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Open Source as Practice and Ideology: The Origin of Howard Dean's Innovations in Electoral Politics

Daniel Kreiss

ABSTRACT. Extending an emerging body of work documenting the migration of technical production models into other domains of social activity, this article analyzes how “open source” works at the levels of both practice and ideology. Through interviews and analysis of public documents relating to Howard Dean’s run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2003–2004, this article reveals how many Internet Division staffers drew on open source projects such as the collaborative building of the Linux operating system as a model for their campaign work. In the process, they helped create a series of technical and organizational innovations in online campaigning that have subsequently become core features of electoral politics. At the same time, staffers strategically and publicly deployed the frame of the “open source campaign” as a cultural resource. Situated within narratives of the new economy and participatory democracy, staffers’ framing of the campaign as a radical techno-democratic effort provided journalists with an interpretive framework for understanding Dean’s run and helped mobilize specialized volunteer constituencies. Given that the campaign was not as participatory in substantive domains as this frame suggested, the article also reveals how the label of open source worked ideologically to elide dynamics of organizational power.

KEYWORDS. Democracy, electoral politics, framing, Howard Dean, Internet, open source politics

During the spring of 2003, a startling new phrase appeared in conjunction with a political campaign. Joe Trippi, the kinetic campaign manager for Howard Dean’s presidential primary run, told every journalist who would listen—and there were many—that the campaign was a revolutionary new “open source” effort. A couple of months later, in the thick of the primary battle, a journalist from *Slate* noted that: “The metaphor of choice for Howard Dean’s Internet-fueled campaign is ‘open-source politics’: a

two-way campaign in which the supporters openly collaborate with the campaign to improve it, and in which the contributions of the ‘group mind’ prove smarter than that of any lone individual” (Suellentrop, 2003). Trippi and other campaign staffers argued that just as Linux involved thousands of individuals across the globe working together to develop an operating system, the decentralized efforts of Dean supporters powered the campaign and were revolutionizing political life.

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By the fall, even hardened political journalists breathlessly referred to Dean's run as a novel, Internet-fueled effort that was upending traditional campaign methods and overthrowing party elites. What else could explain how Dean raised three times more money than his nearest rival during the summer, with over 150,000 people giving money to or supporting the campaign online (Fineman, 2003)? Or the fact that 33,000 individuals across the country came out on a Dean "Meetup Day" one Wednesday night in August? There was such little precedent for this shocking demonstration of electoral support so early in the campaign cycle that many journalists took Steve McMahon, Trippi's business partner and senior strategist for the campaign, at his word when he declared: "We have tapped into a force no one can fully control. I hope you guys remember that when something goes wrong" (Fineman, 2003).

Scholars such as anthropologist Chris Kelty (2008) have powerfully documented "modulations" of the free software/open source movement in domains far afield from technical production, from the flowering of social expression secured by Creative Commons to the collaborative online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Beyond any single project, however, practices of openness and collaboration are for many a highly compelling and meaningful new model for organizing technical, economic, and cultural production. As Kelty argues, open source is best conceptualized as a movement that has far reaching implications for much of political and social life, in both its very form as a set of value-laden practices and the products that result from such large-scale, decentralized, and public collaboration over digital communication networks.

This article extends Kelty's analysis in showing how open source *technical* production offered a set of resources for organizing *political* activity. It does so through close consideration of the online campaigning that fueled Howard Dean's run for the presidency.¹ Like other modulations of the open source software movement, many of Dean's staffers were inspired by the ideals and practices of this form of software production and sought to apply them to the domain of electoral politics. In numerous interviews, staffers within the campaign's Internet Division cited the open

source movement as the inspiration for their attempt at creating a new kind of highly participatory and supporter-driven campaign.² These staffers conceptualized their work in terms of supporting a vast, autonomous, and distributed volunteer community engaged in such activities as developing campaign tools, writing letters to voters in early primary states, and raising money for Dean's run. Reflecting this, some of Dean's staffers and volunteers even used and developed open source technologies in their work because they would "jibe with the movement part of the campaign" (Jerome Armstrong, personal communication, November 21, 2008)—despite the fact that other campaigns could potentially use them.

As these staffers modulated the practices of open source technical development in their organizational and technical work, the Dean campaign became a site of significant innovations in electoral politics. During the 2000 elections, it became increasingly clear to campaigns and, subsequently, to scholars (Bimber & Davis, 2003) that many visitors to candidate Web sites were already sympathetic to, if not supporting, candidates. However, without robust online campaign tools and with few staffers dedicated to Internet, campaigning efforts to systematically engage supporters in 2000 were halting and at the periphery of core campaign efforts (Kreiss, 2010). Four years later, the insurgent Dean campaign with its extensive and independent online supporter community used the Internet much more effectively as a tool for mobilization and integrated it into all aspects of the campaign (Kreiss, 2009). As a number of scholars note (Chadwick, 2007; Jett & Välikangas, 2004; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006; Gronbeck & Wiese, 2005), Dean's staffers created a campaign blog—the first in presidential politics, developed an early social networking platform and personalized fundraising tools, and made distributed supporter participation a central tenet of the campaign's finance and field strategies. For example, the campaign provided citizens with digital tools that enabled them to host events, build their own Web sites, set fundraising goals, and reach out to their friends and family for contributions. These innovations, in turn, spread across Democratic electoral politics in the years after

the election and provided the foundation for the Obama campaign's efforts in 2007–2008.³ On one level, then, modulating open source technical production provided Dean's staffers with a model and set of practices that drove innovations in tools and ways of working with supporters. On another, open source served as a "cultural resource" (Snow & Benford, 2005) that the campaign's staffers wielded strategically to garner resources. Alongside performances of online politics, such as large-scale Internet fundraising events that served as compelling news hooks, Trippi and other Dean staffers and advisors rhetorically deployed the frame of the open source campaign to attract press attention and provide an interpretive framework for journalists writing about Dean's run. Connected to narratives of the new economy, this frame of the open source campaign legitimated the electoral effort as the political analogue of a Silicon Valley start-up, even as it attracted highly skilled technical volunteers. This cultural work also allowed supporters and staffers to view the campaign as a radically democratic techno-democratic movement, despite a campaign hierarchy that limited the Internet Division's work and much supporter participation to "back-end" fundraising and voter outreach (Hindman, 2007). This formal organization held centralized control over the more substantive aspects of the campaign, ranging from the policy platform of the candidate to electoral strategy—a fact that became painfully clear to supporters after the candidate's disastrous third-place finish in the Iowa caucuses. Given this, open source, and constructions of Internet politics more generally, served the ideological function of eliding power dynamics on the campaign.

As it reveals how open source worked at the level of both practice and ideology, this article suggests the complexity of "modulations" of the core components of open source (Kelty, 2008). To do so, this article proceeds in four parts. I begin by reviewing the sources of data for this study before showing how the technical and organizational practices of many of Dean's Internet Division staffers were guided by the open source movement. I then turn to the public framing of the Dean campaign as a radical techno-democratic effort, showing how it was discursively linked to narratives of the

new economy and participatory democracy. Finally, I turn to the concrete work that this frame performed, showing how it attracted the attention of professional journalists and mobilized supporter labor.

METHODS AND DATA

I draw my evidence from a larger book project (Kreiss, in press), which provides a history of new media and democratic politics over the last decade. For this project, my data-gathering and analysis over the past four years has centered on three primary sources: (a) open-ended interviews with political staffers specializing in digital media, especially individuals active on the Dean and Obama campaigns; (b) a comprehensive look at datasets and archival materials related to the 1999–2000, 2003–2004, and 2007–2008 campaigns including Federal Elections Commission reports, professional press articles, blog posts, and conference proceedings; and (c) participant observation with the new media tools deployed by the Obama campaign during the 2007–2008 primaries and general election.

This article makes extensive use of the interview data with former members of the Dean campaign as well as primary documents relating to the 2003–2004 primary election cycle. Over the last three years, I have conducted open-ended interviews with 26 alumni of the Howard Dean campaign, including staffers of the campaign organization, advisors to the candidate and campaign manager, project-based consultants, and volunteers (for a list of the interviews conducted see the Appendix). These recorded interviews lasted between one and four hours and took place primarily via telephone. All interviews were "on-the-record," although participants could declare any statement "off-the-record" or "on background" at their discretion (this happened very rarely in practice). I purposively selected interviewees on the basis of their positions in the Dean campaign organization as revealed by FEC organizational filings. Meanwhile, I asked these staffers for recommendations as to whom else to contact, which led me to a host of important consultants who worked on the campaign—including Jerome Armstrong

and Zack Exley—and advisors, including David Weinberger. No one I contacted declined to participate in this study, although scheduling conflicts prevented me from speaking with the entirety of the Internet Division.

To supplement the data gathered from interviews, during the last three years I used search indexes including Lexis/Nexis and the Internet Archive to collect over 500 documents relating to the 2003–2004 election cycle, which I then categorized and analyzed. These include, but are not limited to, professional press articles, blog posts, campaign Web sites, and e-mail campaign communications. An array of publicly accessible Internet material of broad relevance to the analysis is presented here. For example, not only are Web sites and campaign communications in public forums generally archived and available, the Dean campaign's e-mails to supporters and agendas for volunteer "Meetups" are all accessible. Meanwhile, a surprising number of bloggers, campaign staff, and volunteers reflected on the campaign in blog posts and books such as Trippi's (2004) auto-biographical *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* and Streeter and Teachout's (2007) edited collection of firsthand accounts of staffers and volunteers, *Mousepads, Shoe Leather, and Hope*. I also used FEC data—including that which is compiled on Web sites such as the George Washington University elections project—to map the key new media staffers, consultants, and firms that worked on the Dean and subsequent Democratic campaigns.

OPEN SOURCE AND ELECTORAL INNOVATION

Zack Rosen was a sophomore at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2003. The 20-year-old computer science major spent much of his days reading about the implications of the Internet in books that ranged from David Weinberger's *Small Pieces Loosely Joined* and Albert-Laszlo Barabási's *Linked: The New Science of Networks* to Lawrence Lessig's *Code* and *The Future of Ideas*. Intrigued by these authors' arguments regarding the transformative effects of the Internet on

social life, and in the early stages of a presidential election, Rosen began "looking for an avenue to get involved in politics." What he found surprised him:

I started doing political research and I heard about this candidate Dean who was doing all this creative stuff on the Internet. . . . It was kind of a perfect match. I realized that all the things I was reading about in these books were coming to life in a campaign. And it coalesced a lot of things I was passionate about. (Zack Rosen, personal communication, April 7, 2008)

Soon after this discovery, Rosen reached out to volunteers creating online tools for Dean's effort and launched a mailing list called "Hack4Dean" to coordinate the programming efforts happening entirely independently of the campaign. By July, Rosen had dropped out of college and, with the help of fellow Hack4Dean volunteers, created a prototype of "Deanspace," a toolkit-built on the open source platform Drupal that enabled supporters to set up their own Web sites and plan events for Dean. In the months after the launch of Deanspace hundreds of activist sites bloomed including "Music for America," "Seniors for Dean," and "Catholics for Dean."

Rosen's story is extraordinary, but it captures the unprecedented technology-fueled volunteering that lay behind many aspects of the Dean campaign. From mid-2002 on through to the first nominating contests in January 2004, thousands of enterprising programmers, technology entrepreneurs, and political activists developed and used a host of new Internet tools as volunteers for Dean. As they built Web sites, commented on blogs, gathered offline using Internet-based tools such as Meetup, and, most importantly, donated small amounts of money that rapidly scaled, their work helped to propel a virtually unknown governor from a small New England state into the lead for the Democratic presidential nomination, a position Dean held right up until the Iowa caucuses. And, for many of these staffers and supporters, open source technical production provided both an

animating ethos and value-laden organizational model for their electoral work. As Rosen (personal communication, April 7, 2008), who was hired by the campaign in the fall of 2003, suggests: “People really understood bottom-up open source processes. . . . It really is revolutionary, fundamentally a different way of being effective and getting work done. We all shared the theory that it could carry over to politics, and it was proven out.”

Although the internal workings of the Dean organization have received relatively scant attention in the literature, supporting and coordinating many of these volunteer efforts were staffers within the dynamic Internet Division of the campaign. Under Trippi’s direct management, the Internet Division encompassed a diverse group of staffers, but most had technical and professional knowledge and skills from domains outside of electoral politics. For example, some Division staffers were unemployed or underemployed by a slowdown in the technology industry or just seeking new challenges and therefore left the “new economy” to try their hands at politics. Others were programmers, including participants in open source development projects. A number were part of a new generation of Internet activists who were blogging and taking online action on behalf of progressive causes. As such, they did not know mediated electoral campaigning in any stable, professionalized way and thus were not able, and did not wish, to simply apply established techniques to their first electoral campaign. Instead, they pieced together an amalgam of strategies from these commercial, technical, and activist domains.

It was in this context that open source helped Internet Division staffers and the campaign’s volunteer supporters coordinate their work. As an interpretively flexible concept that carried meaning across disparate social worlds, the abstract idea of the “open source campaign” served as a “boundary object” (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Starr & Griesemer, 1989) that provided staffers and supporters alike with a shared language to coordinate their efforts while enabling them to interpret the concept differently in practice according to their needs. An important part of what made open source powerful was its ambiguity and lack of formal

definition. As Jerome Armstrong (personal communication, November 21, 2008), a prominent progressive blogger and consultant for the campaign, suggests in relation to staffers’ understanding of open source: “Nobody in the campaign knew what the hell it meant.” Given that it was never formally defined, and some staffers had only a vague understanding of technologies such as Linux, open source could generally signify a collaborative organizational model that was both easily transposed to the political realm and particularly resonant for Dean’s progressive staffers who valued democratic participation. This was important because it meant that open source was a concept that had wide appeal, carrying meaning across the heterogeneous professional backgrounds of the Internet Division staffers, with 20-year-old amateur programmers sitting alongside veterans of progressive online activism. In the words of Nicco Mele (personal communication, July 29, 2008), Dean’s Webmaster, the Internet Division of the campaign uniquely tied together the political culture of grassroots progressive organizing and “the open source, collaborative world.”

The aspirational organizational model of the open source campaign was, in turn, loosely grounded in a set of practices derived from technical production. Many of Dean’s staffers convened around this idea of an “open source campaign,” and in a process of relational engagement, continually constituted what it meant in practice (Knorr-Cetina, 2001). Borrowing from a variety of professional knowledge bases, they modulated what Kely (2008) details as open source practices such as distributed collaboration and mass coordination. As they did so, staffers reconceived the Internet as an *organizational* tool for electoral politics—a significant innovation in campaigning. For example, instead of static, HTML versions of campaign literature, staffers drew on the model of open source to provide supporters with digital tools to organize their communities for Dean and even invited them to develop some of the core technical infrastructure of the campaign.⁴ In the process, these staffers helped to create a national volunteer effort that broke fundraising records, turned thousands of individuals out at events

for Dean, and created novel campaign tools that rivaled even commercial applications such as the early social networking site Friendster.

Many supporters, particularly those working on technical projects, in turn saw the campaign and their roles in it in terms of open source. For instance, the Internet application Deanspace, the online toolkit built by Rosen and other members of Hack4Dean, was one example of a technology produced by volunteers and utilized by the campaign. These volunteers, and the staffers that embraced and encouraged their work, saw the development of Deanspace and the online application itself as symbolic of the open source ethos of the campaign and, by extension, the candidate. The Hack4Dean group built Deanspace on the open source Drupal platform in large part because it fit with the perceived “openness” of the campaign. Indeed, even though other campaigns could adopt this technology, given the underlying public source code, volunteers believed that rivals did not have the same open culture of the Dean campaign. As volunteer developer Aldon Hynes explains:

It was important that it [Deanspace] reflect the openness of the campaign. We argued that the Bush campaign could not use it because their culture could not produce the openness. Unlike Dean, Bush was not willing to be open to other people. We believed that there was an underlying deep structure to the technology. (personal communication, April 2, 2008)

Technical projects such as these demonstrate how models of open source production spurred innovations in tools and organization on the Dean campaign. These innovations were not, however, simply open-ended; they were guided by the goals of the larger campaign. Dean’s Internet Division lay at the “interface” (Weber, 2004, p. 264) between a hierarchical campaign organization and networks of the candidate’s independent supporters. Trippi and consultants devised the explicit strategy of creating a standalone Internet Division and using networked tools to convene the independent supporters gathering on external blogs so as to better

direct their efforts. This was important given that Dean’s outsider, insurgent status meant that the campaign needed non-elite bases of fiscal and political support to have any chance at success under the governing rules of the electoral process. As Jascha Franklin Hodge (personal communication, December 22, 2008), a programmer who worked for a number of start-ups before becoming Dean’s National Systems Administrator, described a key challenge for the campaign:

We had no institutional advantages, not like Kerry or Gephardt. . . . It was an environment where people could overcome a power base; we just need to figure out how do we get them engaged enough in the political process, in local party organizations. How do we insert these people into where we can to have them stand up for Dean?

To the extent that the work of the Internet Division furthered these ends, there was a secure organizational space provided for technical experimentation. As Teachout (personal communication, July 10, 2008) relates: “We were constantly being told that we shouldn’t and couldn’t be doing the things that we were doing by other members of the campaign. And then Trippi would say ‘oh you can ignore them.’ That was really important that he had our back, even on stuff that he didn’t believe in, to just be experimenting.” These experiments were, however, tied to the electoral needs of the campaign, such as providing opportunities for volunteers to fundraise and engage in local organizing. Outside of these more transactional activities, there were few channels for other forms of more substantive participation such as contributing to the candidate’s policy platform (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006).

That policy positions were the purview of expert advisors in turn marks an important distinction between the Dean campaign and many open source technical projects. Similar to the way Dean’s Internet Division was embedded in a larger organizational structure, as Weber (2004) notes, large-scale open source projects

tend to have hierarchical decision-making structures that manage complexity and coordination. Yet, a crucial difference is that on projects such as Linux, all aspects of the code are open to contributions. Even though contributions may be rejected by leaders such as Linus Torvalds and his lieutenants, who often hail from the community of programmers around an open source project, these figures must justify decisions and be responsive to participants. In contrast, Dean's supporters had little in the way of channels for expressing their policy views, what can be conceived as the "source code" of political representation. For example, as I detail below, even the campaign's Internet policy was the work of experts, entirely closed to public participation.

Given the delimited ends of participation, for many Internet Division staffers and supporters, the idea of the open source campaign worked culturally to transform transactional political campaigning into a radically democratic act. As the next sections detail, Joe Trippi was instrumental in crafting this association, serving as a cultural "entrepreneur" (Iacono & Kling, 2001) who rhetorically situated the campaign's uptake of digital media for supporters, staffers, and other electoral actors, not only in terms of open source, but more broadly within discourses of new economy business practices and conceptions of participatory democracy espoused by social movements.

THE DEAN CAMPAIGN, THE NEW ECONOMY, AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Even as it served as an aspirational ideal for many staffers, Trippi, along with other staffers, wielded the idea of the open source campaign publicly and rhetorically to gather press, money, and volunteers for the campaign. Importantly, Trippi situated the idea of the open source campaign within larger narratives of the new economy and participatory democracy, and more enduring, stable patterns of cultural meaning (Ferree, 2003, p. 309). In articulating the campaign within the discourse surrounding the new economy, staffers invited journalists to imagine Dean's run in light of Silicon Valley claims regarding consumer empowerment. Meanwhile,

"participatory democracy" has long served as a powerfully legitimating "master frame" for social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 618), and provided open source technical production with an expressly political grounding.

A remarkable array of new terms entered the political lexicon during Dean's run for the presidency, revealing this symbolic work. While few seasoned political journalists had even heard of Linux or blogs at the start of the primary season, by September 2003 even trade publications such as *Campaigns & Elections* marveled at the campaign's use of Meetup.com and quoted Trippi's proclamations that the Dean campaign "isn't top-down organizing; it's really bottom-up" (Mark, 2003, p. 8). Many journalists interpreted all aspects of the campaign through the lens of the Internet, seeing it as the political analogue of the dot.com firms of the 1990s. And, just as the new economy supposedly empowered consumers, these journalists suggested, so the Dean campaign used digital tools to realize the 1960s dream of participatory democracy.

For Dean's staffers, the campaign's uptake of the Internet resembled a host of shifts that pundits and academics argued had come about with the new economy. This was due to the fundamental technological changes that were seemingly revolutionizing much of economic and social life. Trippi (2004) and other staffers, for instance, argued that the campaign was equivalent to the pioneering sites of "Amazon.com, eBay, and all the online travel agencies" (pp. 209–210) where empowered consumers bought, sold, and traded their wares. In other words, the same digital tools that enabled consumers to access and trade goods without any intermediaries also allowed them as citizens to take democracy into their own hands. Trippi (2004) even went so far as to blend the commercial and political registers, arguing that there "are not just markets anymore. They're communities. And we're not just consumers. We're citizens again. We're looking for the companies, politicians, and institutions that will build the best communities" (p. 82).

This cultural link to Silicon Valley in turn enabled journalists to write about the campaign through the well-established story genre of the dot.com start-up. Despite the organizational

complexity of the campaign and the political professionals who populated much of it outside the Internet Division, technology and political journalists interpreted nearly all aspects of Dean's run through the lens of a fledgling Silicon Valley firm. For example, in *Fast Company*, Tischler (2003) argued that: "Dean's campaign has all the hallmarks of a startup circa 1997. It's getting big fast. It's monetizing eyeballs" (p. 109). These characterizations of the campaign did not simply appear in the business and lifestyle magazines of the Valley—publications that paid scant attention to politics during previous electoral cycles. In an expansive profile of the Dean campaign in *The New York Times Magazine*, Shapiro (2003) cited how Internet theorists such as Weinberger, Doc Searls, and Howard Rheingold consulted for the campaign and described the Internet Division as looking "a lot like a dot-com start-up from the mid-90s: preternaturally pale-skinned young men, crazy hours and slightly messianic rhetoric."

As they interpreted the Dean campaign as the electoral application of the technical and business practices of the Valley, journalists legitimated its innovations for a wider audience of citizens and political actors. This worked two ways in a powerful process of "legitimacy exchange" (Bowker, 1993, p. 116) that occurred between the campaign and Valley business interests. The campaign, for instance, legitimated its novel—and thus risky and uncertain—technical practices by pointing to open source projects such as Linux and the way Valley firms empowered consumers, especially when faced with questions from journalists and political elites regarding whether the online campaign would be effective. At the same time, given sagging industry fortunes with the dot.com bust, the campaign's success during the summer months offered the possibility of affirming the Valley's social and business vision. Luminaries of the industry were quick to promote this. For example, in February 2004, the "O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference," one of the consummate industry gatherings founded by open source guru Tim O'Reilly, sponsored a co-located "O'Reilly Digital Democracy Teach-In" that brought together many of the key

players from the Dean campaign to discuss how "Internet technologies are putting power back into the hands of people" (O'Reilly Digital Democracy Teach-In, 2004).

Meanwhile, in the political register, staffers argued that the Dean campaign realized ideal participatory democratic practices. On one level, the collaborative ethos behind open source technical efforts and the empowered consumption of the Internet age fit culturally with ideal conceptions of democracy among Dean's progressive staffers. In this sense, the expanded opportunities for electoral engagement facilitated by networked media reinvigorated democratic life, so much so that Trippi (2004) dedicated his autobiography of the campaign "to the six hundred thousand people of Dean for America who relit the flame of participatory democracy."

On another, however, the conceptions of technology and benefits of mediated citizen engagement espoused by members of the Dean campaign echoed theories of participatory democracy advanced by leftist social movements during the 1960s. The origins of contemporary formulations of participatory democracy lie with the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its influential Port Huron Statement. The Statement was the founding document of the era and intellectual cornerstone of the "metaphysics of participation" among the New Left (Gitlin, 1987, pp. 102–103). Espousing the psychological benefits of participation in political, social, and economic life, the SDS argued that participation would help create "communicative beings" and help men realize their "potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity" (Miller, 1987, p. 332). The prospects for participation, in turn, were deeply entwined with technology, communications media, and social organization. SDS activists believed that "supertechnology" in the hands of bureaucratic elites dehumanized men and fragmented communities (p. 330). The way forward was through citizen engagement in public affairs using "the media for their common participation" and "by experiments in decentralization, based on the vision of man as master of his machines and his society" (p. 364).

Forty years later, staffers on the Dean campaign channeled many of these sentiments as

they crafted their own brand of open source, Internet-empowered politics. For many Dean figures, the Internet was a symbol of ideal democratic forms conceived in much the same terms as the SDS even as it was a tool for realizing this social vision. Dean technology advisor Howard Rheingold, for instance, argued that the Internet inherently had a “decentralized, self-organizing power” that was uniquely democratic, even as it facilitated supporters’ use of Meetup to create political “smart mobs” that were “returning power to the people” (Skinner, 2004). Indeed, these figures believed that the Internet, by its very design, supported the ability of individuals to take action in political life and challenge elites, political parties, and interest groups. As Trippi (2004) argued, “The Internet is tailor-made for a populist, insurgent movement. Its roots in the open-source ARPANET, its hacker culture, and its decentralized, scattered architecture make it difficult for big, establishment candidates, companies, and media to gain control of it” (p. 102). In essence, these figures argued that the Internet was the humanized technology that the SDS was calling for, since it supported a decentralized social order and the communicative links that realize new forms of political power.

At the same time, Trippi and others conceived of many of the benefits of this communicative, mediated political participation in psychological terms. Dean figures argued that through the renewed democratic participation made possible by the Internet, individuals developed the self and overcame the psychological alienation caused by the much-maligned “broadcast model” of political communication. For example, Trippi argued that in this new style of Internet politics, campaign managers needed to “unleash the power of the people to be creative” (Tischler, 2003, p. 109). Citizens, in turn, would have the means to act as creative agents of their own participation, joining not only in electoral activities that they themselves plan but expressive forms of communicative engagement, given that online everyone can be a media producer. All of which, Trippi and others argued, restored the very foundations of American democracy itself: “America is built from the bottom up—not from the top down. Historically to release

this creative energy of the people is to create not a political storm, but tsunami of power, purpose, and patriotism” (Trippi & Cadell, 2003).

While this section revealed the broader cultural tributaries to the symbolic work of Dean’s staffers, in the pages that follow, I detail how framing the campaign as a radical technodemocratic movement was both deliberate and garnered significant resources for the candidate.

GOING PUBLIC AND CREATING A MOVEMENT

Situating the campaign as the political analogue of open source software and the dot.com economy only worked to the extent that the SDS’s ideological descendants on the Dean campaign were able to harness the power of the professional press. This section focuses on how Dean’s staffers and advisors used rhetorical claims of the technologically empowered campaign as a cultural resource alongside the symbolic deployment of digital tools to drive widespread press interest in and shape public understandings of the campaign. As Zack Exley (personal communication, January 6, 2009), a staffer at MoveOn who consulted for the Dean campaign, argues, for Trippi the Internet “was this huge newshook. You could combine the Internet with any old-fashioned campaign story and the papers would eat it up.” This cultural work, meanwhile, translated into significant resources, increasing public awareness of Dean’s candidacy, changing the perception of his chances, and assisting with fundraising and recruiting and mobilizing volunteers. It also worked ideologically to define Dean’s run almost entirely in terms of the Internet, while enabling the campaign to secure the buy-in of supporters and keep them contributing.

The campaign’s uptake of the Internet served as the focal point for journalistic accounts of the campaign. While it is not surprising that many technology-oriented magazines embraced narratives of the digital campaign, as Table 1 makes clear, even many political journalists covered Dean’s run through the trope of the campaign’s uptake of the Internet.

TABLE 1. Newspaper Articles about the Howard Dean Campaign's Use of the Internet and Total Coverage of the Campaign January 2003–February 2004

	Internet	Total articles	Percent of stories
January	2	173	1%
February	4	143	3%
March	13	113	12%
April	8	145	6%
May	16	186	9%
June	38	205	19%
July	88	374	24%
August	71	376	19%
September	92	692	13%
October	85	539	16%
November	109	745	15%
December	173	1222	14%
January	268	2244	12%
February	255	1391	18%
Total	1222	8548	14%

Note: Lexis/Nexus database search of 29 major market daily Newspapers.

Generating these journalistic accounts was part of the press strategy honed by Trippi. From very early on, Internet Division staffers and consultants deliberately and constantly pushed “stories around about what we were doing with the Internet” (Jerome Armstrong, personal communication, November 21, 2008). One reason staffers were so successful at getting these stories in the press was their attention to providing journalists with verifiable metrics of the campaign’s online support. For example, as early as mid-March 2003, the campaign hosted a “Million Dollar Meetup Challenge” for Howard Dean that involved supporters adding a penny to their contributions made over the Internet so the campaign—and journalists—could determine the source of these funds. Meetups themselves served as an important metric that journalists used in assessing the early support of primary campaigns, regardless of the fact that many of these gatherings occurred in states without important nominating contests. For example, the press widely reported on the crowds that the tool helped draw to Dean’s campaign events. A March 2003 Meetup in New York that drew over 300 supporters to hear the candidate, for instance, launched Dean as the Internet candidate for many journalists. Trippi even made sure the campaign continued to use Meetup as an

organizing tool throughout the primaries, given that it provided a verifiable metric of online support for journalists, despite the fact that the campaign had developed better event management tools in-house.

Nothing attracted the attention of journalists more than the campaign’s staging of high-profile public events that dramatically demonstrated its online organizing and fundraising capacity. For example, an early and important symbolic victory for the Dean campaign came during the “MoveOn primary.” On June 24 and 25, MoveOn.org, the largest and most powerful progressive online organization, held an online primary to see if its members could make an endorsement. For Trippi, this was an important opportunity to demonstrate the campaign’s online support—particularly given that it came in advance of the public release of the campaign’s second quarter fundraising numbers (which had Dean leading both Kerry and Edwards). As Nicco Mele (personal communication, July 29, 2008), the campaign’s Webmaster, explains: “Trippi was very focused, MoveOn became a critical focal point for Trippi and consequently for the whole campaign . . . the focus was to impress MoveOn, and attract MoveOn’s attention, and to win the MoveOn primary. It really just gave focus to the campaign.”

Trippi not only saw the organizational strength of MoveOn, given the 317,647 members who voted, but construed, and subsequently framed, this as a key early metric for political journalists to judge the strength and support of the primary campaigns. Dean won with 43.87% of the vote in a field of nine. While this was short of the 50 percent threshold necessary to win the official endorsement of the organization, the primary received wide coverage including a *New York Times* editorial (*The New York Times*, 2003).

The campaign followed up its MoveOn primary victory with online fundraising events that both raised significant monies for the campaign and garnered an extraordinary amount of media attention. Journalists followed these events closely because of their novelty: even during the summer of the 2003–2004 cycle, fundraising online, especially in small increments, was not a well-developed campaign practice. While the campaign held many fundraising drives, a singular event in July received widespread press coverage and became canonic for many who believed the Internet revolutionized the political process. During a \$2,000-a-plate fundraiser hosted by Vice President Dick Cheney, the Dean campaign posted a picture of the candidate eating a turkey sandwich on the Dean For America Web site. Small donations poured in, and Dean out-raised Cheney by nearly \$200,000. While the amount raised was spectacular for online fundraising at the time, just as importantly, Dean's feat grabbed headlines on political pages throughout the country as awestruck journalists watched the campaign's stunning success in online fundraising.

Even as this press attention heightened the visibility of the candidate, it performed cultural work by situating the meaning of the campaign in simultaneously technical, commercial, and political registers. As such, the campaign both had wide appeal, and supporters from different social and professional communities could imagine their electoral work in diverse ways. The developer volunteering for the Dean campaign, for instance, could see the processes and products of coding as a form of political action. Entrepreneurs could see a powerful demonstration of their profit-generating tools being put towards progressive and, ultimately, democratic

ends. Political activists, meanwhile, could invest the often trudging and unheroic work of politics with the veneer of countercultural computing, becoming the hackers of progressive politics as they used Meetups to organize their communities. All of these visions helped the campaign recruit specialized volunteers from among these constituencies and build a broad-based electoral movement.

The cultural construction of Dean's electoral effort as an open source movement helped create and mobilize a technically skilled community of supporters. For example, the campaign developed a formal policy position in support of open source technologies in order to get covered on Slashdot, the large, collaborative group blog populated by technology industry professionals, hackers, and computer enthusiasts—an important group of potential campaign supporters. Zephyr Teachout (personal communication, July 10, 2008), the campaign's Director of Internet Organizing, explained that:

we were using it [the open source policy] to get *Slashdotted*. So, it is actually a story about political strategy, not about policy creation. It was not an open source–created policy platform, it was a policy platform about open source. . . . Half the people who helped write it were wonderful lefty San Francisco technologists on the finance team. . . . I liked the policy, but this is not a radical democratic moment. Now, the reason it is radical and important, the serious point, is that issues that were otherwise completely off the charts are now suddenly important for lots of people. Because suddenly you are responsive to a new category of donors including the *Slashdotters*.⁵

While this was largely a transactional relationship for the campaign, for the Slashdot community it was a validation that a major party presidential candidate heard their concerns. As a Slashdotter announced the news: “Regardless if you're for Dean, against Dean, or you're not an American, it's great to see an American politician on the national level using and promoting free software. I wonder if RMS [Richard

Matthew Stallman] thought he'd see a U.S. presidential candidate releasing stuff under the GPL when he founded GNU 20 years ago!" (Michael, 2003).

This strategy of appealing to specialized communities to help garner fiscal and other support for Dean's candidacy extended beyond Slashdot. Dean's advisors and staffers also symbolically fashioned their efforts as a new economy experiment. Trippi, for instance, recruited David Weinberger, co-author of the business text *The ClueTrain Manifesto*, to serve as the Senior Internet Advisor for the campaign. Trippi looked to him to bring the cache of the new economy to Dean's run and provide "publicity and credibility" for the campaign with an eye towards getting political elites to pay attention to and understand its new media innovations (Weinberger, personal communication, November 21, 2008). Trippi also tasked Weinberger with "drumming up enthusiasm among some Internet people," particularly those who were among the foremost interpreters of digital technologies and social change. To this end, Weinberger created Dean's "Net Advisory Net" (NAN)—an Internet policy group that included new media superstars such as Howard Rheingold, Lawrence Lessig, and Joi Ito, a prominent venture capitalist. The NAN received considerable attention—particularly among bloggers—for the policy positions it developed as Dean's "Statement of Internet Principles." Yet, reflecting the fact that open source was only construed in limited, electoral domains, there was no opportunity for public input in the NAN's work.

Staffers and advisers also blended the technical and commercial registers with the more general terms of democratic empowerment, framing the campaign's uptake of digital tools in terms of traditional social movement activities. As Trippi (2004) put it: "When you looked at him [Dean], you were going to think Internet and personal empowerment in the same way you thought Vietnam hero when you looked at John Kerry, or Southern optimism when you looked at John Edwards" (p. 100). On one level, this quote reveals how Trippi wanted to fashion Dean into a symbol of the ways the Internet allowed citizens to engage in political action. On another, Trippi connected personal

empowerment to larger narratives of political community. Publicly citing books such as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* as the inspiration for the Dean campaign, Trippi argued that the Internet enabled citizens to overcome their alienation from the democratic process and band together to create new forms of political association.

In framing the campaign in this way, Trippi strove to mobilize and motivate those supporters for whom the Internet and blogs were thought of more as tools for deeper engagement in the political process than revolutionary and transformative forces reshaping society. To this end, staffers integrated the rhetoric of empowerment into nearly all the campaign's communications with supporters. As Kelly Nuxoll (2007), the e-mail manager for the campaign, describes, in communication with supporters the campaign's style was to "never say 'our' campaign; say 'your' campaign" (p. 194). Staffers used these rhetorical techniques to describe how supporters had ownership over the campaign while calling on them to take specific forms of action. This was especially so for Trippi, who was like a "muezzin" in his inspirational messages to supporters, particularly during fundraising appeals (Nuxoll, 2007, p. 198). As importantly, staffers adopted a personal style of address, signing their own names to e-mails, to mask the mass-ness of this communication. In doing so, these staffers attempted to create and foster feelings of intimacy toward the campaign among supporters and increase the likelihood they would become and remain involved. Thus, while e-mail communication was only one-way and thousands of people received the same message on a regular basis, even a former staffer to Vice President Gore confessed that "I feel like I have a personal relationship with Joe Trippi" (Mack, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Dean's star rose throughout the summer of 2003, culminating in a \$200,000 10-city, four-day "Sleepless Summer Tour." This was the high point of the campaign, when Dean's nomination looked likely to even the most jaded political professionals. It would end soon. As

the improbable frontrunner throughout the fall and winter, Dean was a target for his rivals and the press. As the candidate made their job of discrediting him easier with a series of gaffes, the campaign ended up losing control of the press narrative Trippi had so assiduously cultivated.

These missteps were, however, minor compared to a disastrous on-the-ground field effort in the crucial state of Iowa. For all the vaunted Internet-based applications, field staffers lacked very basic tools for getting out the vote, had no “precinct captains” in half of the Iowa districts, and worked from an outdated list of volunteers who had signed up online. With few local volunteers, the campaign drew on its significant national support on college campuses, in urban areas, and on the coasts in a last ditch “perfect storm” effort, sending 3,500 mostly out of state volunteers into Iowa wearing orange hats. The strategy backfired on a number of levels. Iowans expect locals to contact them, and the campaign lacked the basic infrastructure to manage and deploy these volunteers. In the days before the caucuses, the campaign had few options except to devote much of its remaining resources to massive television advertising outlays. Dean emerged from the caucuses with a third-place finish, an endlessly replayed “scream” haunting the cable news networks, and a nearly broke campaign. Weeks later he withdrew from the nomination race.

While Dean’s downfall suggests that the campaign’s technical and organizational innovations did not translate into electoral success, they were hardly insignificant. Drawing on models of open source technical production, Dean’s staffers used the Internet as an organizational tool, decentralizing much fundraising, voter outreach, and even technical development for the first time in a political campaign. Inspired by the collaborative ideals of the open source movement, and provided with an organizational space for innovation given the need to find resources for the outsider candidate, these staffers built and deployed a new set of digital campaign tools that enabled supporters to participate in these tasks. As such, the Dean campaign reveals how open source provides a set of value-laden practices that can be incorporated into domains far afield of technical projects such as Linux.

And yet, even as open source guided the internal organizational practices of many of Dean’s technically skilled staffers, it was also a cultural resource that staffers deployed instrumentally for electoral gain. Articulated within narratives of the new economy and participatory democracy, the framing of Dean’s campaign as an open source and radically techno-democratic movement provided an interpretative framework for journalists to understand Dean’s run. It legitimated many of the campaign’s innovations, while attracting an extraordinary amount of press coverage. Framing the campaign’s uptake of the Internet in technical, commercial, and political registers also appealed to multiple constituencies, helping the campaign attract and motivate supporters to perform high-end technical labor, donate money, and talk to voters. And yet, even as symbolic work around the Internet helped the campaign garner resources and become the center of the political world, it may have also led Dean away from the nomination. As Jascha Franklin Hodge (personal communication, December 22, 2008), Dean’s National Systems Administrator and co-founder of the firm that provided much of the online infrastructure for Obama’s campaign, argues: “People became so enamored with the idea of what it was that they were doing that they sometimes lost the macro-political perspective that is necessary to actually get out there and win.”

To the extent that staffers and supporters understood and experienced their online work for Dean as a transformative new way of practicing politics, it may have distracted from their ability to hold the campaign to account for its larger strategy. As they imagined their participation in backend electoral tasks as the summation of the campaign, Dean’s Internet Division staffers and online supporters paid little attention to the formal campaign organization. Yet, it became painfully clear after Iowa that the campaign’s hierarchy maintained authority over the key strategy, allocative, and management decisions that ultimately shaped Dean’s electoral prospects.

And yet, while many journalists proclaimed Dean’s campaign a failure of dot.com proportions and wrote their obituaries accordingly, something was taking shape outside of the public eye during the waning days of the

primaries in 2004. Few recognized the extent to which Dean's staffers and advisors had reshaped the cultural grounds of Internet politics. In the harsh winter of 2004, as comments on BlogForAmerica.com tapered off, fundraising fell to a trickle, and Trippi headed for sunnier climes, the phones of the staffers that developed Dean's online campaign were ringing. Michael Silberman, Dean's National Meetup Director, recalls that in the midst of a wreck of a campaign, the future was unexpectedly bright as everyone in the political world wanted the Dean "magic": "We all received calls from people trying to poach us. . . . We were all pretty well marketable at that time, probably more so than we knew" (personal communication, July 20, 2008).

Dean's Internet Division staffers had become the arbiters of a new form of politics, and they capitalized on these professional opportunities to launch a new generation of political consultancies specializing in new media. These firms became the vehicles through which the campaign's technologies, online organizing practices, and staffers spread throughout the political field, from the corridors of the Democratic Party once Dean was elected chair in 2005 and hired his former staffers to rebuild the organization's technical infrastructure to the New Media Division of the first African American president (Kreiss, forthcoming).

NOTES

1. This article focuses on Democratic online political campaigning because Democratic candidates were the primary drivers of innovation in online electoral innovation during the 2004 and 2008 election cycles. Dean not only drove technical innovation in 2003–2004, but the candidate's former staffers in the Internet Division built much of the organizational and technical infrastructure for the Democratic Party and Obama's run in 2007–2008 (Kreiss, in press). For a discussion of how the political environment and Democratic out-party status, in part, drove this innovation, see Karpf (2009).

2. The formal Internet Division consisted of approximately 12 staffers within the larger campaign organization. There were also a number of staffers whose work revolved around the Internet and the campaign's technical systems in other divisions such as Field, Communications, and Finance. These individuals often worked closely with the

Internet Division, so much so that divisional affiliations and reporting were not always clear. When I reference the "Internet Division" in this article, I am referring to this larger group of staffers whose job responsibilities primarily entailed working online with supporters or developing the campaign's technical infrastructure. For a fuller discussion of the campaign organization, including an organizational chart, see Kreiss (2009).

3. Many of Dean's Internet Division staffers founded consulting firms shortly after the primaries, carrying Dean's tools and organizational practices with them to other sites, including Barack Obama's historic bid for the presidency (Kreiss, 2010). This history detailing how the Dean campaign was the origin point for the dissemination of contemporary networked campaign practices is the subject of my forthcoming book from Oxford University Press (Kreiss, forthcoming).

4. The campaign was willing to test the boundaries of election law. For example, a former staffer of John Edward's Internet teams describes how lawyers for the 2003–2004 Edwards campaign internally debated questions such as the legality of supporters building their own sites for the candidate. Dean's staffers, by contrast, felt they had little to lose with a long-shot candidate and simply forged ahead with supporter collaboration, the idea being that they would worry about the legal issues later (Aaron Myers, personal communication, May 9, 2009).

5. The specific policy in question was to release the software the campaign was developing under the GNU general public license. This was the Deanspace technology developed by Rosen based on Drupal.

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APPENDIX. Interviews Conducted with Former Staffers of the
Howard Dean Campaign

Name	Dean Position
Jerome Armstrong	Consultant
Larry Biddle	Deputy Finance Director
Jim Brayton	Web Designer/System Administrator
Bobby Clark	Web Strategist
Zack Exley	Advisor
Jascha Franklin-Hodge	National Systems Administrator
Aldon Hynes	Volunteer Hack4Dean
Neil Jensen	Volunteer, Internet Division
Clay Johnson	Programmer
Nicco Mele	Webmaster
Amanda Michel	National Director, Generation Dean
Adam Mordecai	Iowa Field Staff
Kelly Nuxoll	E-mail Manager
Tamara Pogue	Field Director
Zack Rosen	Volunteer Hack4Dean Programmer
Joe Rospars	E-mail writer
Ben Self	Chief Data Architect
Michael Silberman	Director of MeetUps
Zephyr Teachout	Director of Internet Organizing
Chris Warshaw	Iowa, Wisconsin Field Staff
David Weinberger	Senior Technology Advisor