

# **Facebook Changing the Face of Voting: How the Internet and Social Networking Sites Affected Youth Voting Behaviors in the 2008 Election**

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## Abstract

*Since the eligible voting age was changed in 1972 to include 18-21 year-olds, turnout has been historically low for the youngest group of American voters. But, the 2008 election got young people to swarm the polls, resulting in one of the highest turnout rates, among the youngest age cohort, in history. The Obama campaign was the first to successfully use social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter, to help mobilize and persuade young voters. In this study, I attempted to find how significant of a role in the Internet played in convincing voters aged 18-24 to vote in 2008, especially for Obama. I use the PEW Internet and American Life Project November 2008 Post-Election Tracking Survey to examine Internet use for campaigning and political purposes among over 2,000 respondents. Preliminary analysis shows that the Internet is not only the number one source of political information for young voters, but it's encouraging them to be more politically active and knowledgeable. However, including other socioeconomic factors, the role of the Internet and social networking sites loses significance. The majority of these young, "wired," voters chose the Democratic ticket in 2008, which raises question about what they will decide 2012.*

## Introduction

In the world of politics, the subject of voting behavior is constantly being researched and theorized about. And ever since 1972, when the voting age requirements were lowered to include 18-21 year-olds, even more focus has been targeted towards getting these newly eligible voters to the polls. Generational differences, weaker ties to the major political parties, and a general lack of interest in politics have been the reasons many scholars have given to explain the inactive young voters.

So, then what made the youngest age group of eligible voters swarm voting booths in 2008? The turnout amongst 18-24 year-olds in the 2008 presidential election was one of the highest ever. And it was the highest since 1992. But, what was so appealing about the 2008 elections? Was it Barack Obama who seemed to not only persuade, but also mobilize millions of young voters?

The Obama campaign had almost every advantage. They raised and spent more money than any other presidential election in history. They installed a massive and successful “grass roots” movement. Obama’s fresh face and cool, calm, collected demeanor was also appealing. Was it a combination of the money, rallies, image, age, and race that got fired-up youth to the polls in Obama’s favor? Was it the chance to make history? Was it classic socioeconomic factors such as race, education, and income? Or was it one specific aspect, because all these qualities can have an advantageous effect on every age cohort, just in differing fashions.

But, the Obama campaign did something not previously done to such an extent. They tapped into the hearts and minds of the Internet generation. Obama was the most

be-friended person on Facebook in 2008. The campaign used Twitter to constantly update the people about where they could see their shining star candidate. I believe their tactics in the Internet sphere was the deciding factor in mobilizing 18-24 year-old voters for the Obama campaign. They successfully understood and used all aspects of the Internet to their advantage. They tapped directly into the life source of most of American young adults.

Prior to 2008, voter turnout had been on a steady decline for years, with few exceptions. And no other age cohort has had more pathetic turnout rates than 18-24 year-olds. In a nation becoming increasingly apathetic but increasingly angry with government, candidates need to motivate the youngest generation of Americans to vote and keep voting. Without such efforts, someday sooner rather than later, polls might be close to empty. If that happens, what will that do to our democracy?

## Literature Review

### General Voting Behavior

The start of the twentieth century marked the beginning of turnout declines compared to the nineteenth century (Hout & Knoke, 1975). Cavanagh (1981) found that after a post-war peak turnout of 62.8% in 1960, the rate fell to 53.9% in 1980, which was the lowest since 1948. Some of this drop could be attributed to the larger pool of eligible voters after the eligible age was dropped to 18. Since 1980, the year with the lowest turnout was 1996 with only 58.4% of eligible voters showing up at the polls (File, 2010). The biggest drops happened among the young, poor, and uneducated (Cavanagh, 1981). Also interesting is that the decline in turnout occurred during a period when legal impediments to voting had been eased and even eliminated and education levels were rising among Americans (Flanigan & Zingale, 2006). This raises more curiosity about the influences that are encouraging young voters to go to the polls or stay home if education and registration restrictions have been made into less significant factors.

The young are less likely to begin voting while the middle-aged are more likely to stop voting. And the new age cohort of 18-21 year-olds that started voting after 1972, represent a constituency that, some believe, have been drifting in and out of the electorate ever since (Cavanagh, 1981). The “pattern of decreasing turnout among successively younger birth cohorts, suggest differences in the political socialization of voting obligations between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Hout & Knoke, 1975:52). Perhaps, Obama’s record-breaking campaign changed political socialization back to stronger levels for the twenty-first century. But, distractions in the non-political world affect all age groups. So, despite this evidence, there is something more to be said about

youth voting behaviors and how these relate to their voting tendencies, or lack thereof, especially for present and future elections.

## **Youth Voting Behavior in the Twenty-First Century**

Any extension of suffrage is usually done with the expectation that the newly franchised group will show support for the political preferences of leaders. But, this hasn't always worked for the 18-21 year-old voters. The voting age was lowered in response to student movements opposing the Vietnam War, but turnout didn't reflect the new found availability (Flanigan & Zingale, 2006). In 2006, 18-29 year-olds represented 42 million people in the pool of eligible voters ("Youth Voter Mobilization Tactics," 2007). This is obviously a crucial demographic to get involved, so why don't young adults get involved politically?

Hooghe and Wilkenfeld (2007) studied the idea that intended behaviors at a young age have a predictive value for actual behavior at an older age. For instance, a 14 year-old who intends to vote when they are of age, will most likely vote. This idea was validated by Granberg and Halmberg (1990). But, these studies focused on European countries, which are all governed by very different systems than the United States. And here, our system and especially registration restrictions have been proven to be of critical influence towards turnout rates (Cavanagh, 1981). In countries where young adults express high levels of trust in political institutions, adolescents and young adults are expected to vote at higher levels (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2007). What about American adolescents? Does that theory prove true among American young adults?

As people grow older they tend to grow through different “adult roles” that may increase voter turnout after they are completed. Life events such as, “settling down,” getting married, developing community ties, finding a career, and leaving home made a significant impact. Residential stability, which is categorized as those who have stayed put for three years or more, had a turnout rate 11% higher than those that have more instability (Highton & Wolfinger, 2001). So, 18-25 year-olds were still showing the least stability since they tend to be a lot more mobile than other age groups (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2007). Previously, when residency requirements were more stringent, it had a higher negative effect on younger voters who are the most mobilized of the population. So, in 1972, the Supreme Court linked residency requirements with the length of time it takes to prepare lists of registered voters and discovered it only takes 30 days. But, they allow states with 50-day residency requirements to keep them on the books (Flanigan & Zingle, 2006). This was done in hopes of getting higher turnout among young, mobile voters. But, it didn’t do much to raise their turnout. Then what does it take to motivate young voters?

This question has prompted think tanks, campaigns, and research centers to develop answers for the Internet generation and their more modern forms of communication. The George Washington University created a pamphlet in 2007 that specified some tactics to get young people mobilized to vote. They found that more personalized interaction is crucial for young voters and when it comes to online political activity, young voters prefer the opportunity to join in on the political conversation just like the services offered on social networking sites. Another benefit of using newly available Internet techniques is that they are cheap and the easiest way to reach this



historically unmotivated age cohort. Getting 18-29 year-olds to the voting booths isn't just beneficial to the candidates in a single election, "...mobilizing young voters creates a larger, more vibrant voting base in the long-run, re-energizing our nation's democracy," ("Youth Voter Mobilization Tactics")

## **Factors and Strategies of the 2008 Campaign**

The electoral participation of Americans under 25 has declined anywhere between 13 and 15 percentage points in presidential election years from 1972 to 2000. (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Even the share of the electorate belonging to youth voters has shrunk from 14.2% in 1972 to 7.8% since 2000.

In 2004, however, there was a temporary jump in turnout rates for voters aged 18-25. They showed the largest increase from 2000 to 2004 among all ages increasing from 48% to 60%, respectively. Thomas E. Patterson points out that young voters were more likely to say they "really dislike" a candidate, perhaps indicating that the unattractiveness of a candidate may be incentive to vote (Flanigan & Zingale, 2006). With George W. Bush's almost record low approval ratings by 2008, this could have been a cause for youth voter participation that November.

Voters are motivated by the ability to make good and easy decisions (Lau, et. al., 2008). And with 44% of young people preferring a president in his or her 40s, age could be the easiest deciding factor. This was focused on young Democrats, however. Young Republicans preferred candidates in their 50s (Thee, 2007).

With Barack Obama being the first African-American president, the "race thing" was definitely talked about quite often during his campaign. Many believed that his race

was the only reason so many young black youth voted in his favor, or showed up to vote period. But, this actually became problematic. Obama's identity is missing cultural markers with which blacks are more familiar (Walters, 2007). As Debra Dickerson (2006) explained, "...you're not embracing a black man, a descendent of slaves. You're replacing the black man with an immigrant of recent African descent of whom you can approve without feeling guilty or frightened." This made the candidate's race an uncertain factor for 2008.

Obama's ground game proved to be a massive success. With over 700 field offices, scattered especially in battleground states, this resulted in a huge increase of the Democratic vote share. Obama offices even managed to flip three states from a Republican to a Democratic majority (Masket, 2009). As an Obama campaign official confirmed, "...The more offices we had the easier it was to empower your local organizers and your local volunteers to be part of the effort...it was more efficient to have more offices." But, too many offices and volunteers could cause oversaturation and a decline in the positive effect (Masket, 2009: 1026).

The Obama campaign, along with the Democratic National committee, poured \$112 million into state-level parties (Farnam & Haynes, 2008). These funds went straight towards the Obama volunteer army. Which proved that "...investing more in shoe leather may be a wise decision." The results were a one point overall increase in the vote share and almost a three point increase in some states (Masket, 2009).

## Youth Results in 2008

The 2008 Obama campaign was the first in decades to be carried so far on the backs of the young. The campaign made the youth a priority, which can be critical towards getting them to the polls. For example, the Obama campaign developed a student-to-student phone bank where volunteer students could download a contact list and call from the comfort of their dorm (Drehle, 2008).

The Obama campaign "...has been heralded as ushering in a new era in online youth civic engagement and two-way communication between citizens and political decision makers," (Milner, 2010: 73). With an e-mail list containing over 13 million names and an interactive website that gives tools for grass roots organizing, it was hard to deny or escape Obama's presence on the world wide web in 2008 (Milner 2010). Besides the campaign's main website, Obama was on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and took cues from different politically motivated, left-leaning organization websites like MoveOn, the Huffington Post, and Daily Kos.

One of the most critical tactics for the Obama campaign was that they got young voters participating early. More than 6.5 million young, interested voters participated in the 2008 primaries and caucuses. This was a rise from 9% in 2000 to 17% in 2008. And 60% of these young primary voters supported Obama (Kirby, et. al., 2008). Obama actually received his biggest victory margins in college towns (Millner, 2010). The primary victory in Iowa over Hillary Clinton came almost entirely from voters under 25 years old. They preferred Obama to the next-closest competitor by more than 4 to 1. The under-25 crowd gave Obama a net gain of some 17,000 votes and he won by just under 20,000 votes in Iowa. "Combining digital-age technology with old-fashioned shoe

leather, the Illinois Senator first rallied Iowa students to cancel Clinton's catwalk" (Drehle, 2008).

## **Internet Effects**

The Internet is proving to be a force to be reckoned with in almost every aspect of American life. It is a news media that provides information quicker, cheaper and in a more convenient form than other mediums. This makes it more likely to be adopted and have the ability to change behavioral patterns. It is actually the only media outlet that has the power to influence political behavior. (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). It is definitely having a major impact on political participation online as well as offline. American Online reported around the time of the 2000 election that seven of the all time top ten live "online chats" were political in their scope, suggesting that the Internet may be leading to higher political interest and participation. A study conducted by Tolbert and McNeal (2003) showed that respondents with access to the Internet and other online election news were significantly more likely to report voting in the 1996 and 2000 elections, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors.

"Internet may indeed be narrowing the participation gap between age groups." Those under 30 are more likely to seek information online in general and half-again more likely to seek political information online in the forms of creating, posting, or forwarding political messages. And it's been shown that a preference for online political information makes younger voters more politically active online and offline (Bachman, et. al., 2010). The Internet also helped to get more minorities politically involved. Over half of the major demographic subgroups were politically engaged online, including 25% of

African-Americans and English-speaking Hispanics that signed up to receive election updates online (Smith, 2009).

With Facebook boasting a market share of 85% on four-year University campuses, it was a golden opportunity for Obama to charm young voters (Drehle, 2008). If political institutions, candidates, and organizations can present politics in a more relevant way to younger voters, their decline in political interest may be slowed, stopped, or even reversed (Lupia & Philpot, 2005). The Internet is the best medium to attempt to cause this change. With more advances in computers, laptops, smart phones, and even tablets, the Internet is increasingly becoming just an arm's length away. But, the only way that political information and campaign news has been aimed at young adults so far is through satire news websites such as the Daily Show or the Onion News Network. These sites have 27% of political online consumers aged 18-29 visiting them for campaign news (Smith, 2009). This statistic can be fairly troubling considering these sources are entertainment more than news.

The mix of age, race, life events, ground movements, and Internet manipulation all worked together to create a brilliant 2008 campaign for Obama that seemed to surpass all standard obstacles.

About 59% of all voters had taken part in some sort of campaign activity online during the 2008 election cycle (Smith, 2008). Among all Americans under the age of 50, the Internet use for political purposes outpaced newspapers, which has traditionally been the number two news source used for political news after television. And 34% of 18-29 year-olds relied almost entirely on the Internet for political news and information leading

up to the 2008 election. In fact, politically aimed Internet use overall has jumped from 37% in 2004 to 46% in the spring of 2008, then to 59% directly after the election (Smith, 2009). Using the Internet to further campaign messages as well as receive donations was a smart move by any and all candidates. The aspect of particular interest for me was the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

During the 2008 campaign, nearly 1 in 5 political online users posted their thoughts, comments, or questions on websites, blogs, or social networks. Thirty percent of these people posting political thoughts and feelings were under the age of 25. But, the overall use of social networking sites is the most impressive with usage numbers almost quadrupling since 2005. Fewer than 1 in 10 Americans used a social networking site in 2005 and more than 1 in 3 Americans used one in 2009. Fifty-two percent of these people used these sites for political purposes. That represents 14% of all Americans using Facebook or similar sites to gain or share information about the 2008 election (Smith 2009).

Of all the political online consumers and all the different political activities online, most of the Internet sided with Obama. Even though Democrats were less likely to go online compared to Republicans, the Democrats that were online were more aggressively in support of their party's candidates. Twitter users voting behaviors were more tilted towards Obama and Independent Obama supporters outpaced McCain voters in social networking activities that corresponded to the campaigns. Online Obama supporters took part in a wider range of online political activities overall (Smith, 2009).

But, no one specific part has been labeled as the ultimate campaign advantage. Yes, it has been shown that the Internet definitely has an impact on youth political curiosity and advancement of their political knowledge, but nothing has specified just how much of an impact this still fairly new medium will have on current young voters as well as future voters. It should definitely raise curiosity knowing that the study conducted by Tolbert and McNeal (2003) showed that the Internet is the only medium that had a measureable impact on voting behavior. And not just on voting, but it impacted other forms of political participation like having political discussions, displaying buttons or signs, attending rallies, and even donating money to a certain candidate, party, or interest group. Not even television can do that. A survey from May 2011 that has been used by the Romney 2012 campaign showed that 31% of likely voters had not watched “live” television in the previous week, meaning they hadn’t watched a show or advertisements as they originally aired on TV. Because of this, television advertising is becoming less reliable and desirable considering the costs and low impact. This is causing more targeted online advertising (Peters, 2012).

Also, a lot of voting behavior research is fairly outdated. Twenty-first century youth voters need to be studied. “Contemporary research has found that young adults are changing the forms of social organization and interaction-and thus citizenship norms-in American society and politics” (Bachman, et. al., 2010). If my generation is having such a large impact on American society, then why hasn’t more research been done on convincing us to vote? Previous empirical research on the role of Internet access in shaping citizen political participation has shown mixed results because of the lack of datasets (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Also, there has been a total lack of research into the

popular genre of social networking sites, which is a growing field not only in scope, but also in power and influence.

My generation is the Internet generation. We not only grew up with the Internet, it grew up with us. And I believe the Internet, specifically the social networking sphere, was the ticket to the White House for the Obama campaign. There has been limited research on this and I want to find the answers to this historic election.



## Methods and Data

### Dataset

For this study I used the PEW Internet and American Life Project November 2008 Post-Election Tracking Survey. The PEW Internet and American Life Project has been conducting multiple studies over the course of recent years to examine the role of Internet is playing not only in individual lives, but in American society as a whole. This particular study was done via telephone immediately after the 2008 election and had 2,254 individual respondents (1,591 of which were Internet users) who answered questions regarding their Internet use, level and methods of online political participation, offline political participation, and other socioeconomic determinants.

### Determining Independent and Dependent Variables

#### *Dependent Variables*

Since the main goal of my research was to discover the significance of different factors on young voters who chose Obama on Election Day 2008, I only used one dependent variable and a recoded version of the same variable, both being nominal level variables. These variables were simple derived from yes or no answers given by the respondents pertaining to whom they voted for in 2008. I labeled the variable, vote02, which enumerated the options of party tickets that could have been voted for. Only the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden as well as the Republican ticket of John McCain and Sarah Palin was of interest, so the other answers were considered missing. I later created a dummy variable from vote02 for logistical regression purposes, which became vote02recode, where only a vote for the Democratic ticket was coded as a

1 and all other votes coded as 0. I used logistic regression analysis in conjunction with crosstabs due to a lack of interval level data, especially in regards to dependent variables.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variables I used in my analysis were ones that exclusively pertained to Internet use during the 2008 campaign, besides multiple variables regarding age. The original variable, age, being interval wasn't used until logistical regression. I used a recoded age variable, recage, which split the age variable into six groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. While I used all groups in order to compare and contrast results, my main focus was on the youngest age cohort. This group of 18-24 year-old respondents was also recoded into a dummy variable labeled, yng\_dum. The final variation on the age variable was a binned variable that grouped all ages into three categories: youngest (18-37), middle aged (37-54), and senior (54+).

Variables concerning Internet use included different activities such as using the Internet in general; using it as the main source for election news; how often the respondent used the Internet; if the respondent used social networking sites to post comments, questions, or theories regarding the election; or if the respondent has used social networking sites to receive any election information. These social networking sites included Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others that were not specified.

I used both types of independent variables separately to analyze the individual effect age had on the potential of a Democratic vote in 2008 as well as how being a frequent Internet user or using the Internet as a main source of political information affected the respondents votes. I then combined different sets of these variables to test the

strength of each type when the other was introduced, or to analyze if the chances of predicting a Democratic vote could be enhanced.

### *Control Variables*

I wanted to use a set of control variables that have shown over time to be significant in predicting how an individual may vote. By using these, I was able to truly test the significance of the Internet and social networking sites on youth voting results in 2008. Variables such as 2007 income, education, race, and student status were used in logistical regression to test the strength of association between the Internet and a Democratic vote. Also, these were used in layered crosstabs to test the same idea and to see the changes different independent and control variables had across all age cohorts.

## Interpretation of Results

Because I have a fairly thorough and multi-part hypothesis, I started with some simple analysis then continued to add independent and control variables along the way. My hypotheses not only looked at 18-24 year-olds being more apt to use the Internet and social networking sites for political purposes, but that this actually encouraged them to vote in 2008 and that it also encouraged them to vote for Obama significantly more than other age groups or the entire voting population as a whole. I started my analysis by testing the relationships between different age groups, use of the Internet as a main political news source, and which party the respondent voted for on Election Day as the dependent variable. The first step I took was to run a couple cross-tabulations. The first cross-tab I ran compared the recoded age independent variable with the dependent variable regarding which party the respondent chose to vote for. I found that age was significantly related to the party ticket voted for and that 18-24 year-olds were the highest supporters of Obama, in terms of percentages, compared to the other five age groups with 74.7% of the youngest respondents voting for Obama compared to the 25.3% who voted for McCain. A chi-square value of almost 76 resulted in a .000 significance value. After creating a dummy variable, coding the use of Internet as a main source of election news as 1 and all other news sources as 0, I ran another cross-tabulation testing how a respondent's political news preference affects the outcome of their vote. According to the Pearson chi-square score, there was not a significant relationship at 1.471 and a significance value of .225. However, the almost 12 percentage point difference between Internet users voting for the Democratic ticket over the Republican ticket shows that

there was some amount of a relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

(Table 1 about here)

To examine the relationship further, I combined both independent variables in layered cross-tabs to test the effect of both age and Internet use on Election Day results. Overall, the combination of the two independent variables had a significant effect on the ability to predict a vote for Obama at the .000 level. I found that 69.4% of 18-24 year-olds who prefer the Internet for election news voted for Obama over the 30.6% who voted for McCain. But, relying on Internet sources for political information among the youngest age cohort wasn't quite significant at .073. It did end up being significant though at the .001 level for those aged 18-24 who used the Internet on a frequent basis. I came to this conclusion by performing a layered cross-tab using an 18-24 year-old dummy variable and the variable, often, with the dependent variable. I also illustrated this relationship with a bar chart using the binned age variable instead. The graph also shows that Internet has overtaken newspapers as the second most highly used source for political updates. This quite possibly will have an effect on future campaigning and future research if this trend continues.

(Table 2 about here)

(Figure 1 about here)

With the large amount of support for Obama and the mobilization of college students in particular, I wanted to study the role that a respondent's student status played, in combination with the source of election news, in determining a vote for Obama. I ran

another layered cross-tab for this relationship. Both full-time and part-time students who prefer to use the Internet as their main news source were overwhelmingly in favor of Obama on Election Day with 63% of full-time students and 100% of part-time students that are Internet newsreaders choosing the Democratic ticket. The chi-square result for full-time, 18-24 year-old students was insignificant, however, with a value of 6.917 and the related significance at the .075 level. However, there was significance for part-time, 18-24 year-old students the chi-square had a value 9.898 and significance at the .007 level. Across all ages, the relationship was significant for both full and part-time students with Asymp. Sig. (2 sided) values at .000 and .001, respectively. The total effect that student status had on the dependent variable was the only independent variable that had a Lambda score worth discussing. The Lambda for all full-time students was .095, while the Lambda for all part-time students was .058. This tells me that knowing someone's student status improves my odds of predicting their 2008 vote by anywhere from 6% to 9.5%.

(Table 3 about here)

After analyzing the basic effects of the Internet on young voters, I wanted to dig deeper into the way Internet was used by 18-24 year-olds during the 2008 election season. First, I wanted to look at where on the Internet respondents were getting their campaign or candidate information, specifically if this information was received from a social networking site like Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. News about a campaign or specific candidates on these sites can actually come from a variety of different areas. Respondents can get personal updates from the candidates themselves via status updates on their personal Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. This is also where information

regarding when a rally might be held or where in the country the campaign may be headed next can be found. These personal pages can also be where a candidate posts recent videos of speeches, their latest commercial advertisement, or links to the official campaign website and places online to donate money to the campaign. If respondents are not “friends” with the candidate on Facebook or following them on Twitter, they can still possibly receive this same multitude of information from other people who are sharing videos, postings, etc. regarding the candidate of interest. A lot of this information may just be for entertainment value, like videos of the “Obama Girl” on YouTube, or it could be just plain false. However, this is where many people may look for a story to further investigate on a different website. Facebook can be a terrific starting point to gathering more information. This is why I wanted to specifically look at the influence these types of websites had on young voters in 2008, not only because their popularity is soaring among all age groups, but because the technology and methods of receiving and sharing news through these sites is incredible and they keep improving.

To analyze the relationship between social network sites, age, and the 2008 vote, I used layered cross-tabs. Even though 76% of 18-24 year-old respondents who commonly used social networking sites for political information voted for Obama, the chi-square score of .381 showed that the relationship was not significant. Surprisingly, the 81.8% of 35-44 year-olds who commonly used social networking sites for political information and voted for Obama did show a significance level of .000 according to chi-square.

I then looked at the relationship between performing different social networking activities, such as posting comments or questions about a candidate, or posting a video of a campaign commercial, along with age and the dependent variable. A large majority of

18-24 year-olds who posted something about the campaigns on a social networking site, 80.9%, voted in favor of Obama. The chi-square value of 13.153 shows that age as well as political activity on social networking sites has a significant impact on party choice at the .000 level.

(Table 4 about here)

Posting questions and comments, or sharing videos and links involving the election or a candidate is now considered by some to be a form of political participation. These online activities may skew perceptions on all political participation though, by possibly showing in the future that political apathy is dwindling, especially among the young. But, can a couple clicks of the mouse to share a political advertisement with friends of Facebook really be considered legitimate participation in the political process?

To get a more detailed test of my theory, I employed logistic regression. This also helped me see the strength of my independent variables more clearly and to see if those relationships would hold significance when other control variables are introduced. First, I ran a binary logistic regression analysis between age and the party ticket voted for on Election Day 2008, modeled by the equation:  $\text{Logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008)} = a + b (\text{age})$ .

(Table 5 about here)

The resulting model is:  $\text{logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008)} = .768 - .009 (\text{age})$ . This model tells me that, without knowing someone's age, the logged odds of them voting for Obama in 2008 is .768 and these logged odds decrease by .009 for each one-year increase in age. To make this number more meaningful, I took the odds ratio value of .991 and



converted it into a percentage to show the change in odds in a more direct fashion. My results told me that the slightly negative relationship meant that a respondent at a certain age is .9% more likely to have voted for Obama in the 2008 election than a respondent at the next higher age. While .9% may not seem like much, when the results are reliant on just a single year increase in age, the percentage change in odds takes on more meaning. According to the Wald score of 32.555, this is a significant relationship. The Cox & Snell R-square as well as the Nagelkerke R-square scores gauges the strength of association between the dependent and independent variables, with the Cox-Snell measurement being the more conservative of the two. In this scenario the Cox & Snell R-square score was .007 and the Nagelkerke R-square was .009, showing that there was a weak relationship. But how accurate is the model's ability to predict a respondent's vote in 2008? Well, the change in -2 log likelihood was 32.727, which is significant at the .000 level. This means that knowing a respondent's age significantly enhanced the model's ability to predict a vote in 2008. The "full effect" of the independent variable, age, on the dependent variable, 2008 vote, is -.18 meaning that across the full range of observed values, an increase in age decreases the probability of voting for Obama by .18.

I then expanded my logistical regression analysis to further test the strength of the relationship between age, using the Internet as a main source of election news, and a vote for Obama in 2008 modeled by the equation:  $\text{logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008)} = a + b_1 (\text{age}) + b_2 (\text{use of Internet as main news source})$ . I expected to see a higher strength of association than when I was only measuring age. I also expected to see an even higher ability to enhance the predictive power of the equation.

(Table 6 about here)

The resulting model is:  $\text{logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008)} = .835 - .01 (\text{age}) - .205$  (use of Internet as main news source). This model tells me that not only will an increase in age cause a decrease in the logged odds of voting for Obama, but also those who choose different methods of news decreases the logged odds of voting for Obama by .01 and .205 logged odds, respectively. The odds ratio for age in this scenario is basically still the same. The odds ratio for using the Internet for election news is 18.5%, which tells me in a more direct fashion, that respondents who use other news sources such as television or newspapers over the Internet, are 18.5% less likely to have voted for Obama in 2008. The Wald score, 36.743, shows that this combination of variables has a significant relationship. The Cox & Snell R-square improved slightly to .008 and the Nagelkerke R-square also improved slightly to .011. While this still shows a weak relationship, it has strengthened it slightly. The main question for this part of my analysis is whether or not the two independent variables working together enhanced the model's ability to predict a respondent's vote in 2008. The change in -2 log likelihood improved slightly to 38.524, resulting in a .000 level of significance. So, both variables enhanced the ability of the model to correctly predict a respondent's vote in 2008 and it was a light improvement from just knowing a respondent's age. Using this information I was able to find the predicted probability for 18 year-olds as well as 48 year-olds. I used the age of 48, because it was the average age of respondents in the entire survey and it is part of an age cohort that tends to be politically active. The predicted probability that this model gives to 18 and 48 year-olds is .61 and .54, respectively. This means that for 18 year-olds who use the Internet as their main source for political news, the probability of them voting for Obama is 61% and for 48 year-olds who use the Internet as a main source for political

news, their probability for voting for Obama is 54%. The other information these probabilities give me is the difference between the two ages. Voters at the age of 18 has a .07 or 7% higher probability of voting for Obama than voters aged 48, giving more emphasis to the fact that Obama knew how to mobilize and persuade young voters very well.

Based on the strength of these results, my final test includes additional control variables. I again included age as well as other independent variable, which were: use of social networking sites to gain campaign information and using the Internet as the main source of political news. The control variables I used included: a dummy variable representing black non-Hispanic voters, a dummy variable combining full-time and part-time students, household income in 2007, and three separate dummy variables representing different levels of education. I was hoping to find that even with the addition of control variables, my Internet based independent variables would still hold a significant influence.

(Table 7 about here)

The results of this analysis raised questions about the hypothesis. Not only did my two Internet related independent variables fail to be significant, with using the Internet as a main source of political news at a Wald score of 1.431 and related significance level of .232, and using social networking sites for political information at a Wald score of 2.347 and a related significance of .126, but even the age variable lost significance with a Wald score of .973 and a related significance score of .324. All the other control variables, excluding student status, proved to be significant in predicting a vote for Obama in 2008.

The combination of all nine variables did significantly enhance the model's ability to predict by quite a large margin. The change in -2 loge likelihood was over 1,394, which is much higher than the change discovered by knowing age and main source of political news.

## Discussion

After several steps and varying layers of analysis, my hypothesis was supported by some analysis and challenged by other tests. While the Internet as a political news source and performing political activities online had a significant effect on voters aged 18-24 choosing Obama in 2008, those factors couldn't hold significance when other independent variables and control variables were introduced. Socioeconomic factors like race, education, and income still have the strongest influence in determining a person's vote, no matter the age or source of news and information.

On the positive side, my research and analysis showed that not only is the Internet now more relied upon than newspapers for political information, but that the Internet is opening doors for more political participation and knowledge. And even though the Internet's role may not have been statistically significant in electing Obama in 2008, I believe it will only continue to have a stronger impact in future presidential elections. It did have a positive influence on involving young voters in the political process, which is critical in order to not only get them to vote for a certain candidate, but to hopefully keep them voting in the future. So, even though my main theory proved to be inaccurate for now, I discovered more about the role of developing technologies in the world of politics than I expected and I firmly believe that future data and research will eventually prove my hypothesis correct. Perhaps as soon as 2012.

The Obama campaign has already been hard at work to prepare for the 2012 campaign season. They have a team of in-house technology developers working at the Chicago headquarters on a top-secret application that will track every door they knock on, every dollar they fund raise, every action they take. Last November they redesigned

the campaign website to look and work the same on every platform: computers, mobile phones, and tablets. Michael Slaby, Obama's chief integration and innovation officer, along with Joe Rospar, the campaign's chief digital strategist, have been constructing a "microlistening" and computer modeling program to comb online and offline behavior patterns for voter information. They plan to use this to personalize every interaction with the campaign from fundraising to vote persuasion. But, that's not all. In a small, dark corner of the Chicago offices there is a team of about a dozen developers that have been working for months to re-write the campaign's code (Romano, 2012). According to Jim Messina, Obama's head campaign manager, "Our efforts on the ground and on technology will make 2008 look prehistoric."

This vamped up version on the 2008 campaign will not only prove to be interesting and possibly controversial, but it could greatly impact how technology driven campaigns become in the future. This could most likely lead to the Internet becoming a significant persuasion and mobilization tool in the very near future.

Although Republican candidates have also been incredible digital strides so far in 2012, they tend to get less attention. Mitt Romney's campaign and a team of online behavior analysts have already spent 18 months trying to fight television's law of diminishing returns. These companies are using algorithms to find similar political sentiments online by observing and analyzing what they read, comment on, and share online. These algorithms have told the Romney campaign that his typical online supporter likes online quizzes, likes to share photographs, and is interested in technology, literature, home repair, and child care. Voters online that are interested in video or casino games, bowling, martial arts, and jazz tend to not be as supportive of Romney's message.

They can even tell when someone watches a Romney video online, how long they watched it, and if they took action because of it. The Obama digital team knows when online supporters open e-mails from the campaign and if they accessed links to the main campaign website (Peters, 2012). According to Darrel M. West, the director of Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institute, “This will likely become the first truly digital election because so many people are not paying attention to live TV.” He even compares this rise in Internet campaigning to the emergence of television advertisements in the 1960s. That is a lot of pressure and influence that is being put on this always expanding medium and so far, the Internet is excelling the expectations of not only candidates, but voters as well.

## Appendix A

**Table 1** Relationship between Age and Political News Source and 2008 Vote

	Vote for Obama	Vote for McCain
18-24	<b>74.7%</b> <b>(357)</b>	25.3% (121)
25-34	59.6% (482)	40.4% (327)
35-44	52.9% (490)	47.1% (436)
45-54	57.3% (553)	42.7% (412)
55-64	59.7% (448)	40.3% (302)
65+	52.8% (440)	47.2% (394)
Internet as main news source	<b>55.9%</b> <b>(386)</b>	44.1% (304)
Other main news source	58.4% (2401)	41.6% (1710)

\*Note: (N) represents number of cases

**Chi-square (age) = 75.843, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000**

Lambda (age) = .000

Chi-square (Internet) = 1.854, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .173

Lambda (Internet) = .000

**Table 2a** Relationship between Age, Political News Source and 2008 Vote for Obama

	Television	Newspaper	Radio	Magazines	Internet
18-24	78.2% (201)	83.7% (41)	60% (8)		<b>69.4%</b> <b>(100)</b>
25-34	63.9% (301)	56.5% (26)	46.7% (57)		57.9% (84)
35-44	55.6% (309)	62.8% (27)	32.8% (42)	100% (5)	57.3% (102)
45-54	61.4% (430)	58.9% (33)	38.7% (24)	71.4% (5)	44.3% (58)
55-64	61.8% (341)	62% (49)	34.6% (18)	81.8% (9)	52% (26)
65+	55.5% (350)	47.6% (59)	51.4% (18)	60% (3)	32.1% (9)

\*Note: (N) represents number of cases

Chi-square (18-24) = 6.967, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .073

Lambda (18-24) = .000

**Chi-square (total) = 70.060, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000**

Lambda (total) = .041



**Table 2b** Relationship between 18-24 (age), Frequency and 2008 Vote

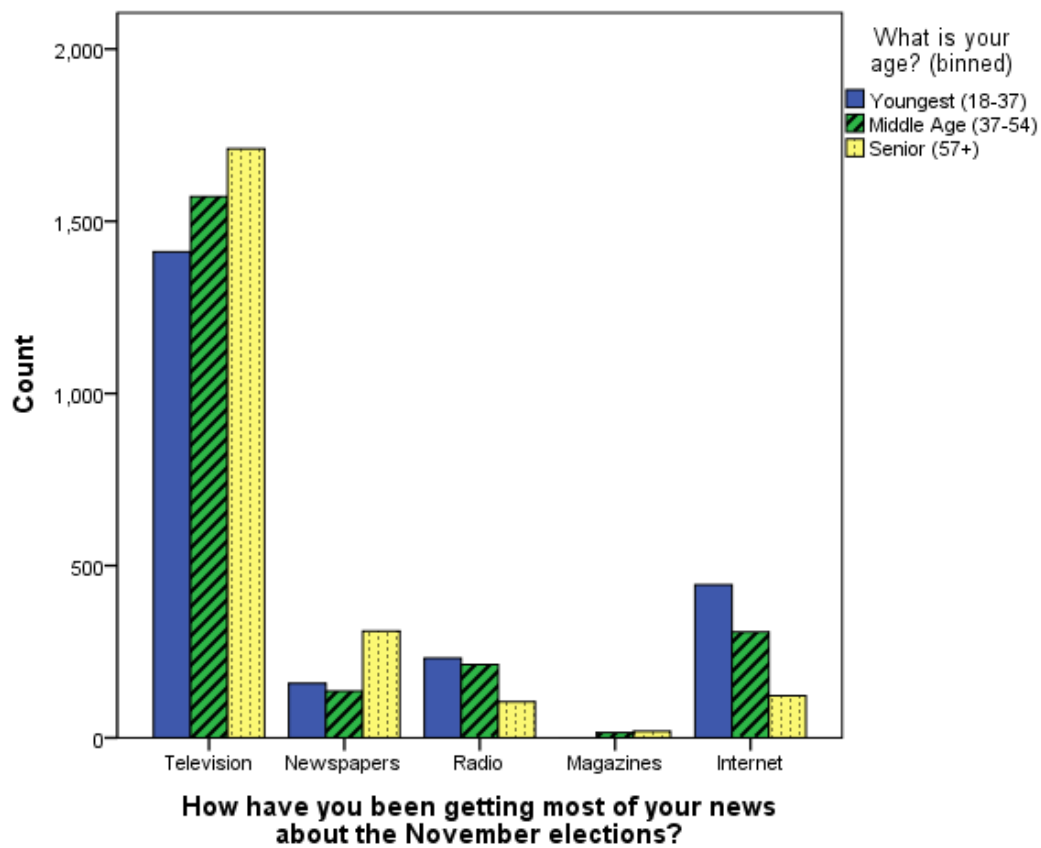
Frequency	Vote for Obama	Vote for McCain
Daily	<b>70.6%</b> <b>(226)</b>	29.4% (94)
Several times per week	<b>75.6%</b> <b>(65)</b>	24.4% (21)
Less often/Never	100% (32)	0% (0)

\*Note: (N) represents number of cases

**Chi-square = 23.955, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000**

Lambda = .002

Somer's d = .001

**Figure 1** Relationship between Age and Political News Source

Cases weighted by Weight by Density3

**Table 3** Obama share of the Vote by Student Status and Age

Age/Student	Television	Newspaper	Radio	Internet
18-24				
Full-time	71.9% (46)	100% (6)	100% (6)	<b>63%</b> <b>(46)</b>
Part-time	67.2% (41)	100% (11)		<b>100%</b> <b>(12)</b>
25-34				
Full-time	81.4% (35)		0% (0)	53.8% (7)
Part-time	62.1% (41)		0% (0)	69.2% (18)
35-44				
Full-time	53.8% (7)		0% (0)	58.3% (7)
Part-time	91.9% (34)	57.1% (4)	62.5% (5)	59.1% (13)
45-54				
Full-time	100% (3)			
Part-time	87.9% (29)	100% (4)	66.7% (2)	
55-64				
Full-time		100% (2)		
Part-time	86.7% (13)	100% (2)		100% (4)

\*Note: (N) represents number of cases

Chi-square (18-24 full-time) = 6.917, Asymp. Sig (2-sided) = .075

Lambda (18-24 full-time) = .000

**Chi-square (18-24 part-time) = 9.898, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .007**

Lambda (18-24 part-time) = .000

**Chi-square (total full-time) = 20.231, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000**

Lambda (total full-time) = .095

**Chi-square (total part-time) = 17.092, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .001**

Lambda (total part-time) = .058

**Table 4** Obama share of the Vote by Social Network Use and Age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
SNS user	<b>76%</b> <b>(98)</b>	46.5% (58)	81.8% (54)	59.5% (22)	100% (14)	100% (5)
Not user	71.8% (191)	74% (225)	55.9% (147)	59.8% (79)	78.8% (41)	18.2% (2)
SNS post	<b>80.9%</b> <b>(144)</b>	56.9% (78)	73.7% (70)	60.6% (20)	84.2% (16)	
No post	63.6% (110)	67.9% (171)	54.4% (99)	59.5% (72)	83% (39)	46.7% (7)

\*Note: (N) represents number of cases

\*\*Note: SNS stands for Social Networking Sites

Chi-square (18-24 SNS user) = .767, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .381

Lambda (18-24 SNS user) = .000

Chi-square (total SNS user) = .002, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .966

Lambda (total SNS user) = .000

**Chi-square (18-24 SNS post) = 13.153, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000**

Lambda (18-24 SNS post) = .000

**Chi-square (total SNS post) = 8.224, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .004**

Lambda (total SNS post) = .000

**Table 5** Logistic Regression between Age and Recoded Vote for Obama in 2008

Model estimate and model summary: Logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008) = a+b (age)

Model estimates	Coefficient	Significance	Odds Ratio	Percentage change in odds
Constant	.768			
Age	-.009	<b>.000</b>	.991	-.9%
Model summary	Value	Significance		
Change in -2 log likelihood	<b>32.727</b>	<b>.000</b>		
Cox-Snell R-square	.007			
Nagelkerke R-square	.009			

**Table 6** Logistic Regression Vote for Obama by Age and News Source

Model estimates and model summary: Logged odds (vote for Obama in 2008) =  $a + b_1$   
(age) +  $b_2$  (Internet news source)

Model estimates	Coefficient	Significance	Odds Ratio	Percentage change in odds
Constant	.835			
Age	-.010	<b>.000</b>	.990	-1%
Internet news source	-.205	.016	.815	-18.5%
Model summary	Value	Significance		
Change in -2 log likelihood	<b>38.524</b>	<b>.000</b>		
Cox-Snell R-square	.008			
Nagelkerke R-square	.011			

Pred. Prob: intnews\_dum-vote02, age 18 = .61 or 61%

Pred. Prob. Intnews\_dum-vote02, age 48 = .54 or 54%

**Table 7** Logistic Regression Vote for Obama News Source and Internet Use against Control Variables

Model estimates	Coefficient	Significance	Odds Ratio	Percentage change in odds
Constant	.125			
Age	.006	.324	1.006	.6%
Black non-Hispanic	3.634	<b>.000</b>	37.870	3,687%
Student	.309	.065	1.362	36.2%
2007 income	-.140	<b>.000</b>	.870	-13%
High School education	.793	<b>.009</b>	2.210	121%
Some College education	.715	<b>.016</b>	2.043	104.3%
Beyond College education	1.111	<b>.000</b>	3.038	203.8%
Internet news source	.183	.232	1.200	20%
SNS user	-.231	.126	.794	-20.6%
Model summary	Value	Significance		
Change in -2 log likelihood	<b>145.613</b>	<b>.000</b>		
Cox-Snell R-square	.115			
Nagelkerke R-square	.158			

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