ONLINE STRUCTURE FOR POLITICAL ACTION: EXPLORING PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN WEB SITES FROM THE 2000 AMERICAN ELECTION

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Abstract

From the perspective of a citizen-Web user, what forms of political action might the presidential campaign sites in 2000 have catalysed? This article explores the online structure – conceptualised as an electronic space within which an individual is given an opportunity to act – for political action engendered by presidential campaign Web sites in the 2000 U.S. election. The Web sites of the thirteen presidential campaigns that were active in the 2000 American election are surveyed and analysed. We find that the online structure facilitated both online and offline political action, and illustrate several dimensions of this phenomenon.

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Introduction

Did presidential candidate Web sites make a "difference" in the 2000 American election?[1] The answer, of course, depends on the meaning of the question. There is no evidence presented to date suggesting that – absent the Web – another candidate than the ultimate winner would have been elected. In fact, the current trend, in both popular and scholarly discourse, is to downplay, if not reject outright, the revolutionary impact of the Internet on politics and political behaviour. This argument suggests that politics on the Internet resembles closely politics offline – and that what happens online is inconsequential since there is no clear evidence yet of it affecting electoral outcomes. What has been called the "normalisation" hypothesis (Margolis and Resnick 2000) seems, somewhat paradoxically, to be reinforced by the failure of commercial models of Web-based political information distribution in the United States during the 2000 election campaign.

This view, it seems to us, mistakes the lack of electoral outcome evidence for a lack of significant impact. A focus on the apparent lack of impact of the Web on voting behaviour may overlook the fundamental changes in campaign processes, and thus the political system, manifested in the thousands of political Web sites – and the links between them – that surfaced during the 2000 election season. We concur with King (2002) in suggesting that analysing what political actors actually do on the Web reveals a rapidly evolving political system.

In this article, part of a broader analysis of the nature and structure of the political Web that emerged during the 2000 American election, we explore the structure for political action engendered by presidential campaign Web sites. As part of a grounded theory analysis of the political Web that emerged during the 2000 American campaign, this article serves as an important foundational step in which we identify categories of political action enabled by the Web and link genres of Web content and features with these action categories. The research question guiding this study was: From the perspective of a citizen-Web user, what forms of political action might the presidential campaign sites in 2000 have catalysed? We present our findings on the frequency with which the structural elements we have identified appeared on the presidential campaign sites during the 2000 election, and analyse the implications of these frequencies for enabling political action.

Our analysis of online structure on U.S. presidential campaign sites in 2000 is situated in and illuminated by the relatively brief history of politics on the Internet. As outlined in numerous sources, the history of the Internet begins with the advent of the ARPANET in the United States in the mid-1960s. The first overtly political uses of the Internet are usually traced back to Usenet, which was first introduced in 1979. By 1986, communities with explicit political agendas had adopted email and bulletin board systems and were using these Internet applications intensively. The dominant conclusion of both users and contemporaneous scholars was that computer networking technology had the potential to dramatically alter the nature and shape of political discourse, and of democracy itself, by engaging and energising new participants in the political process (Abramson, Arterton, and Orren 1988; Downing 1989; Dulio, Goff, and Thurber 1999; Garramone, Harris, and Anderson 1986; Glass 1996; Hacker et al. 1996; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Meadow 1986; Mickunas and Pilotta 1998; Myers 1993; O'Sullivan 1995; Schneider 1996).

By the 1996 and 1998 campaigns, Internet-based politics had moved from the

arcane and utopian (Hacker et al. 1996; Myers 1993) and closer to the mainstream (Bimber 1998; Bucy, D'Angelo, and Newhagen 1999; Davis and Owen 1998; Dulio, Goff, and Thurber 1999; Kamarck 1999; Margolis, Resnick, and Tu 1997; Tedesco, Miller, and Spiker 1998). This movement is suggested by the emergence on the Web of mainstream political candidates and party organisations. For example, in 1996, both major party candidates (Clinton and Dole) had general election Web sites, as well as presidential candidates from minor parties, including Perot and Nader. In addition, several candidates in the presidential primaries, including Buchanan and Forbes, maintained Web sites during the first phase of the campaign as well. At least one-third of Senate candidates maintained Web sites during the 1996 campaign (Kamarck 1999), a figure which increased to more than two-thirds of Senate and open-House candidates in 1998 (Dulio, Goff, and Thurber 1999). By the 2000 campaign, we estimate that 72% of Senate candidates and 53% of House candidates maintained campaign sites – figures that increase to 76% and 68%, respectively, when considering challengers and candidates in open seats (Stromer-Galley et al. 2001). This finding is consistent with Puopolo (2001), who found that 88% of major party Senate candidates maintained Web sites.

Other analyses of the political Web in previous U.S. elections focused on features available to Web users. One study found that 75% of the candidate sites examined used interactive features, such as e-mail addresses, on their sites (Davis 1999). None of the candidates, however, used the Internet to have public discussions with citizens; all chose which e-mail messages to respond to (Klinenberg and Perrin 2000; Stromer-Galley 2000). Kamarck (1999) offers a large-scale analysis of campaign site content for the 1998 senatorial and gubernatorial races. She finds that most sites provided what has been termed "brochure-ware," more or less pamphlets transformed into on-line form, providing candidate histories and issue positions. Few candidates used their sites in 1998 to attack opponents, or to direct visitors to related sites. And surprisingly, although a majority of sites solicited volunteer help, only a small number solicited on-line donations. Harpham (1999) confirms several of Kamarck's findings, and also notes that 49% of sites contained endorsements from outside individuals or groups and that half failed to identify the candidate by party. Similarly, Dulio (1999) finds that nearly one-third accepted online contributions.

These figures demonstrate that the Web has become a realm in which most campaigns find it necessary to have some kind of a presence— although what that presence should entail and how it should be enacted is still ambiguous to many of these actors. As King (2002) argues: "Today a typical campaign's organisation chart includes a campaign manager, treasurer, press manager, and volunteer co-ordinator. Tomorrow a new position will be listed among the campaign's leaders: Web co-ordinator. The Web will be that central to tomorrow's campaign, and we will come to think of the computer – with its dynamic links to data and voters – as the new 'political machine.'" As the Web becomes increasingly significant in electoral campaigns, new questions arise about the forms of political action that may be catalysed or constrained by the online structures created by campaigns.

We have described and theorised previously three dimensions of action by Web site producers and provided exemplars of the ways they were apparent on the Web across site genres during the 2000 campaign (Foot and Schneider forthcoming). We found that the U.S. electoral Web sphere in 2000 included coproduction,

carnival and mobilisation as forms of political action on the part of Web site producers. We concluded that article by suggesting that a close examination of these action dimensions on the Web reveals several developments that may have significant, long-term implications for electoral politics, including: novel forms of co-operation between rival actors; shifts in campaign practices; and the establishment of the Web (distinct from other Internet applications) as a robust dimension of the U.S. public sphere.

In this article, we shift our attention from the online action engaged in by producers of the political Web sphere to the online structure for political action on the part of Web users that was manifested on campaign sites in 2000. Our focus in this analysis is on presidential campaign Web sites, specifically, the online structure facilitating both online and offline political action that was developed on and through these sites. Our goals were to uncover the dimensions of online structure, and to begin an exploration of the relationship between online structure and political action that developed during the 2000 election season in the United States.

Online Structure for Political Action

Our notion of "online structure" is derived from the literature on social movements and the literature examining the potential of the Internet to foster political change. In particular, we attempt to build on the work within the social movements literature distinguishing between "structure" and "action" (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow 1998). Much theoretical work in the social movements literature focuses on the relationship between political mobilisation, and formal organisations, external political processes, and internal organisational features (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996b; Mueller 1992). Toward this end, McAdam (1996a) provides a comparative analysis of different theoretical approaches to using the structure of mobilisation processes as an analytic tool. This literature suggests the utility of distinguishing between the structure for action, and the action itself, and draws attention to the characteristics of the "micromobilisation contexts" (McAdam 1988), "free spaces" (Evans and Boyte 1986) and other associational forms (Cohen and Rogers 1995; Oldenburg 1989; Oldenburg 2001) that facilitate political action.

Parallel to developments in social movements literature, other scholars have suggested that the Internet (or its network precursors) could function as a structure that facilitates political action. An "optimistic" strand in the literature on computer-mediated communication and political behaviour, as reviewed by Margolis and Resnick (2000), suggests that the Internet democratised politics by fostering greater participation, encouraging new parties and interests groups, and levelling the playing field among system participants. This optimism was present in Vannevar Bush's (1945) prescient article, "As We May Think," which presaged the development of electronic computer networks, as well as in some of the earliest discussions of using "information utilities'' for political purposes (Leonard et al. 1971; Sheridan 1971; Stevens 1971). More recently, several scholars have examined the degree to which the Internet, and in particular electronic discussion forums, serve to expand the arena for meaningful political conversation (Baoill 2000; Dahlberg 1998; Schneider 1996).

We seek here to unite these two strands of literature, and examine the relationship between "online structures" and potential "political actions." We conceptual-

ise an "online structure" as a particular electronic space, comprised of various html pages, features, links and texts, within which an individual is given an opportunity to act. We are particularly focused on the development and use of campaign Web sites as an online structure for political action.

Political campaigns have, of course, long functioned as offline structures for political action. Campaign offices serve as physical spaces within which activist citizens can engage in political action. For example, activists staff phone banks, produce and distribute literature, and interact with campaign professionals in these spaces. In addition, campaigns use other structures to invite and provide opportunities for citizen action, for example, television commercials, direct mail, and billboards. In the 2000 campaign, presidential campaign Web sites also provided *online* structure that engendered a variety of types of political action. These actions ranged from the relatively straightforward information gathering to engaging in political talk (Barber 1984). Some of the political action made possible and/or explicitly encouraged by campaign sites was intended to be carried out while online, either through further use of the same site or through other Internet services such as the Web, email, chat, newsgroups, or instant messaging. Other action engendered by the site required offline engagement, whether through face-to-face or telephonic conversation, the display and distribution of "hard copy" materials, or bodily presence at rallies and other campaign events. Thus, we suggest that candidate Web sites provided online structure for both online action and offline action.

For the analysis presented in this paper, we surveyed the Web sites of 13 presidential campaigns that were active in the 2000 American election. Eight of the campaigns produced sites during the primary season; five of the candidate sites examined were active during the general election. We report findings from our survey of all 13 sites.[2] A presidential campaign site was a publicly available Web site identified by a presidential campaign as the "official" site for the campaign.[3] Our analysis of primary campaign sites was based on a survey on archived impressions captured during the height of the early primary season on January 14, 2000. General election sites were examined on or shortly before Election Day (November 7, 2000). The impressions of the general election Web sites we surveyed are available in an archive collected by the U.S. Library of Congress and housed, as of this writing, at the Internet Archive, as noted in the footnotes. There is, as of this writing, no publicly accessible archive housing primary campaign Web sites; our analysis relied on the private collection of the authors, and thus citations are provided to the original sites only.

Our intention in this analysis was to identify the particular ways in which online structure was created by presidential campaigns in the 2000 elections, and to develop a basic catalogue of the variety of actions encouraged or facilitated by the online structure enacted by the presidential campaign sites. Other analyses of campaigns' use of the Web in recent elections have proposed and employed various typologies of Web site features and content for cataloguing the range and distribution of such elements on campaign sites (e.g. Benoit and Benoit 2000; D'Alessio 2000; Kamarck 1999; Puopolo 2001). In contrast, we seek to move beyond description of campaign Web site elements by proposing that campaign sites constitute online structure for both online and offline political action.

Through repeated explorations of the presidential campaign sites in 2000 we identified a listing of actions that were invited, enabled, and/or otherwise facili-

tated through the features, texts, and links on these sites. We then developed categories for these actions that reflect general categories in the literature on political action. A wide variety of activities can be considered "political action" or "political activities"(see, e.g., the discussions in Almond and Verba 1965; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Verba and Nie's (1972) index of political participation order six types of participants – ranging from inactives to complete activists – based on the type of political action in which they engage. Similarly, Brady et al (1995) identify various political activities, such as voting, contacting, contributing, campaign work, and protest, noting that participation varies along dimensions such as amount of time involved, financial commitment, skill and social acceptability.

Our categories of political action, ordered loosely by the increasing intensity of engagement they entail, include: (1) information gathering and persuasion; (2) political education; (3) political talk; (4) voter mobilisation; (5) candidate promotion; and (6) campaign participation. These categories are not exhaustive. In the sections that follow we offer brief overviews of political action enabled by campaign Web sites to guide further research and analysis. We then present a comparative analysis of the presidential campaign sites, demonstrating the extent to which the observed online structures were available to facilitate action during the 2000 presidential campaign.

Information Gathering & Persuasion

All candidate sites provided online structure for information gathering and persuasion, perhaps the most foundational forms of political (inter)action between campaigns and citizens. Citizens seek information as a first step of political action, and campaigns seek to persuade information seekers to become supporters. The most common online structure employed by candidate sites to facilitate information gathering and persuasion was what Kamarck (1999) termed "brochure-ware," including candidate biographies, campaign news, candidate speeches, and position paper.

Although some campaign sites relied mainly on brochure-ware to facilitate information-seeking and persuasion, other sites exploited the extensible and multi-media capacities of the Web to present more detailed information, in a variety of forms and on a broader range of topics than traditional printed or broadcast media could contain. One site, for example, included the candidate's statements on 32 different issues, some of which linked to multi-page reports.[4] Other campaigns provided short video or audio segments, originally produced as advertisements to be broadcast on television or radio, to visitors to their Web sites. The forms of action encouraged by these features were mainly online, although some sites explicitly suggested the site visitors print issue stance comparisons,[5] thus encouraging offline action as well. Finally, nearly all of the campaigns provided the opportunity for visitors to add their name to the campaign's email list, thus extending the reach of the candidate's Web site beyond the single visit, and establishing opportunities for continued interaction between the campaign and the visitor.

Political Education. Several of the presidential candidate sites facilitated and explicitly encouraged site visitors to participate in political self-education – that is, to become informed about the processes of the political and electoral system. Visitors to these sites could access resources and engage in activities designed to instruct them about voter registration and mobilisation,[6] writing letters to newspa-

per editors and other press contacts[7] and/or placing advertisements in media outlets.[8] In addition, several campaign sites provided access to lists of campaign contributors.[9] The educational opportunities we observed on candidate sites were primarily presented as online actions. However, the online actions of political education were clearly intended to catalyse other, offline political actions such as voter registration and candidate promotion.

Political Talk. Some of the presidential campaign Web sites provided online structure facilitating political talk.[10] In general, conversation or interaction can be considered "political talk" when individual participants have the freedom to participate with some level of equality and reciprocity. When political talk is limited to persuasion, it serves what Barber (1984) describes as "thin" democracy; when political talk provides opportunities for individuals to set and control the agenda, and express themselves without constraint, "strong" democracy is possible. Relatively few of the presidential campaign sites provided opportunities for political talk, especially variants that would foster strong democracy.

We found elements that facilitated three distinct kinds of political talk on the presidential campaign Web sites: citizen feedback, interactive dialogue and storytelling. Citizen feedback included opportunities for individuals to respond to the campaign, usually via email, to particular issues or concerns; all Web sites included this feature with the provision of an email address. An example of interactive dialogue supported by a campaign site Gore campaign provided a feature facilitating "Instant Messaging" among individual site visitors.[11] Using this feature, individual site visitors could find other visitors, (presumably, Gore supporters), and engage them in conversation. The Gore campaign Web site merely provided structure that supported synchronous exchange; it neither established nor maintained control over the content. This structure functioned as an autonomous place in which individuals were able to discuss issues free from constraints imposed by the "owner" of the space – what McAdam (1986) calls "micromobilisation contexts" and what Evans and Boyte term "free spaces."

In addition to conversation, other genres of political talk were solicited on some campaign sites. For instance, some sites invited users to email the campaign site producers with stories of their campaign experiences and accounts of their voting actions. Through these requests, campaign sites facilitated the creation and dissemination online of citizen-produced narratives and reports regarding personal political action engaged in offline.[12]

Voter Mobilisation. In the final days leading up to the election, some campaign sites moved beyond urging site visitors to be sure to vote to creating structures enabling individuals to mobilise other potential voters. Some posted "Get Out The Vote" strategies which included calls to on- and offline action such as directing friends to the campaign home page to obtain voter registration information, telephoning ten friends to remind them to vote, and offering to drive seniors to the polls.[13] Voter mobilisation, one of the fundamental campaign activities, was thus one form of political action enabled by some campaign Web sites.

Candidate Promotion Campaign. Web sites provided a richly-developed online structure to encourage site visitors to promote the candidacy of the site sponsor, including opportunities for both online and offline action. Some of the candidate

promotion activities facilitated by the campaign Web sites involved coproduction, the joint production of Web artefacts and spheres (Foot and Schneider forthcoming). For example, the Gore campaign site included a feature allowing visitors to choose among options to produce an "individualised" campaign site.[14] This action can also be viewed as a form of coproducing the official campaign site. Visitors were asked to provide their name, and to then select an "issues graphic", indicate a selection of issues "that you are passionate about" from among 22 different issues and to (optionally) identify with one of 22 different voter groups.[15] The Gore site processed the selections, and generated a Web page including the site visitor's name, graphic, issue selection and group identification. The visitor was then given an opportunity to send the generated URL and a personalised message to a maximum of 10 different email addresses.

Campaign sites also encouraged site visitors to coproduce content (extolling the candidate's virtues, of course) with other Internet services and Web sites, as well as in traditional media venues. Campaign sites encouraged visitors to participate in online chats, bulletin boards, newsgroups and electronic mailing lists produced by organisations other than the campaign[16] and facilitated the (online) production of letters to newspaper editors by providing email links and sample texts.[17]

In addition to coproduction, Web sites provided structure for other many other forms of action designed to promote candidates. In the online realm, visitors were encouraged to register candidate preferences in various online polls, [18] and download electronic campaign paraphernalia such as graphics or electronic "bumper" stickers for use on personal Web sites.[19] Candidate sites also included a "send this page to a friend" link. This feature generally activated the visitor's email client, and included a link in a blank message. The Nader, site, for example, prominently included this feature on the front page of its site,[20] and the Gore campaign used text to suggest that individuals forward pages by email.[21] Similarly, some sites facilitated similar action with "online postcards" or "e-cards" in which visitors selected an image, typed in a greeting, and provided an email address to which the message was sent.[22]

As noted above, some of the political actions enabled by candidate Web sites could be performed either online or offline. Some forms of candidate promotion encouraged by candidate Web sites were explicitly offline actions. For example, campaign Web sites encouraged supporters to purchase space or time in traditional media. The Nader campaign site encouraged individuals to download camera-ready print and broadcast-quality audio advertisements for placement in newspapers and on radio stations.[23] Campaigns also used their Web sites to facilitate offline voter-to-voter contact via radio talk shows and phone banks. Campaign sites provided lists of talk show phone numbers.[24] In addition, candidate sites enabled visitors to purchase campaign materials – cups, shirts, visors, signs, etc. While the actual purchase of the merchandise may have taken place online or offline, the political action of wearing buttons, shirts, hats etc. requires corporeality, and thus is clearly an offline action.[25] Finally, some campaign sites urged users to promote candidates offline by hosting various kinds of parties, for instance, one site suggested organising a sign-making party, an after-work "happy hour" with a campaign theme a party for "undecided friends," and a post-voting party.[26] Other sites asked visitors to coproduce materials offline – to participate in the creation of campaign materials that would be distributed in physical form. For example, the Bradley

campaign site asked supporters to write "open letters to voters explaining why they support" the candidate.[27] These letters were to be distributed offline to potential supporters in early primary states.

Campaign Participation. Campaign sites not only sought to catalyse candidate promotion by users, but they also attempted to recruit users to participate in the campaign. The distinction between candidate promotion and campaign participation reflects the difference between action taken by an individual on his/own accord, and action taken by an individual affiliated and acting in co-ordination with an organisation. Several forms of online and offline campaign participation were encouraged and facilitated on the campaign sites. Most commonly, all sites provided opportunities for individuals to register as a campaign volunteer.

Most campaign Web sites included calendars and other features that advertised campaign events — those held offline and ones that took place in virtual fora. Many sites had state-specific sections in which users could learn about local rallies.[28] Through these features site visitors were notified of opportunities to interact with the candidate and other campaign members. One site suggested hosting offline events at which the candidate could appear and interact with guests.[29] Others sought volunteers for "E-Precinct Management," including assuming responsibility for contacting other supporters, electronically forwarding campaign materials, and ensuring voter participation.[30]

Participation in online events was also encouraged by the campaign Web sites. The asynchronous "interactive town hall" held on the Gore site over a period of several months,[31] illustrates the attempts some campaigns made to attract the attention of Web users. Participation in these online events became a form of coproduction, as virtual visitors contributed questions and comments to exchanges with candidates that were at least partially archived and displayed (simultaneously or at a later date) on the campaign sites.

Finally, campaigns encouraged participation through financial contributions. Donations to the campaigns were explicitly requested on every presidential campaign Web site. Some presidential campaign sites facilitated offline contributions only, featuring instructions on how to contribute offline and forms to download, print, complete, and send with a check.[32] However, many sites offered users the option of contributing either online or offline,[33] generally employing an outside contractor to handle acceptance of the actual donations. The sites of those candidates receiving federal funds took pains to clarify in their "donate" features that contributions for general election campaign purposes were not permissible. Instead these sites specified that private contributions would go toward legal and accounting expenses— freeing up the federal funds for media ads and other campaign activities.[34] Candidates who did not receive federal funding could request contributions to general campaign expenses on their campaign sites. In addition, some campaigns created opportunities for individuals to "donate" to their campaigns by incurring expenses for campaign promotion. For example, the Nader site offered a link from the front page called "Sponsor a Media Ad," in addition to a link entitled "Donate."[35] Through these various Web site elements, campaigns provided an opportunity for individuals to engage in the political action of contributing funds to cover the costs associated with running for elective office.

Comparative Analysis of Online Structures on Presidential Campaign Sites

Having presented an overview of the kinds of action we suggest are enabled by the online structures we observed across the analysed campaign sites, we are now offer a detailed comparison of the sites. Table 1 displays the presence on the candidate Web sites analysed of the Web site elements we associated with the six types of online actions discussed above, and summarises the frequency with which various elements were found on the sites analysed.

Table 1: Online Structure Facilitating Action in U.S. Presidential Campaign Web Sites in the 2000 Election

Online Action Facilitated / Site Elements (x indicates element was present)	Primary Election Sites January 24, 2000]								General Election Sites November 7, 2000]					# of sites	% of sites
	Bradley	Gore	Bush	McCain	Forbes	Bauer	Hatch	Keyes	Gore	Bush	Nader	Buchanan	Browne		
Information Gathering & Persuasion															
Candidate biography	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Video or audio clips	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	10	77%
Campaign news	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Candidate Speeches	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12	92%
Subscribe to email newsletter	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	11	85%
Position Papers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Political Education															
Voter Registration Information	x	x			x				x	x	x			6	46%
Links to newspapers							x			x				2	15%
Assistance with advertisement placement											x	x		2	15%
Contributor Information			x	x			x			x				4	31%
Political Talk															
Citizen Feedback	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Interactive Dialogue				x					x			x		3	23%
Storytelling	x								x		x			3	23%
Voter Mobilization															
Online Voter Mobilization									x	x				2	15%
Offline Voter Mobilization									x	x	x	x		4	31%
Candidate Promotion															
Individualized campaign site									x					1	8%
Links to online polls							x							3	23%
Online store	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	10	77%
Promote offline distribution of materials	x		x						x	x		x	x	6	46%
Electronic campaign paraphernalia	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	10	77%
Send links to campaign site	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x			8	62%
Encourage offline gathering		x							x					2	15%
Distribute materials for media placement											x	x		3	23%
Encourage talk show participation				x				x			x	x		4	31%
Campaign Participation															
Volunteer Sign-up	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Online Contributions	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13	100%
Incurring expenses											x	x		2	15%
Contributor Information			x	x			x							4	31%
Calendars and promotion for local events	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x		x	10	77%
Online Events									x					1	8%

Unsurprisingly, the political action most frequently supported by the online structure of presidential campaign Web sites was information gathering and persuasion. All campaign sites included candidate biographies, campaign news and position papers. Nearly all sites analysed included video or audio clips, campaign speeches and opportunities to subscribe to email newsletters. The near ubiquity of these elements on campaign sites in 2000 is consistent with earlier studies of candidate Web sites (Kamarck 1999), and demonstrates that again in 2000 the efforts of presidential campaign site producers were primarily directed toward enabling Web users to gather information about the candidates in order to win their votes.

The second most common set of online structure elements provided by presidential campaign Web sites facilitated campaign participation. Two features associated with this action – volunteer sign-up and online contributions – were found on all sites analysed. Most of the sites also included calendars and promotions for local events, also designed to facilitate campaign participation. We infer that this reflects a strategic view on the part of campaign site producers of the Web's capacity to expand the activist corps of a campaign.

Elements encouraging candidate promotion, political talk, and voter mobilisation were found somewhat less frequently on presidential campaign Web sites. Most of the sites included online stores and electronic campaign paraphernalia, but were less likely to include other features encouraging candidate promotion. All sites facilitated citizen feedback, which potentially contributes to political talk, by providing an email address with which site visitors could contact the campaign. It must be noted, however, that other forms of structure for political talk – most notably, the kind of political talk that facilitates participatory democratic practices (Barber 1984), were found in very few campaign sites. Finally, only a few sites explicitly provided elements that facilitated site visitors in using online or offline techniques to mobilise others to vote.

Discussion

This paper illustrates the wide range of political actions facilitated by the online structure engendered by presidential campaign Web sites, and the relative frequencies of the facilitating elements across sites. We have demonstrated that presidential campaign sites in the 2000 U.S. elections provided online structure for a variety of both online and offline political actions, including information gathering and persuasion, political education, political talk, voter mobilisation, and campaign participation. Our analysis indicates that all or nearly all presidential campaign sites provided online structure facilitating information gathering and persuasion and campaign participation. Fewer sites facilitated political education, political talk or voter mobilisation.

This analysis of campaign sites as surfaces for political action, and the catalogue we have presented of actions enabled by online structure, is a foundational step in advancing our understanding of the impact of the Web on electoral politics beyond election outcomes. We suggest that viewing election-oriented Web sites through the lens of online structure is important if we are to understand how individual citizens might actually be using these sites to further their engagement with the electoral process. In addition, consideration of political actions that are facilitated by observable elements of online structure allows us to view Web sites as active components in the overall electoral process.

At the same time, we should remember that this preliminary step – identifying common features across sites within a particular genre and at a specific point in time – provides only a snapshot of the shape of the political Web during the 2000 campaign. A full analysis would require examination of sites over time and across genres. For this broader purpose we have proposed elsewhere a multi-method approach called *Web sphere analysis* (Schneider, Harnett, and Foot 2001). Our approach to Web sphere analysis draws on the work of Taylor and van Every (2000) concerning the relationship between communication and organising. We define a Web sphere as a collection of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple Web sites deemed relevant or related to a central theme or object, in the sense of the *gegenstand* concept from classical German philosophy. The *gegenstand* notion of object as a focal point embedded-in-activity (see Foot forthcoming; Leont'ev 1978) enables the identification of a Web sphere as a collaborative production. As a unit of analysis, the boundaries of a Web sphere are delimited by a shared object-orientation, a temporal framework, and an identified periodicity of collection. In this vein, future work should be directed towards analysis of multiple genres of Web sites, e.g. in the U.S., those produced by House and Senate candidates, political parties, advocacy and civic groups, and press and other for-profit organisations.

More specifically, we suggest that future research in this area proceed in four directions, ideally in concert with each one another. First, the ways in which online structure is created by campaigns in the multimedia environment of the Web deserves more comprehensive analysis than was possible in this study. Second, the actions we have catalogued in this analysis as being engendered by online structure should be developed into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, and the frequency with which these actions were encouraged by campaign Web sites should be systematically assessed over time. The kind of analysis we are suggesting would build understanding not only of what actions were facilitated, but also with what frequency and at what stage of the campaign. Third, the aims and intentions of site producers should be included in future analyses of the online structure of campaigns. Finally, the perspectives of site visitors on campaign sites, and the role of Web sites in their experiences of engaging in political action online and offline, should be queried in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the affordances and constraints of online structure for political action.

Notes:

1. The authors wish to thank Erica Siegl for her assistance on this article.

2. The candidates and sites examined were:
George Bush (http://georgewbush.com, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213145/georgewbush.com/); Al Gore (http://www.algore.com, archived 7 Nov 00, (http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213111/http://www.gorelieberman.com/); Pat Buchanan (http://www.gopatgo2000.org, archived 7 Nov 00, EC 2000 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173131/http://www.gopatgo2000.org/); Ralph Nader (http://www.votenader.com, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173110/http://www.votenader.com); Harry Browne (http://harrybrowne2000.org, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063905/http://harrybrowne2000.org); John McCain (http://www.mccaininteractive.com, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors] and http://www.mccain.com [Private collection of authors]; Orrin Hatch (http://www.orrinhatch.com, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors]); Gary Bauer (http://www.bauer, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors]); Alan

Keyes (http://www.keyes2000.org, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors]); Steve Forbes (http://www.forbes2000.com, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors]); and Bill Bradley (http://www.billbradley.com, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors]).

3. In most cases, it was relatively straightforward to determine the official presidential campaign site, and most campaigns had only one site. The McCain campaign produced two interlinked sites. The Buchanan campaign had multiple sites during the election year, partly as a result of the candidate's relationship to the Reform Party.

4. http://www.algore.com, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213111/http://www.gorelieberman.com/.

5. http://georgewbush.com/you.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213206/http://georgewbush.com/you.html

6. See, for example, http://www.algore.com/gorenet, archived 5 Nov 00 EC 2000 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063331/http://www.algore.com/gorenet and http://www.georgewbush.com/you.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213206/http://georgewbush.com/you.html. Both of these pages provide an "instruction manual" for how to talk to voters and convince them to vote for the favored candidate.

7. For example, see http://www.votenader.com/talktothepress.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173837/http://www.votenader.com/talktothepress.html

8. For examples, see http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173833/http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html.

9. For example, see http://www.orrinhatch.com/contribute/index.htm, archived 24 Jan 00 [private collection of authors] and http://207.54.174.86/donorsearch/donorsearch.asp [Linked from http://www.georgewbush.com], archived 24 Jan 00 [private collection of authors].

10. Our concept of "political talk" draws on Barber's work and is more fully addressed in Schneider (1996, 1997). Political talk includes the notions of persuasion, bargaining, agenda setting, exploring mutuality, affection and affiliation, maintaining autonomy, witness and self-expression, reformulation and reconceptualization, and community building.

11. http://noaka.algore.com/im/im.html, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213109/http://noaka.algore.com/im/im.html.

12. For example http://www.algore.com/gorenet/net_involved.html, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063810/http://www.algore.com/gorenet/net_involved.html, and http://www.algore.com/, archived 7 Nov 00, EC 2000 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213111/http://www.gorelieberman.com/)

13. http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063810/http://www.algore.com/gorenet/net_involved.html, 05 Nov 00, EC 2000.

14. http://noaka.algore.com/byoc/byoc.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213230/http://noaka.algore.com/byoc/byoc.html.

15. The groups were African-Americans, Americans with Disabilities, Asian-Pacific Americans, Business Leaders, Educators, Environmental Voters, Ethnic Americans, Faith Community, Firefighters, Ganamos, Gay & Lesbian Americans, Health Care Prof., Jewish-Americans, Law Enforcement Officials, Native Americans, Nurses, Rural Voters, Scientists, Seniors, Students, Tech Community, Veterans, Women. See http://noaka.algore.com/byoc/byoc.html, archived 7 Nov 00,   http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213230/http://noaka.algore.com/byoc/byoc.html.

16. For example, see http://www.algore.com/gorenet/net_involved.html, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173507/http://www.algore.com/gorenet/net_involved.html.

17. For example, see http://www.orrinhatch.com/newspapers.html, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors].

18. For example, see http://www.orrinhatch.com/online_polls.html, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors].

19. For example, see http://www.georgewbush.com/Downloads.asp, archived 7 Nov 00 http://

web.archive.org/e2k/20001031063700/http://www.georgewbush.com/Downloads.asp.

20. http://www.votenader.com, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173110/http://www.votenader.com.

21. "Send any page of the Gore 2000 website via email to your friends, family and neighbors. Select anything from your Al Gore state page, a page on an issue that you are concerned about such as the "Al Gore Working for Families," or the latest press release." See http://www.algore.com/gorenet, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063331/http://www.algore.com/gorenet.

22. For examples, see http://www.billbradley.com/bin/menu.pl-menu=1.htm, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors], and http://georgewbush.com/Postcards.asp, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107133232/http://georgewbush.com/Postcards.asp.

23. http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173833/http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html.

24. For examples, see http://ww.mccaininteractive.com/sc/TalkShow.cfm.htm, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors], and http://www.gopatgo2000.org/talk_shows.asp, archived 7 Nov 00, EC 2000 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173131/http://www.gopatgo2000.org/talk_shows.asp.

25. See, for example, http://www.goregear.com (visited 7 Nov 00). An example of a site that facilitated merchandise purchasing offline only was http://www.gopatgo2000.org/merchandise, archived 7 Nov 2000 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105064035/www.gopatgo2000.org/merchandise/.

26. See, for example, http://www.algore.com/gorenet/index.html, archived 5 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063331/http://www.algore.com/gorenet/index.html.

27. http://www.billbradley.com/bin/article.pl-path=221299-3.htm, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors].

28. For example, http://www.gopatgo2000.org, 5 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105064249/http://www.gopatgo2000.org/.

29. http://harrybrowne2000.org, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063905/http://harrybrowne2000.org.

30. See, for example, http://www.forbes2000.com, archived 14 Jan 00 [Private collection of authors].

31. http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063810/http://www.algore2000.com/townhall, 05 Nov 00, EC 2000.

32. For example, http://www.algore.com/getinvolved/new_check_form2.html, archived 5 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063737/http://www.algore.com/getinvolved/new_check_form2.html.

33. See for example, http://harrybrowne2000.org, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001105063905/http://harrybrowne2000.org.

34. See for example /http://georgewbush.com, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107213145/http://georgewbush.com.

35. http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html, archived 7 Nov 00 http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173833/http://www.votenader.com/publicmedia.html; http://www.votenader.com/donate.html, archived 7 Nov 00, http://web.archive.org/e2k/20001107173507/http://www.votenader.com/donate.html.

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