strategies that are premised on voter interest in 'opting in' are contingent upon electoral contexts. As such, while candidates have widely taken

them up, there is limited utility of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for the vast majority of campaigns, given generally low interest in politics in a high media choice environment (*ibid.*). This suggests a broader cautionary note, that scholars need to carefully analyze how campaign digital media practices may diffuse in terms of adoption – especially from comparatively well-financed presidential campaigns – but have differential effects in varying electoral contexts given seemingly fixed constraints such as generally low interest in contemporary elections.

In sum, the history of the uptake of digital media in campaigning is a story of institutional amplification, not necessarily democratic revolution. Digital media have dramatically amplified some forms of political collective action in institutionalized contexts. Campaigns use digital media to significantly lower the cost to supporters of making small-dollar contributions online. Supporters have more opportunities to volunteer, and it is far easier to do so than it once was, as phone banking, event planning, and fund-raising have gone online. Meanwhile, from Twitter to Facebook, supporters have new vehicles for political expression and engagement. What new media have not necessarily done, however, is make campaigns more responsive to their mobilized supporters outside of the generally shared ends of getting a candidate elected (Kreiss, 2012a).

Political Knowledge, Attitudes and Participation

As Neuman et al. (2010: 24–26) point out in their review of the literature, students of the effects of digital media on politics need to be attentive to three factors that complicate the research findings: diffusion effects, differential effects, and conditional effects. All three factors have significant implications for digital campaigning. Technologies diffuse at different rates throughout societies, meaning that we cannot presume that what we see now will be the case 20 years from now as more people come online. Diffusion effects suggest that what we see happening in digital campaigning today may be different in the future. Differential rates of adoption based on factors such as culture, class, age, and social position in turn suggest that the technologically rich may often be getting richer. Differential effects suggest that there are likely significant differences among the citizens who engage in digital campaigning based on pre-existing political interest and knowledge. Finally, conditional effects refer to the fact that some groups of people will be advantaged by the affordances of technology more than others, given the contexts within which they adopt it. Conditional effects suggest that digital campaigning may ultimately benefit those already most engaged in political life or organized to adopt new technologies.

With these in mind, we can consider the literature on digital campaigning from the standpoint of the types of political communication digital media afford among citizens and campaigns, the effects of digital media on knowledge and attitudes about politics, and the motivations and contexts for participation in digital campaigns. These are significant areas of focus for scholars and reflect, even if they are not stated explicitly, normative theories of democracy (for a review, see Freelon, 2010). Studies of digital campaigning that look at the effects on the electorate are animated by concerns over citizen deliberation and knowledge, polarization, and participation. Within each of these domains there is significant debate and a continual evolution in findings, in part given the diffusion, differential, and conditional effects detailed above.

From the very beginnings of the uptake of digital media in campaign contexts, scholars have seen the possibility for a more deliberative polity, in terms of both citizen dialogue and, more broadly, access to information for improved political knowledge. Prevalent in much of the early literature was the idea that new media would bring about a new era of deliberative democracy as citizens took to the Internet, accessed information, and debated the merits (and demerits) of parties, candidates, and policies, especially in electoral contexts (for a review of this literature and scholarly debate, see Chadwick, 2006; Neuman et al., 2010).

A decade of empirical scholarship, however, has generally found the notion that a new era of deliberation was reshaping democratic processes to be overstated. On a structural level, political scientist Matthew Hindman (2008) has influentially shown that very few voices are heard online and shape public debate, and they are often elites and those already most well resourced to contribute politically. Farrell and Drezner (2008) show that the professional media still largely set the agenda for blogs and other non-professional outlets. On a social and psychological level, scholars have shown that deliberation has to be 'designed-in' to online platforms (Wright and Street, 2007); and this is exceedingly rare in the context of campaigning. As the body of empirical literature suggests, online discussion in electoral contexts features a range of communicative styles, including emotional, moral, and partisan appeals, not simply the rational, generalized, and respectful discourse that lies at the heart of normative deliberative theory. As scholars such as Michael Schudson (2003) have suggested, this means that political communication online looks much the same as offline, and the normative ideal of rational, critical debate is the outlier, not the norm (even across historical periods).

Meanwhile, studies suggest that while there have been some new formats for campaign communications, they have generally furthered the instrumental ends of electoral politics, and have not necessarily created a more

deliberative polity. Foot and Schneider's (2006) extensive content analysis of campaign websites during the 2000, 2002, and 2004 election cycles found that campaigns sought to inform, involve, connect, and mobilize users in the context of electing candidates. This finding was echoed by a unique cross-national comparative study that found markedly similar uses of websites for electoral purposes (Foot et al., 2009). A number of scholars have studied campaign use of the video-sharing site YouTube, finding that the platform supports a range of new campaign strategic content such as inspirational videos and footage of gaffes from the campaign trail. That said, the diffusion of these videos (and citizen-produced content) is premised on how campaigns and other actors interact around these platforms in pursuit of their strategic political ends (Karpf, 2010; Wallsten, 2010).

All of these forms of campaign content are publicly available, but there are considerable methodological difficulties in studying campaign communications that are targeted. The marriage of data, content, and interactivity online has made it difficult if not impossible to study some new forms of campaign communications through conventional methods such as content analysis and experiments. For one, unlike in the mass communication era, online advertising, e-mails, and even webpages are tailored on the basis of data and analytics through website optimization and targeting. Howard (2006) noted many of these tactics a decade ago, and recent work (Serazio, 2014) suggests that these practices have only grown more sophisticated. In-depth interview studies suggest that e-mails are targeted and tailored based on the geography, behavior, and demographics of citizens, as well as their prior history with campaigns and the sequences of appeals (Kreiss, 2012a). The challenge is getting inside campaigns to discover the processes behind targeting, or figuring out how to draw a sample of such narrowly tailored content. For instance, Barnard and Kreiss (2013) conducted a comprehensive survey of the research literature on online advertising and evaluated it in light of interview data from practitioners working in digital campaign advertising. Their conclusion is that the experimental literature is premised on manipulations that were commonplace in campaigning more than a decade ago, and that conventional experimental methods and content analysis of digital campaign advertising may be ill-equipped to discover the nuances of ads and targeting when 'individualized information flows' between campaigns and citizens are increasingly the norm (*ibid.*).

Many of these studies suggest that digital campaign communications fail to meet normative deliberative standards, and also that they are often used to appeal to likely supporters of candidates and those who are already committed and engaged. This accords with the findings of a generation of political scientists who have argued that those who are most

interested in and knowledgeable about politics, and routinely engaged in political discussion online, are generally those who are the most ideologically committed and partisan (Abramowitz, 2010). Increased media choice reinforces this phenomenon. As Prior (2007) has demonstrated, with the rise of a much more fragmented media environment individuals can turn away from politics entirely if they are uninterested. The loss of 'inadvertent exposure' (ibid.) with the increased capacity for media choice has exacerbated information and knowledge inequalities, with significant consequences for who participates in electoral politics. In other words, given that political interest generally shapes political knowledge and behavior, in the era of cable television and the Internet citizens uninterested in politics can avoid seeking out and even seeing much political information during a campaign. The Internet, on its own, has not necessarily made for better-informed or more knowledgeable citizens on the whole; a finding echoed by Zukin et al. (2006) who find markedly stable average patterns of political knowledge and interest over the past 50 years.

Alongside political interest shaping political knowledge is the phenomenon of polarization. Citizens not only turn away from political information entirely, but can also self-select partisan media (Baum and Groeling, 2008). That said, scholars consistently find that the most knowledgeable and committed partisans not only consume general interest news, but also tend to be the most aware of arguments across the ideological spectrum, which makes them look like model citizens (Prior, 2013). The roots of polarization are many and diverse (see Abramowitz, 2010). In the context of media choice, there is debate over whether consuming the information of certain media outlets or platforms actually leads to more extreme positions, or whether media use comes after pre-existing partisanship but also has its own differential effects in terms of issue publics (Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2011). Either way, campaigns have adopted strategies to appeal narrowly to their base of supporters through new partisan digital outlets. Studies of the netroots show how campaigns such as Obama's treat bloggers as important conduits of information to likely Democratic voters during primaries, and to the legacy press during general election campaigns when the electorate is more ideologically diverse (see Kreiss, 2012b).

Scholars also find that political interest shapes not only media choice and knowledge, but also the decision to participate in digital campaigning, although research that specifically accounts for social media is just now emerging. Research suggests that participation in campaigning online generally reflects the ways that political motivation, interest, and resources shape all forms of political engagement (Xenos and Moy, 2007). Scholars argue that the Internet has not generally brought about massive increases in donations, attendance at political events, or voting when political

interest is considered (Boulianne, 2009). Meanwhile, recent studies found that it is the wealthy and well educated who are the most politically active online (Schlozman et al., 2010).

That said, other studies that account for social media use suggest a potential positive causal effect of digital media use on political participation. One contingent of scholars argues that certain kinds of internet use increase the likelihood of voting, and this has more pronounced effects among youth, given that they are the most likely to be online and the least likely to be politically engaged (Mossberger et al., 2008). De Zúñiga et al. (2010) argue that consuming new forms of political information online predicts political engagement; Warren and Wicks (2011) argue that online media use socializes youth into civic engagement; and Pasek et al. (2009) find that social media use builds social capital that translates into political engagement (see also Shah et al., 2001). The literature has suggested a number of potential causal factors, including the lowered costs of communication, new forms of online mobilization, targeted communications from campaigns and other political actors, inadvertent exposure to political content shared through social media, the blending of new audio and video formats, the accessibility of information, and social affordances of online engagement (for a review, see Mossberger and Tolbert, 2010). In addition, the 2012 Obama campaign's 'targeted sharing' program – where supporters on Facebook were asked to contact friends who the campaign targeted to ask them to do things such as register to vote and volunteer – suggest that campaigns may be able to take up social media as a push medium, creating new 'digital two-step flows' of information to online opinion leaders for strategic purposes.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH

In addition to the diffusion, differential, and conditional effects cited above, it is necessary to add the potential for 'medium effects' to the literature on digital campaigning. Despite the considerable insights of the literature cited above, many of its limitations stem from the fact that studies about new media and politics are often premised on assumptions that the medium itself, or at least its dominant and salient features, remains stable. And yet, as Karpf (2012) argues:

The Internet is unique among Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) *specifically because* the Internet of 2002 has important differences from the Internet of 2005, or 2009, or 2012. It is a suite of overlapping, interrelated technologies. The medium is simultaneously undergoing a social diffusion process and an ongoing series of code-based modifications. Social diffusion

brings in new actors with diverse interests. Code-based modifications alter the technological affordances of the media environment itself . . . What was costly and difficult in 2004 is cheap and ubiquitous in 2008. That leads, in turn, to different practices. The Internet's effect on media, social, and political institutions will be different at time X from that at time $X + 1$, because the suite of technologies we think of as the Internet will itself change within that interval.

In other words, given a medium undergoing significant and ongoing changes, it is exceptionally difficult to generalize findings about digital campaigning from one time period to another. Scholars can look for continuities in social and technological practice, such as the development of computational management practices in digital campaigning cited above, but it is difficult to generalize claims about how candidates and citizens use the Internet across election cycles from studies conducted at one moment in time. For example, arguments and empirical findings about Facebook and political knowledge and participation are only valid to the extent that Facebook remains the same; a tenuous claim given that new functionalities are added to the platform almost daily (while others are taken away). Meanwhile, scholars who have located the Internet's effects on the operational 'back end' of campaigns were certainly correct on a number of levels in looking at the 2004 cycle, but this view dramatically understates how the 2012 Obama campaign used digital technologies to engage in 'front end' strategic campaign communications on an individualized level (see, for example, Judd, 2012; Issenberg, 2012b).

To account for medium effects along with the ongoing diffusion of digital media throughout society and their uptake into many domains of social life, my current conceptualization of researching digital campaigning lies in looking at the interplay of changes in the medium and its application layer, the strategic actions of campaigns and parties, and the infrastructure that shapes the background contexts of action for campaigns and citizens. First, the history of digital media and campaigning reveals a gradual and continual evolution in the affordances of the Internet developed outside of the political field. Second, there is the continual development of the strategies and practices of campaigns, parties, and consultants in response to changing socio-technical contexts. And, third, there is the ongoing crafting of infrastructures of technical artifacts, organizations, knowledge, skills, and practices that provide background contexts of action for campaigns endogenous to politics and that afford action across electoral cycles. This enables us to situate the research findings detailed above in terms of these three conceptual areas. It also provides a set of research questions for scholars conducting research on digital campaigning.

First, and most familiar, is the focus on technologies developed outside

of politics for commercial or other purposes that have impacted digital campaigning. On a macro level, scholars have suggested that technological changes are shaping broad shifts in social structure towards a 'networked society' (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2011), providing the contexts for the disembedding of individuals from the group structures of earlier eras (Bennett and Manheim, 2006; Bennett and Iyengar, 2008), and eroding the capacities of long-standing civic organizations and institutions (Karpf, 2012). On the more micro level of digital applications, these dynamics are driven in part by a seemingly endless array of commercial platforms that support much contemporary social and political life. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Pinterest form part of the ubiquitous and invisible technological context for the conduct of social and political life, and shape expectations for sociality and civic engagement (Bimber et al., 2012). These macro- and micro-level changes have 'spillover' effects in campaign contexts, shaping everything from the diffusion of political messages and inadvertent exposure, to political content to the social contexts within which people communicate about politics.

We must also seek to understand how campaigns and parties perceive and experience their media environment and take strategic action within it to realize their goals. In other words, digital campaigning is not simply driven by underlying changes in technology, social structure, and social practice exogenous to the political field, but also by the strategic actions of campaigns. The core goal of campaigning is to secure a majority of votes, and this end has remained the same despite significant changes in political culture that have shaped how campaigns are waged, from candidates standing for office and the whiskey-fueled spectacles of the strong party era, to the candidate-centric campaigns of our own historical moment (Schudson, 1998). In a broad sense, campaigns appropriate digital tools more or less well to use to their advantage (such as MeetUp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), from creating new efficiencies at their operational back ends, to leveraging new opportunities for strategic communications to supporters and undecided voters.⁴ They do so by reading broader shifts in technological, social, and cultural contexts, which may be shaped far afield from politics but impact the potential range of actions campaigns can take in their efforts to elect candidates. This is one reason why 'field-crossers' from the technology industry have been so central to innovations in digital campaigning, from the hackers and 'dot.commers' on the Dean campaign in 2004 to the Facebook (Kreiss, 2012a) and Threadless (Issenberg, 2012a) executives who helped to power Obama's runs in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Particularly important, given rapidly changing technical contexts, consultants and staffers who come to campaigns from contexts outside of politics, particularly the technology industry, are

able to bring their knowledge of larger changes in technology and social structure to electoral politics.

At the same time, scholars need to consider the long-term efforts of candidates, parties, and other political actors to build their capacity to act and achieve their goals across election cycles. This is where infrastructure comes in: the background context of action that campaigns and parties shape and that affords organizational capacity for candidates during elections. Campaigns and parties build infrastructure (or fail to) to afford future electoral action. The most taken-for-granted forms of digital campaigning, such as donating money and contacting voters, are premised upon years of technical development and knowledge creation, as well as enormous investments of financial and human resources. Strategic political actors draw on these background social and technical resources to support their digital campaign efforts, from contacting voters online, to e-mailing supporters urging them to give money. For example, as noted above, as Sasha Issenberg (2012b) suggests, the 2012 Obama campaign's success in digital organizing, given advances in voter modeling, was the product of work that took shape within the Democratic Party in-between presidential election cycles around the 2010 midterm elections. In other words, we cannot fully understand digital campaigning by only examining discrete electoral cycles or changes in technologies that are exogenous to politics, such as the emergence of new social media platforms such as Facebook.

In sum, analysis of digital campaigning must move across three levels of conceptualization: changes in underlying social and technological contexts; the strategic actions of campaigns; and the background capacities to act that campaigns have. These, in turn, suggest a number of avenues for future research. As suggested by Bimber et al. (2012), scholars can research how the expectations and practices of citizenship and engagement around campaigning change (or do not) in conjunction with shifts in media. Scholars can, in turn, research how campaigns and parties respond to these shifts organizationally and technologically. More research is needed into how social media affect the agenda-setting role of the press, digital two-step flows of political communication, and the actors involved in political communication more broadly in the context of campaigns. We also need more empirical studies and conceptual work on how campaigns and other institutional actors respond to these changes to realize their strategic goals, from adapting new organizational forms and work practices (Bimber, 2003), to networked ways of strategically distributing political communication (Kreiss, 2012b). We also know very little about the infrastructure of party networks and how they shape the capacity of campaigns to contest elections from state to presidential races; and even less about the role this infrastructure plays at a time of rapid media and social change.

As scholars begin to think more broadly about participation to include citizens' creation, distribution, and interaction with political content online it seems clear that we lack firm categories for many contemporary aspects of political communication. For instance, how should scholars conceptualize retweets or sharing campaign content through Facebook, actions that are low cost and perhaps not even done with much forethought but that may be highly meaningful or consequential forms of political speech in terms of inadvertent exposure (see Freelon, 2014, on this point)? Finally, how do people encounter, create, and express public opinion in everyday life away from institutional political settings (Walsh, 2004), but with implications for campaigns?

NOTES

1. 'Affordance' broadly refers to the capacities for action that technologies make possible.
2. Another significant factor was changes in Federal Election Commission rules that enabled campaigns to collect online donations.
3. Available online at <http://enga.ge/fundraising/going-inside-the-cave/>.
4. In extraordinary cases, such as Obama's two runs, campaigns are also the incubators of entirely new political tools.

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