

To Blog or Not to Blog: When Traditional Campaign  
Rhetoric Meets Technology—Early Analysis and  
Discussion of Candidate Blogs for the 2008  
Presidential Elections

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2003, presidential candidate Howard Dean turned American politics on its ear with an aggressive grassroots campaign and the introduction of the blog as a principal means of communicating with the voting populace. For many Americans, the 2004 presidential contest was the first mention of the word “blog.” Since then, this new medium has transformed the campaign climate, necessitating direct-voter dialogue and encouraging civic engagement. Candidates from all of the major political parties have added blogs to their campaign repertoire in order to generate mass grassroots communication and to energize voters on a level unparalleled by previous mass media-based campaigns. While many other countries have introduced them into their political systems, the influence of blogs on political discourse has been the most prominent in the United States. Academia, journalists, and political pundits alike have paid particular attention to the role of bloggers in American politics and journalism. However, blogging still remains in such an early stage of development. Therefore, no one can be sure exactly how it will evolve in the future. As Eunseong Kim speculates, “What is clear is that blogging will be an important campaign tool in future political campaigns, bloggers will continuously put pressure on traditional journalists to cover some overlooked issues or events, and communication among Internet users using new technologies such as blogging will continue to increase.”<sup>1</sup>

In preparation for the 2008 presidential election, I believe that it is crucial to re-evaluate the role of blogs in political contests. Although scholars have paid significant attention to the blog phenomenon in recent years, many issues regarding this subject still

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<sup>1</sup> Kim, Eunseong. “Political and Non-Political Bloggers in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election: Motivations and Activities.” Dissertation, Indiana University, 2006, p. 1.

remain relatively untouched. This thesis will explore the role of blogs in the first quarter of the 2008 presidential campaign. While I will primarily focus on 2008 candidate blogs found on campaign websites, I will also discuss the early influence of the 2004 presidential election and the contributions of political bloggers generally. I will be looking to explain whether the role of political campaign blogs has changed since their inception in 2004 during the Democratic presidential primaries. Furthermore, I would like to explore the types of messages that candidates communicate in blogs and how these messages fit into their overall campaign strategy. Finally, I will discuss the implications for future political contests by theorizing the importance of blogs and other interactive features for political campaigning.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to understand the nature of political discourse and civic engagement online, it is necessary to examine candidate blogs and their contents to learn more about blogging as a mass medium and its strategies. After an initial theoretical look at blogs and the 2004 presidential campaign, I turn to three candidate blogs from the 2008 contest. I selected three Democratic presidential candidates for the purpose of analyzing their blogs. I only chose Democratic candidates because I wanted to cross-examine messages directed towards related constituencies. I selected Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator John Edwards, and Senator Joseph Biden as the candidates for the analysis. These three candidates had some of the most developed blogs and their websites allowed for access to archived blogs, which made it easier to find chronological posts. In addition, each candidate has experience as a Senator, entered the race at relatively the same time, and was chosen for a specific purpose.

I wanted to get a sample from the Democratic field of candidates. However, I was concerned with both the candidates' positions in this crowded field, as well as their distinctions that may or may not define their candidacy. Senator Clinton was chosen because she is the frontrunner in the race, and if she wins, she will not only be the first woman to serve as president of the United States, but also the first presidential spouse. It will be interesting to watch how she plays into her key constituency, and whether she utilizes the popularity of her husband. Senator Edwards was chosen because he is a middle of the pack candidate, and this is his second attempt at the Democratic presidential ticket. I wanted to see whether he would capitalize on his earlier run for office as Vice-Presidential candidate under Senator John Kerry, or whether he would try and reinvent himself. Finally, Senator Biden was chosen because he represents the "Dark Horse Candidate," and I wanted to look at possible similarities between his blog and Howard Dean's online campaign strategies, in addition to the efforts of the other two candidates.

In order to analyze each candidate's blog, I looked at the content of each post from the date of his or her official announcement of presidential candidacy to the end of the Federal Election Commission's first quarter fundraising deadline on March 31, 2007. This was done in a chronological fashion, starting with the earliest post in the campaign. If there were earlier posts on the blog, these messages were disregarded in order to ensure that only messages during the official period of the campaign were considered. Additionally, although there are often multiple threads associated with each post, this study does not consider these threads in order to narrow the scope to specific campaign strategy. Each blog post was considered for its topic, subject, and author. Of particular

interest in this study are topics that parallel mainstream media's coverage of political news, such as issues and polling numbers, as well as topics that are unique to the blog community, such as grassroots mobilization. Subjects are individuals or groups that are featured or discussed in posts, usually reflecting special attention to key constituencies. Authors can be either members of the campaign's new media team or other campaign staff, special guest bloggers, or comments from other forms of media. The purpose of this content analysis is to assess the blog "conversation" and how it parallels traditional media coverage of the campaign, as well as how it fulfills its own rhetorical campaign function.

# CHAPTER 1

## The Origins of Blogs in Politics

### 1.1 Emergence of Blogs in U.S. Culture

Although blogs have been around since as early as 1997, they have exploded in recent years, owing largely to the increase of Internet-use worldwide. In 1997, John Barger, one of the original bloggers, coined the term “weblogs” to name the interactive electronic journals where information is electronically posted, updated frequently, and presented in reverse chronological order.<sup>2</sup> In 1999, Peter Merholz, another early user, separated the word “weblog” into “we blog”, and since then, the new term “blog” has been used more frequently.<sup>3</sup> Blogs commonly contain both text and hyperlinks. Besides these functions, blog posts can also contain pictures and video, known as “photoblogs” and “vlogs.” According to Gracie Lawson-Borders and Rita Kirk, “Blogging emerged as a ready communication tool in 1999 when Pyra labs created the product blogger [...] which permitted information to be frequently updated, provide templates for user ease, and is offered free to its users.”<sup>4</sup>

The community of bloggers on the Internet, otherwise known as the blogosphere, is continually expanding. Since their beginnings in 1997 and legendary development during the 2004 presidential election, blogs have continued to grow at a dramatic rate. According to Technorati, a search engine for blogs, there have been as many as 35

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<sup>2</sup> Gracie Lawson-Borders & Rita Kirk. “Blogs in Campaign Communication.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (4) 2005, 548.

<sup>3</sup> *The Economist*. “It’s The Links, Stupid: Blogging is just another word for having a conversation.” *The Economist* (20 April 2006). 26 March 2007  
[http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=6794172](http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=6794172).

<sup>4</sup> Lawson-Borders & Kirk, p. 548.

million blogs created as of April 2006, and on average, 75,000 new blog sites are created every day.<sup>5</sup> The blogosphere is endlessly diverse in topics and forms. Content can range anywhere from miscellaneous facts about the author to sharp political analysis and commentary on current events. They provide a more personalized approach to presenting news and information. Additionally, many blogs are heavily inter-textual, weaving together stories and images from many other blogs. Lately, they have received a significant amount of media attention due to the social and political power that they have demonstrated as a medium of mass communications. For example, many political pundits believe that Senator Trent Lott lost his job because bloggers would not forgive his inappropriate racial remarks from the late Senator Strom Thurmond's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have argued that the Trent Lott incident demonstrates that, "the influence of political blogs on American politics is growing and that time constraints in the journalism environment makes journalists' reliance on political blogs inevitable."<sup>7</sup>

Certainly, one measure of importance in the realm of mass media has been the ability to perform the role of "watchdog." Blogs have demonstrated their ability to perform this function, especially after the mainstream media's inability to scrutinize the Bush administration's case for war with Iraq in 2003. One example of bloggers as "watchdogs" is when they questioned the authenticity of CBS's intelligence regarding President George W. Bush's intent to misrepresent his military service in the Texas National Guard.<sup>8</sup> The story began when blogger Scott Johnson made an initial post about

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<sup>5</sup> Technorati.com as quoted in Kim, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew P. Williams, Kaye D. Trammell, Monica Postelnicu, Kristen D. Landreville, & Justin D. Martin. "Blogging and Hyperlinking: Use of the Web to Enhance Viability During the 2004 US campaign." *Journalism Studies* 6(2) 2005, 178.

<sup>7</sup> Bloom as quoted in Kim, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Williams et. al, p. 178.

the questionable documents on the morning of September 9, 2004.<sup>9</sup> As a testament to the interconnectivity of the blogosphere, Johnson's post led to numerous responses, including additional posts on his site as well as on other blogs. "This Web chatter led to national newspaper and televised broadcast coverage questioning the authenticity of the documents. Ultimately, the story then exploded across all major media channels, leading to an internal investigation at CBS."<sup>10</sup> This blunder led to the retraction and apology by both the anchor, Dan Rather, and the network, as well as the ultimate resignation of Rather.<sup>11</sup> Another example of bloggers as "watchdogs" is when the Sinclair Broadcasting Group announced it would air an anti-Kerry documentary about his service in Vietnam. Bloggers again led the charge to stop the broadcast.<sup>12</sup>

Despite their ability to direct the conversation, blogs are still very much an emerging mass medium. While in 2004, only 11% of Internet users have read the blogs or diaries of other Internet users, the blogosphere is continually expanding.<sup>13</sup> Today, a new blog is created every second of every day, and the blogosphere is doubling in size every five months.<sup>14</sup> Now owned by Google, blogging has quickly grown in both popularity and prestige. Their sheer number has increased dramatically since 1999, growing from approximately fifty to anywhere from 2.4 million to 4.1 million sites on the Web

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Williams. "The Main Frame: Assessing the Role of the Internet in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Contest." In The 2004 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective, ed. Robert E. Denton, Jr. (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005) 249.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Danielle R. Wiese and Bruce E. Gronbeck. "Campaign 2004 Developments in Cyberpolitics." In The 2004 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective, ed. Robert E. Denton, Jr. (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005) 224.

<sup>13</sup> Lawson-Borders & Kirk, p. 549.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=6794172](http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=6794172).

today.<sup>15</sup> The future of blogs in American culture is very bright.

## 1.2 Blogs in Politics

There are two main genres of blogs: those run by politicians on their campaign websites and those authored by journalists or non-journalists that offer political commentary. Blogs lend themselves well to American politics because by their very nature, they are overtly democratic. As they gain popularity with the public, many scholars believe that this new form of technology has the ability to engage people in democratic conversation. According to Kim, “Web logging suggests that Internet users might indeed be able to engage in diverse political discourse with equal standing.”<sup>16</sup> Chris Mooney, a writer for the *American Prospect*, suggests that, “the culture of dialogue and fairness in blogging presents a great opportunity to actually engage the other side.”<sup>17</sup> The format of blogs provides the opportunity for ordinary citizens to converse and debate their differing viewpoints in an online forum. This major innovation in online communication makes it possible for anyone to start a new conversation thread whenever he or she is worried about being isolated by those who dominate the discussion. Furthermore, voters can by-pass the agenda-setting function of the mainstream media by educating themselves on issues and stories that more traditional news outlets prefer to cover in a much more arbitrary fashion.

While American politicians have been slow to adopt blogs, politicians from the United Kingdom have been blogging for years in an effort to reach out to their

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<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Stromer-Galley & Andrea B. Baker, “Joy and Sorrow of Interactivity on the Campaign Trail: Blogs in the Primary Campaign of Howard Dean.” In *The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004*, eds. Andrew P. Williams & John C. Tedesco (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006) 118.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Mooney as quoted in Kim, p. 31.

constituency.<sup>18</sup> American politicians, on the other hand, have tended to blog to win office. During the 1996 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole became the first American presidential candidates to use the Internet as a campaign tool.<sup>19</sup> For the most part, this campaign season only saw the introduction of campaign websites, which were little more than repetitions of printed campaign literature. As the Internet advanced and was used by more people, the content of campaign websites evolved to include much more interactive tools to inform and engage both potential voters and the media. These tools consisted of innovative fundraising operations, a means to email the campaign, community tools, Web videos, and blogs.

For example, prior to the 2000 presidential election, candidates in 1996 and 1998 avoided direct online interaction between the candidate and the public, and instead, used their websites as public relations tools to promote their campaign message.<sup>20</sup> However, candidates in the 2000 election had entirely new message strategies. In the 2000 presidential campaign, Steve Forbes became the first presidential candidate to announce his candidacy online.<sup>21</sup> Another first during this campaign cycle was online fundraising, as the FEC ruled in 1999 that candidates were authorized to raise money online and were eligible for matching funds for those donations.<sup>22</sup> Finally, both of the major party candidates urged their visitors to establish their own personal versions of their websites:

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<sup>18</sup> Kaye D. Trammell. "The Blogging of the President." In The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004, eds. Andrew P. Williams & John C. Tedesco (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006) 135.

<sup>19</sup> Wiese & Gronbeck, p. 218.

<sup>20</sup> Kaye D. Trammell, Andrew Paul Williams, Monica Postelnicu, and Kristen D. Landreville. "Evolution of Online Campaigning: Increasing Interactivity in Candidate Web Sites and Blogs Through Text and Technical Features." *Mass Communication & Society* 9(1) 2006, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis. "Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

“The Gore campaign urged visitors to ‘Build Your Own Campaign’ while the Bush campaign titled the innovation ‘My George W.’”<sup>23</sup>

Today, the campaign website operates as an online headquarters, open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to respond to voter inquiries. This CNN-effect of sorts, with the need for 24-hour updates, necessitates the use of blogs in order to keep this operation afloat. According to Trammell et al., “It appears that the modern campaign shifted to not only require current and issue-driven Web sites but also Web sites that offer interactivity and invite user participation.”<sup>24</sup> Blogs were first introduced to the political campaign cycle by former Governor Howard Dean during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, and were quickly incorporated into other campaign websites. Following the larger trend of Internet campaigning, blogs were another step by politicians to expand their campaigns online.

### **1.3 Election 2004—The Man and The Year That Started It All**

The use of the internet for political information and campaigning during the 2004 presidential election, led many scholars to conclude that “unlike all prior presidential elections, the 2004 campaign for the White House can be earmarked as the first true ‘electronic election’.”<sup>25</sup> The 2004 presidential election reached a new level for online political communication and election activities.<sup>26</sup> Record amounts of campaign contributions were raised over the internet, and while candidates reached millions of potential voters through e-mail, voters were able to reach one another through web-

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* at 51.

<sup>24</sup> Trammell et. al, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Monica Postelnicu, Justin Martin, & Kristen Landreville, “The Role of Campaign Web Sites in Promoting Candidates and Attracting Campaign Resources.” In The Internet Election: Perspectives on the Web in Campaign 2004, eds. Andrew P. Williams & John C. Tedesco (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006) 99

<sup>26</sup> Williams, p. 243.

blogging. According to Williams, “The growing audience for blogs was a regular theme throughout the 2004 election.”<sup>27</sup> The 2004 campaign was the first political campaign in the United States to use blogs as a communication tool with the voters. In the 2004 Democratic primaries, former Governor Howard Dean mobilized an unprecedented number of constituencies through a grassroots effort centered on blogs. As a result, every viable candidate in the race soon instituted blogs on their campaign websites as a way to raise money, mobilize volunteers, and communicate their message.

When Howard Dean’s campaign launched its blog on March 15, 2003, it was given little attention by traditional media outlets. Dean, a relatively unknown figure, was eventually able to emerge as the leading contender for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination with the help of his “Blog for America” and its network of committed supporters. Joe Trippi, Dean’s campaign manager, inaugurated the blog with a post explaining its purpose: “This is the place where we at the campaign can let people know when, where, and how you can help. We are going to need as much support from netroots and grassroots as we can possibly get. Please check back here regularly.”<sup>28</sup> The first blog was crafted by Matthew Gross, and called “Dean Call for Action Blog.”<sup>29</sup> The original blog only allowed campaign staff to contribute commentary about the campaign. However, by June, the campaign had switched to a new name for the blog, “Blog for America,” and MoveableType blogging software, a more interactive format that allowed readers to post comments. The structure of Dean’s campaign blog included an initial daily post from the campaign staff, and several more posts throughout the course of the

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, p. 249.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew R. Kerbel & Joel David Bloom. “Blog for America and Civic Involvement.” *Press/Politics* 10(4) 2005, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Stromer-Galley & Baker, p. 114.

day. Under each post would be a link to a comments section, where readers could view what other people had said about the post, or could contribute their own opinion, which would appear publicly for others to read. According to Joe Trippi, “The blog participants served as the eyes and ears of the campaign, watching what was happening and providing critical feedback [...] We learned so much and get so many good ideas about how to move forward.”<sup>30</sup>

The mainstream media began to take notice after the blog began bringing in millions of dollars of donations from online supporters, calling it revolutionary and heralding blogs and internet fundraising as the wave of the future. By the July 1 campaign fund-raising filing deadline, Dean had raised 7 million dollars, demonstrating that the campaign, with the help of online resources, had built a powerful grassroots following.<sup>31</sup> An article from *The New York Times* describes the successes of Dean’s blog. As Elisabeth Rosenthal writes, “The Dean interactive website Blog for America, where visitors can post any messages they want, gets more than 40,000 hits a day. His campaign drew in \$15 million in the financial quarter that ended in September, the vast majority in small online contributions.”<sup>32</sup> As Francis Clines of *The New York Times* suggests, “Whether Dr. Dean wins the presidency or not, his strategists’ mastery of the Internet as a tool for organizing volunteers and amassing money already qualifies as the main innovation of the 2004 campaign.”<sup>33</sup> The height of interactivity between the Blog for America’s readers and Dean’s campaign staff came on August 26, 2003 when Howard

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Elisabeth Rosenthal. “Political Challenge 2.0: Make a Virtual Army a Reality.” *The New York Times*. 21 December 2003, p. N42.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Clines. “The Doctor and the Net: His Bloggers and Donors Pursue Victory via the Mouse.” *The New York Times*. 17 November 2003, p. A20.

Dean brought a red bat on-stage at New York's Bryant Park at the suggestion of one of his blog readers. The speech represented the culmination of his "Sleepless Summer" campaign tour, while the red bat symbolized the thousands of blog readers and "Deaniacs" who had been "swinging the bat" to raise funds for Dean.<sup>34</sup>

Howard Dean was not the only candidate to have a blog in the 2004 presidential election, but he was the first. After Dean's success with online fundraising, five of the ten candidates for the Democratic nomination followed suit by created blogs. Retired General Wesley Clark, Senator John Edwards, Senator John Kerry, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, and Senator Joe Lieberman all followed in Dean's footsteps. After the primaries, both Senator John Kerry and President George Bush had blogs during the final phase of the 2004 presidential election. While campaigns have been known to be slow to adopt technology, the rapid proliferation of blogs on campaign websites during the 2004 campaign season is noteworthy. Considering 2004 was the inaugural run for American campaign blogging, these blogs represented the transition to technology as a means to interact with and mobilize voters on the campaign trail.

During the 2004 campaign, blogs were also influential from a journalism perspective. They were alternative sources of campaign coverage, and served as "watch-dogs" of the mainstream media by routinely fact-checking claims from both the candidates and major TV networks and newspapers. In the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, both commentary and investigative reporting by blogs were credited with setting the news agenda at points in the campaign.<sup>35</sup> For example, left-leaning blogs, such as DailyKos and Wonkette, ignited controversy over Bush's campaign and its

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<sup>34</sup> Stromer-Galley & Baker, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> Matt Carlson. "Blog and Journalistic Authority: The Role of Blogs in US Election Day 2004." *Journalism Studies*, 8(2) 2007, 267.

discriminatory approach to information in the run-up to the war in Iraq. Conservative blogs, like InstaPundit, discussed Senator Kerry campaign's internal crises and platform flip-flopping.<sup>36</sup> From a commentary standpoint, throughout the campaign, outside bloggers, who were unaffiliated with a particular campaign, shared their thoughts about the candidates with the rest of the blogosphere. Bloggers became the campaign story themselves when they were issued press credentials for the Democratic and Republican conventions.<sup>37</sup> In order to compete with the rising medium, the major news outlets, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *MSNBC*, quickly adopted their own versions of blogs, modeled in similar fashion to candidate blogs, but without the overt bias.

In the 2004 presidential campaign, the largest gain for bloggers came on Election Day. The most notable political blogs saw a surge in their traffic on Election Day, rivaling major network news coverage. "On election night, the most popular sites were overloaded and shut down as servers around the country struggled to handle the volume of visitors."<sup>38</sup> Even candidate websites saw an unprecedented response, with tens of thousands of hits as the exit poll numbers started to filter in. According to Wiese and Gronbeck, "Perhaps the best evidence that blogs matured in 2004 came when *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* drew the largest audience for broadcast news on election night, with popular bloggers serving as invited guests to help report the polls."<sup>39</sup> This Election Day recognition is a powerful testament to the growing strength of blogs as an influential form of alternative media.

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<sup>36</sup> Wiese & Gronbeck, p. 224.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

### Hillary Clinton: Blogging the First Woman President?

On January 20, 2007, symbolically two years to the day of the inauguration of the next president of the United States, former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced her official formation of a presidential exploratory committee via her website. In a video message posted on her campaign website, Clinton, the two-term Senator from New York, announced, “I’m in. And I’m in to win.”<sup>40</sup> If Clinton wins, she will not only become the first woman to serve as president of the United States, but also the first presidential spouse. Clinton is a formidable candidate for president, as she is arguably the best-known candidate from either party. She is also widely respected by the members of her own Democratic party, and she has been able to raise a considerable amount of money to fund her campaign—earning over \$36 million in the first quarter fundraising period.<sup>41</sup> While her first quarter earnings are impressive, most of the donations were from large donors. In order to compete with the other Democratic frontrunners, such as Senator Barack Obama and Senator Edwards, and shut out dark-horse candidates like Senator Joseph Biden, Clinton will have to find a way to organize a larger grassroots following and attract smaller donors (contributors of \$200 or less) through an effective internet-fundraising or direct-mail campaign.

#### 2.1 Hillary Clinton—A Brief Biography

Hillary Diane Rodham, Dorothy and Hugh Rodham's first child, was born on October 26, 1947 in Park Ridge, Illinois. As a graduate of Wellesley College, Clinton

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<sup>40</sup> John Roberts, “Hillary Clinton launches White House bid: ‘I’m in’,” *CNN*, 22 January 2007, 9 April 2007, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/01/20/clinton.announcement/index.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Presidential Candidates Fundraising Activity through First Quarter 2007. Campaign Finance Institute. 30 April 2007, [http://www.cfinst.org/president/Q1\\_SummaryTable.pdf](http://www.cfinst.org/president/Q1_SummaryTable.pdf).

went on to attend Yale Law School, where she served on the Board of Editors of Yale Law Review and Social Action, interned with children's advocate Marian Wright Edelman, and met Bill Clinton.<sup>42</sup> After graduation, Hillary advised the Children's Defense Fund in Cambridge and joined President Nixon's impeachment inquiry staff advising the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives.<sup>43</sup> In 1975, she married Bill Clinton, and moved to Arkansas for Bill's political career. In Arkansas, Hillary joined the faculty of the University of Arkansas Law School in 1975 and the Rose Law Firm in 1976. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the board of the Legal Services Corporation. Bill and Hillary's daughter, Chelsea, was born in 1980. When Bill was elected governor of Arkansas in 1978, Hillary became Arkansas's First Lady. In her twelve years as First Lady of Arkansas, Hillary also chaired the Arkansas Educational Standards Committee, co-founded the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and served on the boards of the Arkansas Children's Hospital, Legal Services, and the Children's Defense Fund.<sup>44</sup>

When her husband was elected President of the United States in 1992, Hillary assumed an active role as the nation's First Lady. She chaired the Task Force on National Health Care Reform, and continued to be a leading advocate for expanding health insurance coverage, as well as women, children and veteran's issues.<sup>45</sup> On November 7, 2000, Hillary was elected to the United States Senate from New York, becoming the first First Lady elected to the United States Senate and the first woman elected statewide in

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/hc42.html>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/hc42.html>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/>

New York.<sup>46</sup> To the surprise of her critics, Clinton used her first term in the Senate to transform herself into a more broadly appealing national figure, gaining respect from members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. As Senator, “Hillary has been a steadfast advocate for middle-class families, working to help create jobs, expand children's health care and protect Social Security from privatization, [...and] fought to strengthen our approach to homeland security.”<sup>47</sup> In 2006, New Yorkers reelected Hillary to the Senate with 67 percent of the vote.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 Clinton’s Campaign Website

Senator Clinton’s campaign website mixes traditional campaign features with more interactive elements that include some of the latest trends in technology. On the homepage of the Hillary for President site, Clinton’s new media staff has created an opening page that includes announcements of the latest news about the campaign, a way to contact the campaign, a “Get Connected” section with links to Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, or Flickr, as well as links to redirect visitors to different sections of the site. The seven sections of the website include “Home,” “Hillary,” “Take Action,” “Newsroom,” “Blog,” “Video,” and “Contribute.” In the “Hillary” section, the campaign has created a brief biography about the Senator. “Hillary’s Story,” the biography describing Clinton, discusses her early life in Illinois, her role as mother and advocate, and her terms as First Lady and United States Senator. This section highlights Clinton’s achievements in public office, emphasizing her actions on issues related to key constituencies such as women, veterans, and the middle-class. In the section titled “Take Action,” visitors to the website can enter the virtual “action center” and join “Team

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<sup>46</sup><http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/hc42.html>

<sup>47</sup><http://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/>

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Hillary” by registering to receive updates and access to web tools. Visitors can also help Clinton fundraise in the “HillRaisers” portion, build her list of supporters in “Build Our Base,” and either plan or find a party or event in their area.

In the “Newsroom,” voters can seek out a summary of the most recent news stories about Clinton and search current and archived photos, press releases, and speeches. Senator Clinton also maintains a video log on her website. In the “Video” section, visitors can view her special live webcasts labeled “HillCasts,” or view Clinton in her various speaking engagements across the country in “On the Move.” Finally, in the “Contribute” section, Clinton’s campaign has created an online contribution form that allows supporters to use their credit card to donate online.

### **2.3 The Blog— Structure**

On Senator Clinton’s “Blog” page, the campaign’s new media staff, special guests (usually Clinton’s strategists or senior advisors), and visitors to the site all have the chance to “blogHillary.” In the main section of the page, the new media staff has created a blog that is updated almost daily, and is posted chronologically starting with the most recent post. Each blog addition or “thread” is accompanied by a title, author, date and time, and message—either in video or text format. At the bottom of each thread, there is a way for visitors to comment on the message. However, those that wish to comment must first register with the site. In the right hand corner of each thread, the blog provides links to allow the reader to “digg It,” search other blogs for comments on Clinton’s blog thread in “Search on Technorati,” bookmark the blog thread on “del.icio.us” (a site where people register to view their bookmarks either from home, the office, or elsewhere), send to a friend through the email link, or print the blog post. “Digg It” means that the post

would be submitted to Digg, a user-driven social content website where submitted content is read by other users and rated a digg if liked. If the content receives enough diggs, it is promoted to the front page for the millions of visitors to see.<sup>49</sup>

On the right-hand side of the main blog, there is a “Team Hillary Action Center” where links to the “Featured Posts,” “Recent Posts,” and “Archived Posts” are located. There is also another “Get Connected” link, and a way to subscribe to interactive sites like “XML,” “MY AOL beta,” “Google,” and “My Yahoo.”

#### **2.4 The Blog—Methods of Analysis**

In order to analyze Senator Clinton’s presidential campaign blog, I will be looking at contributions from the first post on February 19, 2007 until March 31, 2007, the Federal Election Commission’s first quarter fundraising deadline. It is interesting to note that Clinton’s blog originates nearly a month after her announcement of her candidacy, which might suggest that her online-campaign strategy was not a crucial part of her pre-announcement preparations. During this period of nearly six weeks, there were sixty-seven posts. As previously mentioned, each post was analyzed for its topic, subject, and author.

The discussion topics fall into three main categories: Policy Issues, the Campaign Process, and the Blog Community. Policy Issues and the Campaign Process are the two areas that reflect traditional media coverage of political elections, while the Blog Community discussions are relatively new to the political arena and unique to political blogs. Policy Issues are postings that include discussion of current events and policy in support of the candidate’s position on campaign issues. The Campaign Process includes posts that discuss campaign strategy, such as the “horse race,” key endorsements,

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<sup>49</sup> <http://digg.com/about>

controversies, attacks against candidates, campaign stops, primary announcements, and favorable press. In terms of the Blog Community, these posts reflect the desire of the campaign to directly address the readers of the blog on a more personal level, with an overall emphasis on new technology. For example, Clinton's new media staff invited supporters to send in blog submissions. The staff then selected the best submission, and gave Kelly G. from South Carolina the special honor of being the first post on Clinton's campaign blog. Other efforts to establish the Blog Community include podcasts, live blogs, video and multimedia links, fundraising appeals, and posts from the campaign's main blogger. Subjects can be individuals and groups that are featured and discussed in the postings, usually reflecting special attention to key constituencies. Authors can be either members of the candidate's new media team, the candidate or other senior members of his or her staff, a campaign press release, or comments from other media such as newspapers, television, or other blogs.

## **2.5 The Blog—Analysis**

Senator Clinton's official campaign blogger is Crystal Patterson. Patterson serves both a rhetorical and physical function. She is charged with dictating the message of the candidate to the blog community, as well as leading the online, rhetorical strategy of the campaign. Patterson also represents the official face of the blog. In her opening message on February 19, 2007, she welcomes visitors to the campaign's new blog, and says she "looks forward to getting to know all of you as the campaign moves forward, and to hearing your ideas, stories, questions, and opinions."<sup>50</sup> She also reiterates the campaign's philosophy when she says, "we want all of you to join the conversation."<sup>51</sup> Patterson

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=3>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

echoes Senator Clinton in her announcement of her candidacy when ending her first blog post with “Let the conversation begin!”<sup>52</sup> This theme of a “national conversation” also mirrored the rhetoric of Clinton’s healthcare campaign as First Lady.

### *Topics*

On Clinton’s blog, posts relating to the Campaign Process are an overwhelming majority of the threads from February 19-March 31, 2007. This emphasis on the process rivals mainstream media’s focus on polling numbers and the “horse race.” These threads can be divided into four main categories: Polling Numbers, Endorsements, Campaign Stops, and Attack Posts. Mark Penn, the Chief Strategist for Hillary Clinton’s campaign, provides weekly updates on poll numbers. Penn is clever in his posts, as he spins each new poll to appear favorable to the candidate. Penn also strategically selects the polls he uses on the blog, which are overwhelmingly positive numbers for Clinton. While the exact motives are not known, the campaign seems to be using the numbers for two reasons. First, it gives the campaign the opportunity to more or less fix the numbers so that they are favorable to Clinton. This spinning of the poll numbers cannot be done in traditional media, like television or newspapers. Furthermore, the readers of a campaign blog are usually supporters of the candidate. Therefore, Clinton’s blog readers are less likely to challenge how the numbers are posted. Second, the campaign uses these posts to help maintain enthusiasm, as well as push the readers of the blog to do more to help the candidate. For example, Mark Penn writes, “This poll [...] has the horseshoe for president a statistical tie or better. When people ask me, ‘Can she win?’, I tell them she is already winning in the polls. Going forward, we may have many twists and turns, but Hillary has shown that just by getting in, she is well positioned to win.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

While Clinton's new media staff is concerned with polling numbers as evidenced in the text, they also place a considerable amount of importance on endorsements of the candidate. In the Endorsements subsection, Patterson has included endorsements from influential Democrats as well as powerful female icons. On March 26<sup>th</sup>, Patterson announces former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack and First Lady Christie Vilsack's support of Senator Clinton. On March 28<sup>th</sup>, she quotes Billie Jean King, "[Hillary] is a winner and I am standing beside her because she has the vision, the drive and the knowledge to lead this country."<sup>54</sup> On March 29<sup>th</sup>, Patterson includes an audio link to allow blog visitors to listen to United States Representative Jim McGovern endorse Hillary. There have been some posts of support from international figures such as Marina Pisklakova from the National Center for the Prevention of Violence as well as Inez McCormack, a human rights and women's activist. Additionally, there been two notable endorsements from women's groups: Ellen Malcolm of EMILY's List, an organization working to elect pro-choice Democratic women, and Kim Gandy, President of the National Organization for Women (NOW). The purpose of the inclusion of these endorsements is to demonstrate the growing number of supporters for Clinton. Posts by key Democrats demonstrate to readers that Clinton has growing support from the members of her own party. The endorsements from women's groups are important in terms of their influence on women voters, Clinton's key constituency. Furthermore, by including female role models, such as Billie Jean King and Geraldine Ferraro, the campaign is setting the tone that it is possible for a woman running for President to get the votes needed to win. "As Ferraro writes, "Now is the time to elect someone whose victory will tell all our sons and

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=444>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=3077>

daughters that they can be president—that there are no barriers to talent and ability. And Hillary is the one to do it.”<sup>55</sup>

The third category, Campaign stops, describes Clinton’s appearances from the point-of-view of her campaign staff. These posts inform the readers about what Hillary has been up to on her tour of the country. However, the blog only includes campaign stops that relate to key constituencies, such as when the Women’s team traveled to Nevada or when Clinton took part in the “Bloody Sunday” ceremony, which remembered the civil rights struggle and honored those that took part in the fight. Finally, during this period, Clinton’s blog includes one attack post. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, the Hillary Camp unleashed its first blog attack against Senator Barack Obama. In a post titled “Cut Ties and Return Cash,” Howard Wolfson, Communications Director, discusses how Senator Obama, while “denouncing slash and burn politics yesterday, his campaign’s finance chair was viciously and personally attacking Senator Clinton and her husband.”<sup>56</sup> Wolfson continues by calling for Senator Obama to remove Mr. Geffen, his finance chair, from his campaign. It will be interesting to see how attack posts play out in the 2008 election, as negative political advertisements have continued to receive voter backlash at the polls and in the mainstream media. Since campaign blogs do not meet nearly as many viewers as political advertisements, it will be important to take note of whether politicians are switching their attack campaign to their blogs, which mainly contacts their base.

Posts relating to the Blog Community are the second most numerous threads on Clinton’s blog. These posts are designed to encourage reader participation in the blog and

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=3096>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=547>

campaign, as well as maintain and increase readership with interactive features. The purpose of campaign blogs is to make supporters feel like they have a voice in the way the campaign is run. This section of posts allows for the most access to the campaign members, albeit still relatively limited. This section is divided into Hillcasts, Open Threads, Weekly Round-Up, Fundraising, and Technology. In the HillCasts, Patterson has added a link to each HillCast in her post with a short description of the webcast. Each HillCast addresses a key issue that the campaign wishes to highlight and targets a specific valuable constituency. The HillCasts in the period from February 19-March 31, 2007 discuss Iraq, Energy, Children's Healthcare, and Equal Pay—all issues central to Clinton's platform and voter base. The HillCasts can also be used by readers to learn more about the issues in the campaign, reflecting the campaign's desire to become an alternative medium for readers to learn about what is at stake in 2008. As for the Open Thread, while there is only one during this period, it is important because it demonstrates that the campaign is placing emphasis on "listening" to its readers. However, the campaign should make an effort to include much more of these threads in the future. In terms of the Weekly Roundup, Patterson discusses "some of the things Hillary and her campaign have been focused on this week," or in other words what the campaign would like the audience to focus on as well.<sup>57</sup> For example, a post on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, encourages readers to tell the campaign how they feel about Hillary's view that there should be no military action in Iran, and also their opinions on Hillary's roadmap out of Iraq.<sup>58</sup>

Following the fundraising success of candidates from 2004 presidential contest, Clinton follows in the tradition by using her blog as a viable means of fundraising.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=890>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Patterson uses emails from both President Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton in her posts to help the fundraising drive before the March 31<sup>st</sup> FEC filing deadline. The urgency is apparent, especially as posts near the deadline. In the March 31<sup>st</sup> post titled “Incredible Response”, Patterson quotes Patti Solis Doyle, Hillary’s campaign manager, “Now there are just a few hours left. At midnight tonight, we have to close the books on the first quarter[...] As Hillary’s campaign manager, I’m telling you right now, every dollar we bring in before midnight will make a difference.”<sup>59</sup> Technology also plays a key role in the blog community, and therefore, the campaign demonstrates a desire to incorporate it into their own blog. Patterson includes links to both Clinton’s new “YouTube” page on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and “MySpace” page on March 19<sup>th</sup> to encourage readers to seek out other alternative and progressive mediums to learn more about the candidate.

Finally, posts relating to the policy are the least numerous on Clinton’s blog. This topic also takes a backseat in the mainstream media’s coverage of political campaigns. While Clinton’s blog does discuss some of her platform in other sections, the purpose of policy posts is to discuss where she stands on the issues of the 2008 election. These posts can be divided into Constituents’ Issues and News Posts. In terms of Constituents’ Issues, the blog is often used as a way to demonstrate how Clinton is devoted to her key constituents, which in the case of the Democratic Party are women, veterans, minorities, and the middle-class. In a blog post on February 26<sup>th</sup>, Patterson draws our attention to a couple of events that Clinton took part in to celebrate civil rights and African American history. In another post on March 4<sup>th</sup>, Patterson announces that “Hillary was in Selma, AL today to commemorate ‘Bloody Sunday’, and historic moment in the civil rights

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=3203>

movement.”<sup>60</sup> On March 7<sup>th</sup>, Patterson announces the “Women for Hillary” special initiative, and quotes Hillary Clinton, “We can only break barriers when somebody dares to challenge them. With this campaign, we will make clear that every one of us can say, ‘I can be president.’”<sup>61</sup> On March 8<sup>th</sup>, Patterson notes Hillary’s call for a “GI Bill of Rights,” and on March 30, announces Clinton’s call on Circuit City to “reconsider layoffs of thousands of workers in New York and across the country in order to replace them with lower-paid workers.”<sup>62</sup> In the News subsection, Patterson includes posts that are relevant to the most current news stories of the day. In a March 14<sup>th</sup> post, Patterson addresses the U.S. Attorney controversy, by adding a link into her post that would allow readers to “join Hillary in calling for the resignation of Alberto Gonzales.”<sup>63</sup> On March 19<sup>th</sup>, Patterson quotes Clinton on the 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Iraq War, “Four years ago, the Bush Administration launched a pre-emptive war in Iraq. Tragically, it misjudged the number of troops needed, miscalculated the cost, and mismanaged the mission.”<sup>64</sup>

### *Subjects and Authors*

The subjects of Clinton’s posts appeal to her key constituencies, most notably women. As previously discussed, Patterson, and the rest of the new media staff, incorporate posts that address issues relating to the African-American community, Veterans, and women’s issues. This represents an attempt by the campaign to solidify their base. By maintaining their base block of voters, Clinton’s camp also hopes to sustain their blog readership, making sure that her supporters get their information from a campaign-controlled source, as opposed to mainstream media.

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=1819>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=2044>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=3164>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=2356>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=2666>

The blog has two main categories of authors: Crystal Patterson and Special Guests. As previously mentioned, Crystal Patterson, Clinton's blogger, authors the majority of the threads, serving almost as a news anchor for this medium. She provides weekly round-ups which inform readers what is going on in Hillary's campaign, as well as organizes the blog to the campaign's liking. In each of the posts marked Special Guest, the author has been chosen for a strategic purpose in communicating the campaign's message. Special Guests can be members of the campaign staff, Hillary herself, or readers of the blog. In the period I am analyzing, there have been only five reader-submitted posts. Incorporating reader-submitted posts demonstrates that the campaign wants to make an effort to include the blog readers in the process. As a testament to the campaign's desire to allow readers to have a voice, a post from Kelly G. won the special honor of being the first post on Clinton's campaign blog. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Kelly writes, "Mrs. Hillary Clinton, I will be a first time voter in the 2008 elections! In my heart I want you, Hillary Clinton, to convince the better of me to vote for you in 2008."<sup>65</sup> The other four reader-submitted posts also discuss crucial issues that the campaign has been focusing on. For example, in a post from Robert M. on February 21<sup>st</sup>, he writes, "Having been involved with Veterans Issues for the past 14 years the Senator ha[s] a strong concern for Veterans issues and their families[...] I thank her for her concern, and wish her well on the campaign."<sup>66</sup>

While readers have been able to have their voices heard by the campaign and voters on the Blog, they have only been able to hear Senator Clinton's own voice once. She has only written one blog post for the campaign thus far. In her post titled "Thank

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=7>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=22>

You” on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, she says, “I have been reading through the comments you all have been making—many of them encouraging, some critical and some with great suggestions—all of them are appreciated.”<sup>67</sup> As for the other members of the campaign staff, there have been a couple of posts from staff members expressing why they joined Hillary’s campaign. However, the majority of the campaign’s message comes from Crystal Patterson or Mark Penn, who delivers the polling numbers.

## **2.6. The Blog—Final Thoughts**

In the first quarter fundraising period, Senator Clinton’s blog has played a crucial role in energizing supporters, appealing to key constituencies, advocating policy, and fundraising efforts. However, the blog is lacking in interactive features. While readers can comment on posts, Hillary’s blog does not have the tools to make visitors feel like they are part of the campaign process. Even with Hillary’s emphasis on fundraising, she still received the bulk of her first quarter fundraising efforts from large donors, instead of following in Dean’s footsteps and utilizing her blog for more grassroots donations. Furthermore, while the campaign’s blogger plays an extremely instrumental role in the blog, there is a shortage of other campaign members and the candidate’s voice in the blog. Clinton, and more senior members of her staff, should do a better job at contributing. The fact that Bill Clinton’s voice was heard more than Hillary’s is a sign that the Senator Clinton needs to make a better effort at emerging from her husband’s shadow. If Hillary Clinton really is committed to building a grassroots groundswell, and to “wanting all of you to join the conversation,” she needs to focus her efforts at increasing the interactivity of her blog and incorporating her own voice into the medium. While the big donations and influential endorsements are important, if Hillary is really in it to win, she needs to

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<sup>67</sup> <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/blog/view/?id=977>

pay significant attention to grassroots mobilization as reflected in the development of her blog.

## CHAPTER 3

### John Edwards

Joining Senator Clinton in the crowded field of Democrats is Senator John Edwards. On December 27, 2006, Edwards announced his entry into the 2008 Presidential contest.<sup>68</sup> His announcement marked his second attempt at the presidential nomination, following his unsuccessful run in 2004. While Edwards is relatively an inexperienced candidate, serving only one term in the United States Senate, he was chosen as Senator John Kerry's running mate in 2004 presidential race, and is well-respected among the members of his party.

#### 3.1 John Edwards-A Brief Biography

On June 10, 1953, John Edwards was born in Seneca, South Carolina, and later raised in Robbins, North Carolina.<sup>69</sup> A graduate of North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill law school, Edwards was a trial lawyer before entering politics. While a law student at Chapel Hill, Senator Edwards met his wife Elizabeth, and they were later married in 1977. They have had four children: Catharine, Emma Claire, and Jack. Their first child, Wade, died in 1996.<sup>70</sup>

In 1998, Edwards ran for the United States Senate, and successfully defeated incumbent Republican Launch Faircloth. During his term, Senator Edwards focused on health care, education, civil liberties, the environment, saving Social Security and Medicare, and campaign finance. In 2004, at the end of his six-year term, Senator Edwards sought the Democratic nomination in the 2004 presidential election. After his

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<sup>68</sup> <http://johnedwards.com/about/john/>

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

defeat, he became the Democratic candidate for Vice President, Senator John Kerry's choice for a running mate. After Edwards and Kerry lost the election to President George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, Edwards recommitted himself to the One America Committee, a political action committee he established in 2001, and was appointed director of the Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law.<sup>71</sup> He was also a consultant for Fortress Investment Group LLC.

### **3.2 “John Edwards ‘08”—Campaign Website**

Senator Edwards' campaign website is divided into eight main sections: “About,” “Newsroom,” “Events,” “Multimedia,” “Issues,” “Blog,” “Take Action,” and “Contribute.” In the “About” section, visitors can read biographies of the Edwards family, John, Elizabeth, or their eldest daughter, Cate. The “Newsroom” section contains press releases, recent headlines, official photos, speeches, and “RSS central.” RSS central is similar to an email update system. “When you sign up for John Edwards for President's RSS updates, the JEFPP website will automatically send you a notice each time new content is added to the site. Instead of sending it to your email inbox, it will send the notice to your chosen RSS reader.”<sup>72</sup> In the “Events” portion of the website, there is a chronological list of upcoming events with John Edwards, starting with the most recent, and information about participating. The “Multimedia” section has video, audio, podcasts, downloads, and photos. Furthermore, should problems arise, there is also a “Technical Corner.” Under “Issues,” the campaign has prepared position papers on issues such as “Restoring America's Moral Leadership in the World,” “Guaranteeing

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.johnedwards.com/news/rss/>

Affordable, Quality Healthcare for Every American,” and “Eliminating Poverty.”<sup>73</sup> The “Take Action” section allows visitors to the website to join the campaign, make an online contribution, volunteer by joining “One Corps”, spread the word, join Students for Edwards, read testimonials, opportunities for networking, become a citizen journalist, join the E-Team, or get updates on their mobile phone. Finally, in the “Contribute” section, visitors can make a secure online contribution to John Edwards’ presidential campaign.

### **3.3 The Blog—Structure**

According to the campaign website, “The John Edwards '08 blog is *your* blog.”<sup>74</sup> On the website, there are two main types of blog posts, homepage posts and diary posts, and anyone can contribute to either type of post. Homepage posts are featured on the John Edwards '08 home page of the blog, and have to be voted for by the members of the blog community in order to make their appearance on the homepage. On the other hand, diary posts do not have to be voted on, but they can only be viewed on readers’ individual Edwards '08 blog page and are listed under “Diary Posts.” However, everyone can read and comment on them. In order to participate on the blog, readers need to sign up for a free account.

The homepage of the blog is divided into four sections: “Straight from the Podium” (SFTP), “Podium,” “Open Mic,” and “All.” In the SFTP section at the top of the homepage, the most recent blog entry from the campaign headquarters is featured, with entries from the Edwards family, featured writers, and the campaign staff. The Podium section features less recent blog entries from campaign headquarters; each entry in this

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.johnedwards.com/about/issues/>

<sup>74</sup> <http://blog.johnedwards.com/about>

section has once appeared in the SFTP section, but has since been replaced by a more recent entry. The Open Mic section has the most recent blog entries from the blog's online community. When readers create and submit blog entries, they go into the "Voting Booth," where other registered blog members can vote on them. If a blog receives enough votes, the entry is posted on the Open Mic section of the homepage. The All section has links to all blog entries from both the online community and campaign headquarters. The blog is also organized at the top of the homepage according to topic: "News," "Arguments & Analyses," "Action," "Quick Posts," "Diaries," and "Talk Live," a general chatroom for the online blog community. At the bottom of the homepage, there are six organizational sections providing convenience for blog users. These include "Featured Blog," "Who's Online," "Recent Entries," "Recent Comments," "Most Read," and "Most Discussed This Week."

On each blog posting, there are several technical features that link to new sites. First, there are "tags," which are keywords that appear under the title of a blog entry or a diary entry, and created by the entry's author. Tags serve two major purposes: by reading a entry's tags, a reader gets a sense of what the entry is about and by clicking on tags, a reader can read other entries that feature the same tag. Tags allow readers to view all entries that pertain to a given topic or issue. Secondly, there is a comments section which allows readers to comment on the particular thread. Thirdly, there are the links to four independent services on the Web: del.ici.ous, Digg, Yahoo and Technorati. The first three, del.ici.ous, Digg, Yahoo, let readers save a post's Web address as a bookmark in a list. The Technorati link will show readers all the other blog posts that link to the post. There are also three other types of blogs in addition to text blogs: "Video Blog," "Photo

Blog,” and “Audio Blog.” When readers from the online community create entries with multimedia like video and audio, and are featured on the “Open Mic” section, they are also placed in one of these three categories.

### **3.4 The Blog—The Methods of Analysis**

In order to analyze Senator Edwards’ presidential campaign blog, I will be looking at posts from his official announcement of his candidacy for president in New Orleans on December 28, 2006 to March 31, 2007, the Federal Election Commission’s first quarter fundraising deadline. Although his blog has earlier entries, it is crucial to evaluate messages only from his campaign. Furthermore, I will be concentrating on the blogs from the “Straight from the Podium Section,” because they are the most indicative of Edwards’ rhetorical strategies. During this period of fourteen weeks, there were 158 posts to the blog.

### **3.5 The Blog—Analysis**

On December 29, 2006, the campaign’s lead blogger Joe Clarke quotes Washington Post columnist Dan Balz, “Senator Edwards offers a window to the future with his announcement day activities.”<sup>75</sup> Clarke continues by explaining the meaning of the quote: “Balz was referring to the Senator's innovative campaign style - the use of podcasts and videocasts; direct, one-on-one access with reporters and bloggers; and the eschewing of traditional pomp and oratory in favor of a more engaging, personal conversation.”<sup>76</sup> Clarke continues by assuring readers that the Senator’s campaign will

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<sup>75</sup> <http://blog.johnedwards.com/story/2006/12/29/84244/578>

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

remain “accessible, personal, and direct from announcement day to victory.”<sup>77</sup> Of the three blogs being considered, Edwards’ blog is indeed the most innovative, accessible and personal, however, whether or not it is the most direct remains to be seen. While readers have the opportunity to create their own blogs, they are often left in the dark as to whether anyone from the campaign is even listening.

### *Topics*

The messages on Edwards’ campaign blog will be divided in the same fashion as Clinton’s blog: Policy, Campaign Process, and Blog Community Posts. Edwards, like Clinton, is mainly focused on the campaign process in his blogs. Edwards’ speeches, statements, and media appearances make up the bulk of his threads during this period of his campaign. However, unlike Clinton, Edwards places a greater emphasis on blog community posts, opening up the forum for readers to engage either on the official campaign blog in the form of open threads or with their own personal blogs. In terms of the campaign process, Edwards’ blog includes two main categories: Speeches, Statements, and Media Appearances, and Blog Controversy. The first category, speeches, statements, and media appearances, takes up a majority of the posts on the blog. This category includes favorable press, statements made in regard to Ann Coulter’s defamatory comment and Attorney General Gonzales, as well as excerpts from speeches taken from the campaign trail and announcements of Edwards’ media appearances. The second category involves the blog controversy. The controversy occurred when two bloggers from the campaign posted some controversial, albeit satirical, threads about religion on their own personal sites.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

In response to public outcry, on February 8<sup>th</sup>, John Edwards posted the following comment about campaign bloggers: “The tone and the sentiment of some of Amanda Marcotte's and Melissa McEwan's posts personally offended me. It's not how I talk to people, and it's not how I expect the people who work for me to talk to people.”<sup>78</sup> He continues by saying that, “Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but that kind of intolerant language will not be permitted from anyone on my campaign, whether it's intended as satire, humor, or anything else.”<sup>79</sup> Despite Edwards’ stern words, the bloggers were not fired because he was willing to give them a second chance after the two women assured him that it was not their intention to “malign anyone’s faith.”<sup>80</sup> While this controversy did receive a considerable amount of media attention, the use of the blog to address the issue was important because the controversy was related to the blog. Fortunately, this event occurred relatively early in 2008 race, so any damage done could be controlled and reversed in the coming months of his campaign.

The Blog Community posts consist of threads posted by the Edwards family, Blog Roundups, Open Threads, and fundraising efforts. First, the official campaign blog has only received three posts from the Edwards family. While Edwards’ voice is heard more than Clinton’s, there still is a lack of direct dialogue between the candidate and the readers of the blog. John Edwards has posted twice on the blog in order to address the controversy with two bloggers who posted on his campaign blog, and to discuss the direction of his campaign. On a post on March 30, 2007, Elizabeth Edwards thanked well-wishers for the tremendous amount of support she had received since announcing her battle with breast cancer has resumed.

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<sup>78</sup> <http://blog.johnedwards.com/story/2007/2/8/113651/4503>

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

In the Blog Roundup and Open Threads category, the new media staff of the campaign offers excerpts on recent important topics from blogs all over the Web in “Blog Roundup.” In their JRE (John R. Edwards) Blog Roundup, the staff takes excerpts from bloggers on the John Edwards Blog online community to direct the conversation of the thread. These blog roundups are usually posted weekly. In addition to the blog roundups, the new media staff offers another chance for bloggers to get involved by posting Open Threads. The new media staff posts an Open Thread when it wants to allow bloggers to comment on issues in the campaign, and their input can be utilized by the campaign. Unlike Hillary Clinton’s campaign blog that seldom uses this feature, the John Edwards blog posts Open Threads weekly. While the importance of this difference has yet to be determined, it is evident by the focus on open threads that Edwards’ campaign is concerned with modeling its blog on former Governor Howard Dean’s blog from the 2004 Democratic primary race. Edwards, in his populist tradition, is focused on letting the people speak by allowing them to voice any concerns they have with the campaign or simply start their own dialogue on the blog. After seeing Dean’s early successes in 2004, it is clear that Edwards has learned from the shortcomings of his own online initiatives. He is making a substantial effort to appeal to the voters by enforcing his claim that “The John Edwards’08 blog is *your* blog.”

In terms of fundraising efforts, Edwards’ blog does not advertise for fundraising contributions nearly as much as Clinton’s blog. Before the March 31<sup>st</sup> filing deadline, fundraising goals were only given significant attention twice. On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Edwards blog announced the new “Hit a Home Run for John Edwards08” fundraising campaign, in which the campaign generated a badge for people to put on their webpage with a link to

the contribution site. This badge was aimed at spurring online donations for “\$1 Million for One America.”

Finally, in the Policy posts, there are two main categories: News and Constituents’ issues. In the blog, the new media staff has carefully selected press about and speeches by John Edwards to address the issues that Edwards supports and the constituencies he is trying to reach. The Edwards’ blog touches upon issues such as the environment, affordable health care, Iraq, minimum wage, and urban poverty, and reaches out to constituencies such as African-Americans, students, and homosexuals.

#### *Subjects and Authors*

Most of the subjects on Edwards’ blog relate to the candidate, as opposed to Clinton’s blog which focuses more on addressing the key constituencies for the Democratic Party. Most of the posts come from Edwards’ speeches, media appearances, or statements, rather than contributing an in-depth conversation on issues such as environment, affordable healthcare, or Iraq. In this regard, Edwards’ blog follows the tradition of mainstream media, which usually downplays the issues and focuses more on the campaign process. As for authors, unlike Clinton’s blog, there was no central campaign blogger. While Joe Clarke had the most credits on the blog, there were multiple campaign staffers who contribute as well as bloggers from across the blogosphere. This made it a little more difficult to organize a cohesive campaign strategy, and in the future, when readers look for a campaign “voice,” they will be confused as to which bloggers provide the best access to the candidate.

### **3.6 The Blog—Final Thoughts**

Senator Edwards’ campaign blog is the most interactive of the three candidates.

However, while the increased interactivity is important and fundamental to blog technology, it can discourage older readers from becoming a part of it. Furthermore, even though supporters can create their own blogs on the website, it is impossible for the campaign to read all the blogs and the comments on each posts, and incorporate their suggestions into the campaign. Readers may begin to wonder whether their blogs are just useless sounding boards, or whether they actually make a difference to Edwards. As a second-time candidate for President, it is clear that Edwards has learned from Dean's online strategies in 2004. While his blog is extremely interactive and pays much more attention to the blogosphere, Edwards still does not contribute much of his own posts, nor does he incorporate posts from readers into the main section, "Straight from the Podium." If Edwards is to become a frontrunner in the race for the Democratic nomination, he must find a way to address his constituencies better, instead of merely discussing his campaign appearances and using regurgitated speeches from these stops across the country.

## CHAPTER 4

### Joseph “Joe” Biden: The Dark Horse Candidate?

Senator Joe Biden, a six-term Senator from Delaware, also joins the crowded pack of Democratic presidential hopefuls, which includes the aforementioned Senator Clinton and Senator Edwards. Like Senators Clinton and Edwards, Biden started his career as an attorney, practicing law in Wilmington, Delaware. Now the senior United States Senator from Delaware and Delaware’s longest-serving Senator, Biden serves as the Chairman of the powerful Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Senator Biden announced his candidacy for the Democratic Party’s nomination in the 2008 presidential election on January 31, 2007. Like Clinton, he released a videotaped announcement of his candidacy to voters on his campaign website. According to The Associated Press, Biden said, "After nine months of doing this, there is no exploratory committee - I'm running."<sup>81</sup> He is the last of the three candidates in this study to make his announcement, coming exactly two months before the FEC’s first quarter fundraising deadline on March 31, 2007. While a much less recognizable candidate than Senators Clinton and Edwards, Senator Biden has received considerable praise after the first Democratic presidential debate. If he can fundraise enough to compete with the frontrunners and create a strong grassroots base with the help of his website and traditional operations like phone-banking, Senate Biden may be able to fulfill the promise of dark horse candidates everywhere.

#### 4.1 Joe Biden—A Brief Biography

Joseph R. Biden, Jr. was born on November 20, 1942 in Scranton, Pennsylvania,

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16901147/>

and grew up in the suburbs of Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>82</sup> In 1965, Biden completed his undergraduate education at the University of Delaware. He went on to attend Syracuse University College of Law, where he met and married his first wife, Neilia Hunter, in 1966. They had three children, Joseph R. III (Beau), Robert, and Amy. Biden graduated from Syracuse in 1968, and was admitted to the Delaware Bar in 1969. In 1970, he was elected to the New Castle County Council, and in 1972, at the age of 29, he ran for and won the U.S. Senate seat against a popular Republican incumbent.<sup>83</sup> A month later his wife and daughter were killed in an auto accident, while his two young sons were seriously injured. His initial thought was to resign, but was persuaded to serve, and when he took office on January 3, 1973, he became the fifth-youngest U.S. Senator in United States history. In 1977, Biden married Jill Jacobs, and they have one child, Ashley.<sup>84</sup>

In the Senate, Biden has a moderate-to-liberal voting record. A six-term U.S. Senator from Delaware, Biden is Delaware's longest serving senator.<sup>85</sup> In the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, he serves on the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the Caucus on International Narcotics Control.<sup>86</sup> As a member of the Judiciary Committee, which he chaired from 1987-95 and served as ranking Democrat on from 1981-87 and 1995-97, he has presided over some of the most contentious Supreme Court confirmation hearings in history.<sup>87</sup> For example, the 1991 hearings on Clarence Thomas gained national attention when someone leaked charges of sexual harassment of Anita Hill by Thomas. After the Thomas hearings, Biden worked hard on the 1994

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<sup>82</sup> <http://biden.senate.gov/>

<sup>83</sup> <http://nationaljournal.com.proxy.bc.edu/pubs/almanac/2006/people/de/des1.htm>

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> <http://biden.senate.gov/biography/>

<sup>87</sup> <http://nationaljournal.com.proxy.bc.edu/pubs/almanac/2006/people/de/des1.htm>

Violence Against Women Act, helping to renew it in 2000. As Co-Chairman of the International Narcotics Control Caucus, Biden has introduced legislation that coordinates the national drug control policy.

For three decades, Senator Biden has also served on the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, becoming its Chairman for the second time in January. He is the only Presidential candidate to issue a plan for Iraq that involves bringing American soldiers home without leaving chaos behind in Iraq. He has been re-elected to the Senate by wide margins in 1984, 1990 and 1996, and by a slightly narrower margin in 2002.<sup>88</sup> In 1987, Biden entered his first race for president, only to drop out after a Michael Dukakis staffer leaked an "attack video" insinuating charges of plagiarism of a British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock.<sup>89</sup> Biden has been a possible presidential contender in 1992, 2000, and 2004. Biden decided not to enter the 2004 contest because he was not sure he could raise \$9 million by January. However, as it turns out, Governor Howard Dean was able to raise an even greater figure than \$9 million through his Internet efforts, while Biden was likely expecting to rely on traditional Democratic contributors.<sup>90</sup> In June 2005, on *Face the Nation*, Senator Biden said, "My intention is to seek the nomination. I know I'm supposed to tell you, you know, that I'm not sure. But if, in fact, I think that I have a clear shot at winning the nomination by this November or December, then I'm going to seek the nomination."<sup>91</sup> Senator Biden made the formal declaration of his candidacy for the 2008 Presidential Election on January 31, 2007.

#### **4.2 Biden's Campaign Website**

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Senator Biden's Campaign website is very similar in structure to both Senator Clinton and Senator Edwards' sites. Like its counterparts, "Biden For President '08" is patriotic in tone, with many resources to actively recruit and mobilize supporters. On the homepage, there is a newsfeed addressing the most current political issue, followed by a list of "good press" for the Senator. On the right-hand side of the homepage, there are the interactive and multi-media features, including a clip from the video library, links to "Contribute today," "Join Joe's Campaign," and "Get Connected" to social-networking sites like *MySpace*, *Facebook*, *Flickr*, and *YouTube*. Biden also has a link to current initiatives, which in this timeframe has been related for the most part about the Iraq War. If a voter were to venture beyond the homepage, Biden's new media staff has prepared a campaign website that includes seven features: "Welcome," "Get Informed," "Get Involved," "Issues," "Multimedia," "News Center," "Blog," and "Contribute." The website, like most aspects of a political campaign, is entirely packaged and polished.

The "Welcome" section has a "personal" message from the candidate, Senator Biden, while the "Get Informed" section provides a carefully written biography of the Senator that emphasizes his middle-class roots, his role as a "family man," and his previous actions on behalf of key constituents that might be visiting the site to find out more information. "The Issues," "Multimedia," and "News Center" serve as a necessary public relations tool. While "The Issues" section is very little more than a position paper—meticulously crafted—on the important issues of the 2008 election, the "Multimedia" and "News Center" are interactive press releases. The "Multimedia" section has both a video library of stump speeches and a photo library, while the "News Center" has clips of favorable press from across the Internet, as well as press releases

labeled “latest news.” Like the other two candidates, Biden also has a link to an online contribution form on his webpage, in hopes of reaching more contributors who might have come to his site for information and left with a candidate to support.

#### **4.3 The Blog—Structure**

Similar to Clinton’s blog, Senator Biden’s blog is much less technical than Senator Edwards’ blog. Biden’s blog is fairly straightforward, and easy to navigate, which might attract older readers to visit more often and use as an alternative news source. While they are generally utilized by the younger, more tech-savvy demographic, both Clinton and Biden’s blogs are simple enough to be read by even the most technology-challenged individual. Each blog post is listed chronologically starting with the most recent, and some posts offer and encourage comment threads which allow the reader to comment on the topic. Below each post, there are also hyperlinked categories that describe the subject terms of the post and link to an organizational column on the left-hand side which itemizes the blog according to subject. Each subject has the number of blogs that relate to it, and allow readers to search the blog based on topic. There is also an archive feature that allows visitors to find blogs based on time-frames. Unlike Edwards’ blog, Biden’s new media staff has not allowed supporters to create their own blog community on the site. While Edwards allows supporters to register on his campaign website for their own personal blogs and have the opportunity to have their posts featured on the blog’s main page, Biden (and Clinton) do not allow this feature, and the Biden ‘s campaign blog is written primarily by the new media and other campaign staff. Biden has the least amount of outside contributors on his blog, and is lacking in reader-submitted posts. While this does help the campaign to better control its message, readers may

eventually become frustrated at the lack of interactivity, and wonder whether the blog is a forum for debate and discussion of the issues and the campaign or if it is merely an extension of campaign rhetoric.

#### **4.4 The Blog-Methods of Analysis**

In order to understand the nature of political discourse and civic engagement online, it is necessary to analyze Senator Biden's campaign blog and its contents to learn more about this mass medium and its strategies. As previously mentioned, Biden's campaign blog is moderately interactive, allowing readers to provide feedback, but not giving them the opportunity to initiate their own conversations with personal blogs. In order to analyze the candidate's blog, I looked at the content of each post from the date of Biden's official announcement of his presidential candidacy—January 31, 2007—to the end of the Federal Election Commission's first quarter fundraising deadline on March 31, 2007. During this period of nine weeks, there were 222 blog posts.

#### **4.5 The Blog—Analysis**

##### *Topics*

The discussion topics focused on three main areas: Policy Issues, the Campaign Process, and the Blog Community. Policy Issues encompassed by far the majority of the posts from January 31-March 31, 2007. These posts can be sub-divided into two categories of their own: Biden's opinion and News posts. Biden's Opinion is the category that quotes directly from Senator Biden on the issues that are important for the campaign. These quotes are taken from various appearances on media outlets as well as speeches from the floor of the Senate or elsewhere. The News Posts category contains excerpts from mainstream media outlets and discusses current events, relating to foreign policy

and domestic issues. While many would think that posts conveying Biden's own words would saturate his campaign blog, News posts far outnumber opinion posts. This is a huge oversight on the part of Biden's team, and in the future, they should look to find more ways of incorporating Biden's words on the issues. If Biden has not yet formulated his own opinion on these issues or does not have the public forum to address them, the blog should play a key role in sounding out his views as well as receiving the necessary feedback from its readers. This oversight also demonstrates the lack of coordination between the campaign and the blog, and Biden's team must find a better way of integrating technology into their overall campaign strategy, especially if they are looking to build a strong grassroots following. In this regard, Biden's blog also seems to represent more mainstream political coverage than an alternative media source or a campaign blog because of the amount of excerpts it pulls from news websites such as MSNBC and CNN. Furthermore, visitors to Biden's blog, expecting to read about Biden's campaign trail, are actually inundated with mainstream news coverage about the war in Iraq, international relations with Iran, and the like. From this perspective, it seems as if Biden's campaign blog, as a mass medium, is far more consistent with traditional media outlets than as an alternative source of information. The Senator's blog rivals mainstream media's political coverage, far more than either of the other two candidates' blogs. Although by mirroring traditional media's coverage of political issues, the blog exposes readers to issues that the campaign deems important, and supports Senator Biden's positions. Furthermore, the blog pays much more attention to the issues than mainstream media, who are often more concerned with reporting the sensational controversies and candidate-attacks.

Within the Campaign Process posts, issues of campaign strategy, such as the “horse race,” key endorsements, controversies, attacks against candidates, campaign stops, primary announcements, and favorable press, are addressed. These topics are usually covered much more in-depth in the mainstream press, and therefore, Biden’s blog does a good job of addressing campaign strategies without overwhelming readers with poll numbers. In terms of the “horse race,” a post on February 1, 2007, quotes Biden as joking that “he’s the 800<sup>th</sup> candidate for president” and that the “senator from Delaware is used to being called a ‘dark horse’ or ‘second-tier contender’.”<sup>92</sup> Biden’s new media staff also addressed the controversy regarding Senator Biden and his comment calling Senator Barack Obama, “the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean.”<sup>93</sup> In terms of this controversy, the blog helped damage control by posting endorsements and open-editorials from African-American leaders such as campaign manager for Gore-Lieberman 2000, Donna Brazile, as well as writers. For example, the blog quotes Ginger Rutland’s Op-Ed from the *Sacramento Bee*, “I’m black. I don’t pretend to speak for all black people. But speaking for myself, I would appreciate some straight talk about race from presidential candidates.”<sup>94</sup> An interesting feature in Biden’s blog that is not as prevalent in Senators Edwards and Clinton’s blogs are “attack posts.” Although not nearly as hostile or frequent as attack advertisements on television, these posts do cause some concern of a cross-over of negative campaigning from television to the internet. For example, on February 1, 2007, a blog post describes Biden as “chiding his competition for choosing approaches that are more ‘politically’ than ‘substantially’

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<sup>92</sup> <http://blog.joebiden.com/>

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

correct, and for staying away from the Iraq debate until their presidential aspirations required that they entered it.”<sup>95</sup>

As previously mentioned, the blog community is established through podcasts, live blogs, new website announcements, video and multimedia links, fundraising appeals, and “Welcome to the Blog” posts by the campaign’s main blogger, Erin Medlicott. These posts are crucial because they demonstrate a commitment to integrating traditional campaign style with technology and to online-campaigning more generally. However, each of these features has been few and far between in this two-month time frame. There has been only one attempt by the Biden camp to utilize the blog as a grassroots fundraising effort. The most prevalent attempt at engaging blog readers has been through the campaign’s blogger, Medlicott, who produced weekly “Welcome to the Blog” posts. Medlicott inaugurated the blog with her own personal reasons for supporting Senator Biden on January 31, 2007. In her statement she said, “In my view, these actions, along with many other accomplishments, prove this Senator’s got guts. He has the courage of his convictions. He has strength of character.”<sup>96</sup>

#### *Subjects and Authors*

The Subjects of blog posts are important to the rhetorical function of the blog, insofar as the subjects are usually key constituencies that the candidate is trying to target with his message. In the case of Senator Biden’s blog, the new media staff tries hard to appeal to the African-American community, especially after the “Clean” comment controversy. This is accomplished through endorsements and open-editorials from African-American community leaders and public figures. Aside from the African-

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

American community, other target audiences are largely absent from the conversation. This might be due to the fact that Biden, as a white, heterosexual, Catholic male from the Northeast, is largely devoid of key constituencies relating to race, gender, or sexual identity. Another reason for this might be that the blog's over-saturation of news articles relating to Iraq may have left little room for discussion of domestic policy initiatives.

The campaign's blogger, Erin Medlicott, has a considerable amount of credits on the blog, however the largest amount of credits goes to mainstream media outlets. While Medlicott usually prefaces some of the articles by linking the campaign with the message of the article, most of the blogs on Biden's site are attributed to mainstream media. In the timeframe I studied, there was only one post from an alternative media source, another blog, and zero credits from the candidate or other campaign staff members. This is a huge oversight on the part of the Biden campaign. By letting mainstream media overtake the blog, Biden risks losing his blog readership, as visitors to blogs are often looking for information that can not be readily found in a newspaper. Furthermore, by not addressing his blog readers directly like his counterparts, Senator Clinton and Senator Edwards, or having any of his senior campaign staffers contribute to the blog, readers may begin to feel as though the campaign is not really listening and tune out as well.

#### **4.6 The Blog—Final Thoughts**

Senator Biden's campaign blog, as mentioned before, is moderately interactive, which means that although it incorporates basic online-campaigning features, it still has a ways to go in connecting the blog with the overall campaign strategy. There is a huge disconnect between the campaign and the blog. Furthermore, as designed and implemented, the blog does little to reach out readers and allow them to engage, which

was the linchpin of Former Governor Howard Dean's successes in grassroots mobilization and fundraising. If Biden wants to compete with more recognizable names, such as Senators Clinton and Edwards, he must be able to replicate and improve on Dean's blog and its successful fundraising and grassroots mobilization efforts. He should open up his blog to more posts from readers, introduce more open threads or live blogs, or allow supporters to create their own blogs in connection with the campaign. The Biden's new media staff must also find a way to incorporate posts from the candidate or his senior staff, rather than excerpts from stump speeches. Furthermore, the emphasis on current events inundates blog readers with mainstream media's coverage of political events, rather than providing an alternative media outlet. Biden's blog, as a mass medium, is a disappointment. It is the least interactive and personal of the three Democratic candidates in this study, and it is too closely aligned with mainstream media's coverage of the campaign. If Biden wants to attract more supporters, he should give them a better forum to discuss the tactics needed for victory in 2008.

## CONCLUSION

American politics is in the midst of one of the most challenging periods in this country's electoral history. With dwindling turnouts at the polls and an increasing number of contests decided by a mere hundred ballots, politicians are in need of a new strategy to unite and reinvigorate an American public that is growing more divided and feeling more alienated from the political process than ever before. To meet this need, politicians and campaign consultants are returning to a strategy built on grassroots organizing and mobilization in order to better connect with the voters and encourage civic participation. One of the main tools used to implement this strategy has been campaign blogs. According to Kerbel and Bloom, "The advocacy role of the campaign blog is a throwback to the partisan press of the nineteenth century, whose sharp rhetoric in the pursuit of political agendas mirrors discourse on [...] partisan campaign blogs of the Left and the Right."<sup>97</sup>

During the 2004 Presidential campaign, Former Governor Howard Dean's blog became a "center of gravity for a virtual community" and a "center for idea sharing, organizing, motivating, [and] galvanizing a national effort around the candidate."<sup>98</sup> While it is not possible for every candidate to replicate Dean's blog successes, it has become a model for the 2008 candidates. However, there are many difficulties in duplicating his model for the more mainstream candidates. In order to build and sustain his online community, Dean's campaign "had to relinquish a fair degree of control over the daily operation of its campaign and permit grassroots supporters to be empowered with more

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<sup>97</sup> Kerbel & Bloom, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* at 24.

than just rhetoric.”<sup>99</sup> This type of “open-source campaigning” reflected a decentralization of campaign decision-making and rhetoric, and is contrary to the regimented and highly-structured campaigns of traditional campaign managers.<sup>100</sup> Without some degree of decentralization, blog communities cannot thrive. Dean, as a “dark-horse” candidate with few resources, was able to risk his campaign by adopting an unconventional approach. This risk propelled him into the spotlight, and his blog is one of the most significant factors in his early successes. In order for campaign blogs like Dean’s “Blog for America” to become a mass-produced political medium, future candidates will have to weigh the benefits of a loyal, active, and virtual following against the potential loss of message control inevitable in a decentralized structure where everyone can participate. The failure of Dean’s campaign overall will probably be influential in how the 2008 candidates shape their blogs. As demonstrated by this thesis, three of the 2008 contenders have built their blogs using a hybrid of Dean’s blog and more traditional elements, which reflect mainstream media’s coverage of the campaign.

*Final Assessments—Would Dean be Proud?*

The candidate that does the best job of integrating his or her campaign with technology was Senator Edwards. Edwards’ blog was the most interactive, allowing readers to create their own blogs for the chance of having them displayed on the homepage. His new media staff also frequently posted “Open Posts,” which allowed visitors to the site to voice their opinions on a topic that was important to them, emphasizing a decentralized approach in theory. However, of the three candidates, Senator Clinton’s blog was the most similar in purpose to Dean’s “Blog for America.”

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Clinton's blog had the most posts from the campaign staff, as well as from the candidate and her spouse as well, emphasizing direct-voter dialogue and interaction. This feature will help readers feel that the candidate is listening to what they have to say on the blog, and that their opinion matters. Clinton also does the best job of using the blog as a means of grassroots fundraising, with frequent posts from both her campaign staff and her husband, former President Bill Clinton. This strategy, modeled after Dean, has proved to be successful as Clinton turned in the largest returns in the first quarter fundraising period. The biggest failure of the three candidates in both duplicating Dean's model and incorporating technology and the campaign is Senator Biden. Biden, as a dark-horse candidate, holds the most promise for mobilizing a strong grassroots effort, built on a virtual blog community. In his online campaign, he has the most freedom to take risks, and an unconventional approach might be exactly the tactic he needs for overcoming the resources and strengths of his opponents and the frontrunners on his party's ticket. Biden's campaign only attempts to use the blog as a means of fundraising once during the crucial first quarter fundraising period. This is a tremendous oversight on the part of Biden's campaign, especially since the blog reaches some of his most loyal supporters.

Furthermore, Biden's blog does not diverge from mainstream media's coverage of the 2008 presidential race and of current events. This represents a failure on the part of the Biden camp to create their own agenda, and provide an alternative source of information. This blunder has contributed to a blog that is more focused on presenting the current events of the day than on opinion pieces from the campaign staff, which could help generate more support for the candidate. Visitors to Biden's blog may wonder if the

campaign is even listening to their comments, or whether they even care what they have to say.

*Early Implications for the Remainder of the '08 Race*

The purpose of campaign blogs is to create a community and establish a virtual base for the candidate. While all three of the candidates discussed here have created blogs that are interactive to a certain extent, they must find a better way to control their campaign messages, while still paying homage to Dean's decentralized approach. All three of these candidates, as well as the rest of the candidates for the 2008 presidential election, need more candidate-generated posts as well as open posts where the readers set the agenda in order to create a conversation between the blog readers and the candidate. While blogs will most likely not determine the eventual outcome of the election, they will play a significant role in grassroots mobilization and fundraising if candidates can make a greater effort to incorporate these two goals into their online strategy.

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