

Denison University

**Digital Strategies in Political Campaigns:
A Qualitative Content Analysis of Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's Websites in the
2016 presidential election**

James Le

Dr. Suzanne Condray

COMM 404 – Presidential Communication

December 8, 2016

INTRODUCTION

On September 26th, 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon stepped on stage for the first ever Presidential Debate to be broadcast on national TV. By 1960, 88% of American households had TVs, with only a small number of Americans still relying on radio as their main channel of communication. That night it was estimated that some 74 million people tuned in to watch the now historic debate. What happened after the 2 candidates took the stage is a familiar tale. Nixon, pale and underweight from a recent hospitalization, appeared sickly and sweaty, while Kennedy appeared calm and confident. As the story goes, those who listened to the debate on the radio thought Nixon had won. Those that watched the debate on TV thought Kennedy was the clear winner. Many say Kennedy won the election that night. As history is told, Kennedy won the election that night because of how young, healthy, and handsome he appeared on screen next to Nixon.

Nowadays candidates have so much more to worry about. Not only do they have to worry about their image on screen, they also have to think about how they represent themselves on social media, how they connect with voters through campaign-based applications, and how their person is generally assimilated into technology. And they're expected to do all of this on top of figuring out how to keep citizen journalists at bay so they don't destroy the campaign's hard work with the freedom of press that comes with the Internet.

The campaign experience used to be candidates speaking to the public in person, on the radio, and, since the Kennedy/Nixon debate, on television. But in between appearances, they had a chance to relax. Today, candidates have to be connected every second of the day. There is no time off. Hillary Clinton has nearly 10 million likes on Facebook, 11 million followers on Twitter, and close to 4 million followers on Instagram. Donald Trump has over 16 million on

Facebook, 17 million on Twitter, and over 4 million on Instagram. If today's candidates are not putting the media out there, you'd better believe someone will do it for them – whether they like it or not. That's a lot of risk to manage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research studies in the past have looked at different ways political campaigns adopt digital strategies to bring their messages to potential voters. D'Alessio (2000) studies the adoption of the World Wide Web by American political candidates in the 1996-1998 timeline. He finds out that use of the web by campaigns in 1998 was significantly greater than use in 1996. In addition to that, the greater the number voting age adults in a constituency, the more likely the campaign is to establish a website; incumbents established websites less frequently than non-incumbents; and candidates disbursing more funds were more likely to have websites. Davis (2005) looks at the 2000 and 2004 election and their use of the Internet. The 2000 campaign between Gore and Bush saw the candidates use the Internet in traditional and not very creative ways, mainly to push messages from the top down to citizens who signed up online. The 2004 campaign saw the Internet being embraced by traditional campaigns as an incredibly efficient way to put the power in the hands of their supporters; in particular, both Kerry and Bush's campaigns recruited volunteers online and asked them to personally press their candidates' case with others. 2008 marks the year when technology adoption truly became fruitful. Merrie Spaeth (2009) examines aspects of the 2008 US presidential election from a public relations point of view, exploring how Barack Obama and his campaign staff harnessed new communication technologies to bring the candidate and his message to the US electorate. Obama's ability to leverage different digital platforms helps him to achieve an extremely positive public image and

favorable ratings. A few themes emerge to describe the primary purposes of utilizing online strategies, mainly political websites, during presidential campaign.

Candidate Portrayal

The portrayal of running candidates is pivotal during campaign because it is an important factor to determine how voters will vote. Yoon and Joseph (2008) examines how the 2000 and 2004 election campaigns utilized websites and television. The findings suggest that webpages are more effective than television advertising at delivering specific, detailed information about a candidate.

Levenshus (2010) looks at Obama campaign's adoption of new tools for the Internet, in which the campaign uses social media to manage relationships with grassroots public by being open and adaptable. This portrays an image of Obama as being a friendly and approachable president. Verser and Wicks (2006) studies how images are used on political websites during presidential campaigns. Both Gore and Bush's campaigns in 2000 developed specific portrayals of their candidates to manage and enhance impressions. These studies rationalize how campaigns can strategize online content to portray their candidates in a specific way.

Kaye (2013) studies the influence of online source reliance on candidate preference during the 2008 presidential election. He comes up with 3 important findings – that reliance on a medium is associated with personal characteristics; that individuals moderately relied on media sources to learn about the candidates; and that reliance on social network sites, political blog, cable television, online newspapers, online news magazines, and candidate sites predicted candidate preference in the 2008 presidential election. This confirms that people rely on the online portrayal of the candidates to stay aware of the campaigns.

Position Taking and Issue Dialogues

Apart from the capacity to portraying candidates, campaign websites are very useful for the candidates to state their positions and create dialogues on important issues. Souley and Wicks (2005) brings about the importance of campaign websites as communication tools during elections. In short, websites afford candidates the opportunity to spotlight their accomplishments and policies, contrast their positions against opponents, and attack the opposing candidates.

Examining this aspect even more closely, Xeros and Foot (2005) observes position taking and issue dialogue behaviors on candidate websites in 2002 election cycle. They find out that online position taking will be observed in significantly greater frequency than both direct and indirect online issue dialogue. Major party candidates will engage in more online position taking and direct issue dialogue than 3rd-party candidates. Campaign intensity will be positively associated with online position taking and direct and indirect online issue dialogue. Incumbent candidates will engage in online position taking and direct and indirect dialogue less frequently than challengers. And the online presentation of issues by candidates engaging in indirect dialogue will show the marks of strategic framing.

Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, Martin (2005) enhances the understanding of Web campaigning through the examination of the use of blogs and hyperlinks as online campaign tools during the 2004 election. They find out that the issues discussed in websites were significantly different from issues discussed in blog posts, which indicates that the campaigns used these online communication tools to discuss and debate very different issues. In terms of hyperlinking and fundraising, websites tended to link internally and frequently offered promotional and revenue-generating materials, while blog posts frequently linked externally and were less likely to solicit donations or otherwise engage in fundraising. These findings show concrete ways that candidates can use specific online tools to go about delivering their stance.

Key Messages Communication

Last but not least, candidates can use communication technologies to provide key campaign messages. Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) analyzes the impact of social media on the 2008 election in comparison with traditional media and finds out that social media was useful not just for its facility in distributing a campaign message, but also for its utility in offering a mechanism for ongoing engagement on the part of those moved by the message.

An important online tool that can be used to deliver key messages is political blogs. Wicks, Bradley, Blackburn, Fields (2011) finds out that candidates in 2008 use their own blogs for acclaims, political parties use their blogs to level attacks against opponents, and rebuttals on blogs are rare. It appears that both Obama and McCain viewed their blogs as a venue to highlight accomplishments and present evidence of successes along with future promise and potential. Perlmutter (2008) argues that blogs have a major impact on how and where people get information. Political blogs exist primarily as a meeting ground for like-minded people and to persuade visitors to adopt a perspective.

Taking all of these into account, it is apparent that the communication technologies such as social media, political websites, political blogs prove to be extremely useful in presidential campaigning. I am interested in how such technologies impact the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.

METHODOLOGY

The parameters of my study are campaign websites of both the 2016 presidential candidates – hillaryclinton.com for Hillary Clinton and donaldjtrump.com for Donald Trump. I chose qualitative content analysis as the methodology to analyze the content of both websites. I looked at the sites during the timeline from early September to late November, covering

throughout the highs of pre-, during-, and post-campaigning. At the time being, Donald Trump has become the president-elect, and my analysis is intended to give out possible explanations for that result.

I focused heavily on the technical features of campaign sites, and at times gave light on how candidates discuss political issues on campaign sites. In order to do that, I relied heavily on Lynch and Horton's "Web Style Guide" (1999), which explains established design principles and covers all aspects of web design – from planning to production to maintenance. The guide also shows how these principles apply in web design projects whose primary concerns are information design, interaction design, and efficient search and navigation. This guide equips me with necessary background to critique and assess the functionality and aesthetics of political websites.

Pamela and William Benoit (2005) articulate a set of design criteria for evaluating political campaign webpages that I am going to use for my analysis. They address both the function (political communication: issues, character) and form (navigation aids, Web page layout) of these messages. The criteria can be grouped into 8 categories: identification, navigation, readability, information accessibility, interest level, information breadth and depth, adaptation to audience, and interactivity. To illustrate how these criteria can be employed to evaluate candidate Web pages, I applied them to the 2016 websites of Clinton and Trump. The analysis section below reveals major findings from my evaluation.

ANALYSIS OF 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WEBSITES

Identification

Identification assesses whether the site provides clear information about its origin and ways to contact the originator of the information. Four particular identification issues were

assessed: author identified, date revised, page titles clear for bookmarks, and contact information (address, telephone, fax, e-mail) (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 237).

Author identified. Author identification should be immediately accessible because users evaluate a site by the credibility of the author. The user should be able to determine quickly whether or not the official Web site of the candidate has been accessed. Both of the websites did a good job at identifying the candidates they represent. Clinton's site has an obvious URL (www.hillaryclinton.com) and a clear page title, "Hillary Clinton 2016 | Hillary for America." Trump's site also has an obvious URL (www.donaldjtrump.com) and an equally strong page title, "Make America Great Again! | Donald J Trump for President." Users can immediately recognize that these are the official website of the respective candidates.

Date revised. Users also evaluate the currency of Web sites by the revision date. This information also tells a user whether new information has been added since the last visit to the site. It is important for visitors to know whether the Web page is current. Trump's site does a solid job at being up-to-date because all the posts have date stamp, so users know that the site has new content regularly. His main page has an "In the News" and a "Press Releases" sections that show the newest posts about the election. At the time of this writing, Trump has become the President-Elect, and his main page features a big image of Trump and Pence in confetti shower after winning on election night with the big text "Thank You American." In contrast, I have visited Clinton's site numerous times in the past few weeks, and the main page is always the same – the advertising video of Clinton announcing her running and the black-and-white image of her shaking supporters' hands. Even though the site might have fresh content, unfortunately it is not visible in the main page. It can be argued that there is no point to update the site after Clinton's loss, but even during the campaign, I didn't see a lot of up-to-date content.

Page titles clear for bookmark. The page title becomes important because it is the text for a bookmark added by a user. If the page title does not provide a concise description of the page contents or change with each page within a site, the user will have difficulty identifying the site in the list of bookmarks or accessing a particular page within a site. As I mentioned above in the author identified section, both sites have really clear page titles, which include 2 phrases separated by a dash-line. I bookmarked both of them for future accessibility and they are fairly easy to being spotted out in all of my bookmarking sites.

Contact information. The Web is a “bi-directional medium – people expect to be able to send you comments, questions, and suggestions. Always provide at least one link to an email address in a prominent location in your site” (Lynch & Horton, 1999, 49). Even though the user has accessed information through the Web site, not all communication with the campaign will be Web-based. Street addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers should be available to provide voters opportunities to take advantage of this bi-directional medium. I personally think Trump’s site does a better job in displaying contact information. Scrolling down the main page, I can see a blue section with a link to contact the campaign as well as a telephone number. It also specifies that “by entering your mobile number, you are agreeing to receive periodic text messages from Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.” When I clicked the link to contact the campaign, I was directed to a form in which I can fill out name, email, phone, city, state, and comments to the campaign. On the other hand, Clinton’s site also has a link for contact purpose at the end of the main page; however, it does not have a contact form displayed. Instead if I want to get in touch with the Hillary for America team, I need to email donations@hillaryclinton.com (for donation-related inquiries) or email orders@hillaryforamericashop.com (for merchandise inquiries) or send inquiries to Hillary

office box in New York. From a user's perspective, it is more cumbersome to contact Clinton because it requires a separate email browser.

Navigation

Navigation evaluates the ease with which users can move from one part of the site to another. Readers need a sense of context, of their place within an organization of information. And so it is vital to provide this sense of context with navigational cues such as clear and consistent icons, a consistent look for all site pages, navigational devices within a site, obvious links, working links, and clear menus (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 239).

Consistent look for all site pages. It is important for Web sites to have a style that uniquely identifies them. This style should be evident on each of the pages within the site to create a consistent environment. It is clear that blue is the main color used in Clinton's site, which is appropriate because she is the Democratic candidate. I am mostly impressed with the campaign logo that is displayed in every single page, a big blue letter H with a light blue arrow cutting through. The logo signifies that Hillary can move the country forward in a positive direction. Besides from that, the site has a modern look and feel, the interactions are fairly minimalistic, and it's built to be responsive. In contrast, Trump's site brings a good mix of red and blue segments mixed with the white background. I think it is a smart strategy because that signifies patriotism (America's flag has red, blue, and white colors). The site is mostly text. It has a page full of videos and there are several images throughout the site. Overall, the site is light on content and built to collect data and donations.

Moving within the site. It is not always clear where a hypertext link will take users or where they will want to go next. Ease of movement within a site concerns how difficult it is for a user to find the information of interest. I would say it is fairly easy to navigate in both webpages. The

clear menu and big text headlines help me explore the sites with ease and certainty. Now it would be handier if there is a search option in which I can type in specific keywords and find relevant information, but none of the sites offer that function.

Links working. Users' attempts to navigate a site are stymied by links that are no longer active. I didn't spot any broken links with my navigation throughout both sites, so they both pass this criterion.

Buttons indent/change color with use. Some links are navigation buttons. Visual cues that indent the button or changes in the color of the button are other ways of signaling that a link has been activated and the user will be moving to another location in the site. Every link that I hover at in Clinton's site changes its color to blue, while every link that I hover at in Trump's site changes its color to red. Again this represents their parties well – blue for Democrats and red for Republicans.

Menus clear and limited to 5-7 choices. Menus identify the main heading within a site. Users are overwhelmed by too many choices and a lengthy set of menu options will take longer to load. Lynch and Horton (1999) suggest that 5-7 menu choices are optimal. Clinton's main menu has 5 choices: About, Act, Issues, Shop, and More. Trump's main menu has 6 choices: Positions, States, Get Involved, Media, Shop, and Contribute. Both menus are clear and within the range.

Readability

Readability is an evaluation of the clarity and effort required of the user who chooses to view information on the screen rather than print. Readability issues for print and the Web diverge and this evaluation concentrates on whether the designer has made the necessary adaptations to improve readability for Web users. This assessment includes an evaluation of the text line length,

color of background and text, font style, and adaptation of the presentation style of the information (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 240).

Text line length of 8-12 words. A common rule of thumb for readability on a website is to limit the text line width to between 8 and 12 words. It is difficult to read text with more than 12 words per line because the distance between the left and right margins increases and the “eye has to make a significant shift to return to the left margin” (Lynch & Horton, 1999, 68). I quickly read through the few posts in both Clinton and Trump’s site, and they all satisfy the text line length expectation.

Background subtle, type dark. Strong backgrounds as well as dark backgrounds with light type may make the text more difficult to read. A light background with dark type is the most readable because it has the sharpest contrast (Gillespie, 1998; Lynch & Horton, 1999). Again, both sites do a really good job at displaying their information: black text on a white background – the default option for most readers.

Font easy to read. Typefaces that work well for the web include the default in most browsers, Times New Roman, or those that are designed for the web including Georgia or Verdana. It is very easy to see that Times New Roman is used in both sites, however Clinton’s site has a slight edge here. In Clinton’s site, most pages intro with a big, bold headline, a quick statement to summarize the page at a very high level, and an image to assist with understanding. In contrast, the text on Trump’s site is on the small side for web standards, and it’s thin. The content is written in big, chunky paragraphs and there are no sub-headers to break up the blocks. There also are no visuals to assist in the story being told. This makes reading difficult. Most people skim and/or skip over big, chunky paragraphs, just hitting sub-headers and standout bullet points/quotes.

Information adapted to media. Because readability is more challenging on the web, a good web design will adapt information to the medium by presenting information in chunks. Clinton's site adopts better design practices than Trump's; however, they both do a fairly good job in presenting information at a readable manner in the web.

Information Accessibility

The information highway is a dead end if users cannot access information easily. Web sites are generally organized hierarchically by necessity. This part of the evaluation considers how the information is subdivided, whether the organization is designed for users, number of levels of information, clarity of the site structure, availability of a search function, length of the pages, whether the main ideas are emphasized, whether new information is identified, presence of a search function, and need for lengthy scrolling (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 241).

How information is subdivided. Information should be organized into logical units and the hierarchy of the structure should be evident to users. Scrolling down Clinton's site, it is easy to notice that information is divided into 3 main sections: Learn – on how to learn more about her campaign, Support – on how to support her campaign, and Vote Together – on how to register to vote for her. On the other hand, information in Trump's site is divided into 3 main sections: In the News, Press Releases, and Video. Information can also be found in the heading menu that includes Positions – his positions on important issues and policies, States – his involvement with different states, and Media – his appearance in the media.

Information organized for users. Sites should consider their users as they organize information. This evaluation considers whether the information is organized into categories that are likely to be those that users will intuitively assume they can find on this kind of site. Clinton's site organizes information in a logical and effective manner: The Learn section

includes About, Issues, Blog, and Speeches. The Support section includes Find My State, Volunteer, Shop, Jobs, Help from Home, Donate, Raise, and Protect the Vote. The Vote Together section includes African Americans for Hillary, Latinos for Hillary, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Hillary, Women for Hillary, and Millennials for Hillary. Trump's site organizes information for users based on his positions on 16 issues and involvement on 15 swing states. Tactically speaking, Trump's site target on specific target audience to win the swing state battles, while Clinton's site is looking to grab millennials looking for lots of visual content to quickly scan through and engage with.

Number of levels. It is possible to have so many levels in the hierarchy of information that the user becomes frustrated when trying to reach the desired information. Both sites minimize the hierarchy of information to 2 to 3 levels, so it is super easy for me to reach the desired information.

Clarity of site structure. The structure of the site should be obvious to the user. The site should be organized so that users can quickly assimilate the structure and act. Both sites have clear structure and layout with good visual cues.

Emphasis on main ideas. The hierarchy of information should create a structure that emphasizes the most important ideas. This kind of organization is necessary for the web because information must be chunked. A hierarchy should be constructed that moves from the most important ideas to more detail or specific information (Lynch & Horton, 1999). Most of Clinton's issues pages start with a strong intro, then get into the content, which is put into listicle form to make it quick and easy to read. What's really happening is that her team is trying to give people the information they need in a digestible manner and then they supply the audience with links to dive deeper if they want more. On the other hand, Trump's positions pages are all built

to be read long-form, so it's harder to catch his main ideas. A side note is that all of the headers on his site are full caps lock. This method gives the reader a sense that they're being yelled at and also makes it harder to read.

New information identified. Ideally, potential voters will be frequent visitors to a political campaign website but they must be enticed to return by making it obvious that there is additional information since their last visit. As I briefly mentioned in the first category, Trump's site has date revision for up-to-date news, while Clinton's site does not provide clear signs that additional information exists in the site. Therefore, readers will more likely return to Trump's site.

Search function. A search function is especially important for a large and complicated website because it makes it easier for a user to quickly access a particular piece of information. Keyword searches and menus that allow the user to limit the search to an area of the site provide the greatest accessibility for readers (Ochs, 1999). I mentioned above that it would be super neat if there exists a search function in either of the site to quickly spot relevant information; and unfortunately that option is not yet available in either Trump's or Clinton's site.

Scroll over 2 pages. Long webpages (over 2 screen) require the user to scroll and loading is more time-consuming. Users find scrolling to be disorienting because "they lose their sense of context" as information scrolls off the screen (Lynch & Horton, 1999, 59). Both webpages require users to scroll to read the content of certain issues, watch certain speeches, or commit certain actions. However, I actually don't find that disorienting, instead I find that accommodating to modern day web design practices – to display a lot of information in a limited real estate computer screen. Therefore, I give a pass to both sites in this criterion.

Interest Level

Interest level assesses features that pull the user deeper into the site. I examined design features that are motivated by attracting and maintaining user attention. Specifically, I assessed whether the text and graphics were balanced, primary colors were used well, multi-media was used effectively, whether it entices visitors to return, and the effective use of visual images (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 242).

Text and graphics balanced. Graphics have the capability of achieving impact if they are not so large that they require extra loading time and if they are balanced with textual information. Clinton's site has a better edge here; it provides a good mix of graphics (mostly of Hillary) and text in most pages. Trump's site, on the other hand, has a disproportionate text to graphics ratio. I don't know if the site is intentionally designed that way, but it is certainly a pain point.

Primary colors used well. Primary colors are likely to be chosen for their political significance but they are highly saturated and can overpower a webpage (Lynch & Horton, 1999). To be used well, they should be used sparingly and for areas of special emphasis. As mentioned a few times, blue is the primary color used in Clinton's site. It is used in strategic areas such as hard text, bold headlines, important buttons, menu sections and navigation links. Overall, it works fairly well with the white background. More importantly, the color is appropriate for the "Stronger Together" slogan and the campaign logo of moving forward. Trump's site brings a good mix of red and dark blue with the white background. By signifying patriotism, these colors go extremely well with the "Make America Great Again!" slogan and a campaign all about America.

Multi-media used effectively. I examined whether the sites included the use of audio, slide shows, or video and whether the medium was delivered effectively for the web. Both sites

feature numerous video content; but Trump's site has a whole Video section dedicated for video display, while video content in Clinton's site is spread out and thus harder to find.

Entice visitor to return. While candidates want their political sites want to reach as many individuals as possible, they also want visitors to return. I personally have more urge to return to Clinton's site, because the design is gorgeous, the platform is mobile-friendly, and the multimedia is used effectively. However, I am biased because the site is built to gear toward young voters. Trump's site is built with specific purpose to empower voters and drive donation, so if it succeeds at those tasks for first-time visitors, there is no need to focus on retention rate.

Visual images. I assessed the screen resolution, appropriateness, and placement of visual images to determine if images were used effectively to generate interest in the information. This is one of the strongest part of Clinton's site. For example, her biography section features outstanding and descriptive images of her past and present, as well as a portrait of her smiling at the front. All the issues pages feature relevant images of Hillary's interaction with people above the headlines. Her blog section has amazing display of images tailored for each post, inspired by a lot of online magazine templates nowadays. Trump's site, on the other hand, has less visual images. I can only find pictures of him in the main page and in the Gallery section. However, they are mostly images of Trump by himself with quotes of his saying, and there are none of him interacting with other people. This properly reflect his self-centered personality that he displays throughout this campaign.

Information Breadth and Depth

Information breadth and depth is an assessment of the content categories within the political Web sites. I analyzed the breadth of content categories and the depth of information provided by determining if the sites included information regarding biography, philosophy,

accomplishments, support, messages, campaign information, and Web links (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 243).

Biography. Biographical information can provide the measure of a candidate. It is an opportunity to personalize the candidate for the voter/user. Clinton's site offers a beautiful biography section that follows a chronological order of her life: the very beginning, finding her voice, children and families, health and human rights, serving her country, equality at home and abroad, and stronger together. I learned a lot about her personal upbringing and political career through reading the text, viewing the images, and watching the videos. On the other hand, Trump's biography is secluded in the About section in a small blue menu at the top of the site, which is difficult to pay attention to. The biography features 3 images of Trump, his accomplishments as a real estate mogul, and his celebrity status as a television star. Overall, Trump's biography is much more superficial in comparison to Clinton's one and I didn't learn much about him.

Philosophy/mission/vision statement. It is important for candidates in presidential campaign to stay on message. A philosophy/mission/vision statement would be more general than issues and encapsulate the larger image of the campaign. Clinton's slogan is "Stronger Together" and Trump's slogan is "Make America Great Again!" These are both general and catchy statement to that sticks into voter's mind.

Accomplishments. One of the functions of political messages is to acclaim past accomplishments (Benoit, 1999). I assessed whether the Clinton and Trump websites included description of past successes. It turns out that the biography sections in both websites are the only places that cover accomplishments. Since Clinton's biography is richer with more detail, I learned way more about her accomplishments than about Trump's.

Support. Support included evidence of backing, positive regard, or preliminary victories. I examined each site for the use of positive media quotations, polls, and endorsements. This is a strong aspect of Trump's site. Whereas I couldn't really find specific support in Clinton's site, Trump's site has a dedicated Endorsement section under Media that entails a list of posts about people who endorse Trump's presidential campaign.

Messages. I examined whether the candidates used their websites to increase the audiences for their previous messages. In particular, I determined if the sites contained speeches, press releases, articles/memos, and interviews. This is another strong aspect of Trump's site. Clinton's site has a Speeches section with lengthy remarks from her campaign trail. On the other hand, Trump's site, under the Media section, offers information organized by Content Center, In the News, Speeches, and Press Releases. Together, they do a phenomenal job at elaborating Trump's messages and stances on issues.

Campaign information. Information about the campaign can provide voters with a sense of connection to the campaign and the specific details they would need if they planned on attending an upcoming event. I determined if the websites provided information about the event schedule or reports from the campaign trail. Again, Trump's site is stronger at this particular aspect. I couldn't find anywhere in Clinton's site information about her campaign trail, whereas Trump's site has a Schedule section that features upcoming events for Trump and Pence. Users can get tickets or request media directly from the links on the site as well.

Web-links. One strength of the web is the ability to connect users to other sources of information through hyperlinks. I was interested in whether candidates used this feature to funnel voters to the sites of the political parties, news sources, interest groups, or other locations. Both sites have a ton of hyperlinks that direct to other news sources, but I am mostly interested in the

social media channels. Clinton's site allows users to follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, and Medium. Trump's site allows users to follow him on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Considering that these are the most popular social channels on the Internet, both sites do a good job at reaching appropriate channels to relay their information online.

Adaptation to Audience

The flexibility of the Web is one of its greatest assets and Web designers who take advantage of adapting sites to audiences to maximize the potential for reaching different voters. This criterion for evaluating Web sites determined if the content was adapted for different users, if the site was adapted to different user levels, if it was possible for users to customize the site, and if the site was available to users in different languages (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 243).

As I have mentioned a few times, Clinton's site adopts some of the best modern web design practices – colorful, media-rich, interactive, and mobile-first. Therefore, I would give it a very high score in terms of adaptability for different users and different user levels. More impressively, the site is available to users in Spanish: there's a button that allows the language to switch to Spanish, and the structure is the exact same as it was in English. This shows that Clinton team carefully gauge the importance of Hispanic voters, a growing population of minority in America. Trump's site, on the other hand, is more like the New York Times or Washington Post, from the design layout to the organization of content. Thus, it is more suitable to sophisticated middle-age professionals, while might not appeal to young voters or non-tech-savvy people. It is not possible for users to customize Trump's site, nor is it available to users in different language. Therefore, Clinton's site is clearly better than Trump's site in terms of adaptation to the audience.

Interactivity

Interactivity is more than “click and read”; it is a way to engage and empower users. A website’s success can depend on the interactivity of the site. I determined if both campaign websites included an opportunity to provide feedback, subscribe to a newsletter, volunteer, contribute, and register to vote (Benoit & Benoit, 2005, 244).

Opportunity to provide feedback. I determined if the site included a space that would allow users to provide feedback to the candidate on issues. This interactive feature would allow individuals to feel that they had expressed their opinion to the candidate on an issue they considered to be important. Unfortunately, I couldn’t find any place in Clinton’s site to submit feedback, so this could be a minor issue for users who want to express their opinions. Trump’s site, however, has a Trump talk section in which users can join Trump Talk and make calls for Trump, even from home. I think that is a better way for individuals to provide feedback, one-on-one talk with the candidate.

Newsletter subscription. I examined sites to see whether a user could enter an email address to receive a newsletter from the campaign. By asking for a subscription, users could indicate their interest in the election and take action that would continue to provide them with information. I didn’t find any place in Clinton’s site to subscribe to her newsletter, but can easily do this in Trump’s site. His main page has a part titled “Be the first to know” in which users can sign up to receive the most up-to-date Team Trump news, announcements and event information.

Volunteer. Some users are interested in committing their time for volunteer activities with the campaign. I examined candidate websites to determine if they were being used to recruit volunteers and if particular volunteer activities were being solicited. Under the Support segment in Clinton’s site, user can click the link Volunteer. At the time of this writing, the link directly

backs me to the main page, so it seems like it is currently not working properly. Thus, I cannot make any evaluation on how the site recruit volunteers. On the other hand, if you press in the Get Involved section in Trump's site, a signup form will appear and ask you to fill in personal information to receive updates from Trump. Users can check the box "I would like to volunteer" if they are interested in volunteering for the campaign.

Contribute money. Websites are another avenue for raising funds for a campaign and I was interested in whether this medium was being used interactively for this activity. With increases in e-commerce and familiarity with electronic funds transfer, websites are a potential gold mine for soliciting contributions. This feature, I argue, might be the most important after all, since it is critical for the candidates to raise money early in their campaigns. In Clinton's site, when you click the Donate button, you will be directed to a site titled "Support Democrats." There is a bold blue headline saying "Chip In To Help Democrats Fight Back", following by the donation form asking for the contributor name, donation amount, credit card information, and employment information. In Trump's site, when you click the Contribute button, you will be directed to a site titled "Donald J. Trump for President, Inc." The contribution process entails 3 steps: specifying the donation amount, entering personal information, and pressing Contribution button. Overall, both processes are simple, professional, and efficient at achieving their goals.

Register to vote. The site may provide an opportunity to register to vote. Voters are the primary targets of the sites and this interactive opportunity to register through a site may involve the user and benefit the campaign by increasing support. In Clinton's site, users can do this by clicking at Protect the Vote link under Support section, which directs them to a form that collects their names, email, and zip code number. I assume that they then will receive email with instructions regarding how to register to vote. In Trump's site, there is no specific link that says

register to vote, but I think that the Get Involved section might have done just that by collecting users' information and sending them email reminders later on.

DISCUSSION

Similar to her campaign, Clinton's touch points have a couple of pain points related to trying to be more modern than she really is, but, overall, the experience is awesome and you can tell she knows her stuff. Trump's isn't bad, but a lot of it seems to be about driving revenue to himself, marketing himself (not his platforms or campaign), and entertaining people. As I argue throughout this essay, Trump's message is quite general, and his website is built with a simple purpose to collect data and money. On the other hand, Clinton's campaign attracts a lot of young voters and her site reflects that. At the end of the day, we all know the result. Donald Trump is going to be the 45th president of the United States. Like many other people, I was surprised with this outcome; but given my analysis of his website and an overarching look at his digital campaign, this is actually a reasonable outcome.

First of all, Trump has openly leveraged his wealth and the power of his brand and lives and breathes it. He markets with a purpose to a very well-defined niche. He has even styled himself as being authentic and true to his brand. Without a doubt, there has never been a more talked about candidate than Trump. For better or worse, he has dominated the headlines on key issues and world politics. Through his domination of the media, he has ensured that the Trump brand remains current and newsworthy.

Second of all, Trump allows his followers to lead the way. His slogan "Make America Great Again" may not include minute details but it is sure to make Americans fantasize about the good old days and how the country was great at one point of time. The followers can relate to the brand at a more personal level which is priceless. His slogan is all over hats and T-shirts and

there is also a hashtag. His powerful and catchy slogan can be easily remembered by the audience. Just like successful brands, his slogan builds energy and feeling, and helps communicate the brand message successfully.

Last but not least, whether in a talk show or on a website, Trump's message is the same. The politician's campaign is based on the principle that being remembered is better than not being remembered at all. In a world which is filled with noise and spam, there are too many choices, customers are more likely to pick a brand which they remember. Similarly, Trump has built a brand for himself which people hear more often than rest of his competitors. This not only drives brand recall but helps his supporters retain his messages on American values, global politics and the economy. Another key vein which Trump has tapped into is the American electorate's need for transparency. Trump is known for taking the stage and giving voice to anything that goes on his head. He deviates from the pre-approved and politically correct scripts. By opening up and showing who he really is, Trump has only strengthened his position.

CONCLUSION

As presidential elections happen once in 4 years, it is interesting to witness how the campaigning changes in terms of technology and tactics. Over the course of 4 years, a lot of innovation has occurred. It is very rare that the candidates will follow the same formula as those who contested before them. Websites like Twitter and Facebook were mostly used by the forward-thinking candidates to reach the younger audience. Barack Obama's campaign in 2008 has been viewed as the first campaign which focused on social media as a marketing medium. Clinton and Trump in 2016 have embraced innovative technologies and social media to connect with the tech-savvy cohort of voters. My study helps shine the light on how they use websites to accomplish their goals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benoit, P. J. & Benoit, W. L. (2005). Criteria for evaluating political campaign webpages. *Southern Communication Journal, Vol 70, No 3, 230-247.*
- D'Alessio, Dave (2000). Adoption of the World Wide Web by American Political Candidates, 1996-1998. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, Vol 44, No 4, 556-568.*
- Davis, Steve (2005). Presidential Campaigns Fine-tune Online Strategies. *Journalism Studies, Vol 6, No 2, 241-244.*
- Faules, Don F & Baker, Eldon (1965). Communication and the Campaign Manager. *Today's Speech, Vol 13, Issue 2, 30-39.*
- Kaye, Barbara (2013). I Can Choose Clearly Now: The Influence of Online Source Reliance on Candidate Preference During the 2008 Presidential Election. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, Volume 21, 294-311.*
- Levenshus, Abbey (2010). Online Relationship Management in a Presidential Campaign: A Case Study of the Obama Campaign's Management of Its Internet-Integrated Grassroots Effort. *Journal of Public Relations Research, Vol 22, Issue 3, 313-335.*
- Lynch, P.J. & Horton, S. (1999). *Web style guide; Basic design principles for creating Web sites.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Metzgar, Emily & Maruggi, Albert (2009). Social Media and the 2008 US Presidential Election. *Journal of New Communications Research, Vol 4, Issue 1, 141-165.*
- Ochs, N. V. (1999). *Search and you shall find.* Retrieved from <http://www.microsoft.com/workshop/design/layout/site011999.asp>
- Perlmutter, D. (2008). *Blogwars.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Souley, B. & Wicks, Robert H. (2005). Tracking the 2004 Presidential Campaign Web Sites: Similarities and Differences. *American Behavioral Scientist, Vol 49, Issue 4, 535-547.*
- Spaeth, Merrie (2009). Presidential Politics and Public Relations in 2008: Marshall McLuhan 2.0 *Journalism Studies, Vol 10, Issue 3, 438-443.*
- Verser, R. & Wicks, Robert H. (2006). Managing Voter Impressions: The Use of Images on Presidential Candidate Websites during the 2000 Campaign. *Journal of Communication, Vol 56, Issue 1, 178-197.*
- Wicks, Robert H., Bradley, Amy, Blackburn, Gregory & Fields, Tiffany (2011). Tracking the Blogs: An Evaluation of Attacks, Acclaims, and Rebuttals Presented on Political Blogs

- During the 2008 Presidential Election. *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 55, Issue 6, 651-666.
- Williams, A. P., Trammell, K. D., Postelnicu, M., Landreville, K. D. & Martin, J. D. (2005). Blogging and Hyperlinking: use of the Web to enhance viability during the 2004 US Campaign. *Journalism Studies*, Vol 6, No 2, 177-186.
- Yoon, D. & Joseph, S. (2008). Comparisons of Presidential Election Campaigns: A Functional Approach to the Candidates' and their Parties' Websites and TV Spots. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, Vol 24, Issue 1, 63-73.
- Xenos, M. & Foot, K. (2005). Politics as Usual, or Politics Unusual? Position Taking and Dialogue on Campaign Websites in the 2002 U.S. Elections. *Journal of Communication*, Vol 55, Issue 1, 169-185.