

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF 2012 PRESIDENTIAL  
CANDIDATES' DIGITAL COMMUNICATION:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by

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## ABSTRACT

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the U.S. public flocked to the Internet, social media, and other digital tools. Political candidates took note, and integrated these into campaigns. These tools allowed politicians to reach the public directly, bypassing the journalists who once were the only way to reach mass audiences. As digital communication has increased, it is unclear how much journalistic mediation these tools receive. This study analyzed news coverage of incumbent Barack Obama's and opponent Mitt Romney's digital communication in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign. The researcher identified 292 articles (containing 372 specific mentions) from 10 leading newspapers and *The Associated Press* that mentioned Obama's or Romney's campaign websites, Twitter, Facebook, and mobile applications. In addition to describing overall prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and level of mediation coverage, the study compared coverage by candidate and by specific tool.

Of 20,968 articles about Obama's and Romney's campaigns carried by the news outlets, only 1.4% mentioned digital tools or messages. Further, prominence for the stories was low, with 53.4% running inside sections and only 6.2% on the front pages. Within the stories, mentions of the candidates' digital tools were quite brief. Only eight stories, (0.04% of all coverage) were wholly devoted to digital communication.

The mentions most often focused on message content (covered in 57.5% of the mentions), followed by use of digital tools for political means (41.4%). Fact-checking (18.3%) and the use of digital tools for attacking politics (10.8%) were rarely discussed. Nearly half of the mentions had no tone, and more than half of the mentions had little to no mediation, suggesting little critical analysis of digital communication.

Journalists were most likely to cover websites and Twitter than the other tools. Obama tended to receive more coverage overall, more coverage of his Twitter feed, and more neutral coverage. Romney's mentions focused on his website and were more likely to be negative.

Journalists appear to be doing little to mediate candidates' digital communication. Because of the importance of an informed voting public in U.S. democracy, this raises concerns about the future role of journalism in the political process.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Campaign websites, first used in the late 1990s, gained noticeable strength during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. In 2008, *The New York Times* published an article titled “How Obama’s Internet Campaign Changed Politics” about soon-to-be-elected presidential candidate Barack Obama’s Internet campaign strategy. “Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee,” Arianna Huffington told the paper (Miller, 2008). Other presidential campaigns used the Internet prior to Obama, but not with nearly as much success. By using the Internet to organize supporters and collect donations, Obama was able to save a considerable amount of campaign funds and volunteer time on the ground.

One difference between digital tools in the 2008 presidential election and previous elections was the development of social networking websites like Facebook and video content websites like YouTube. Social networking sites were used to efficiently organize supporters, while ads were placed on video content sites (Miller, 2008).

In 2012, Obama’s re-election campaign increased its Internet presence. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (“Degree,” 2012) compared incumbent Obama’s and Republican challenger Mitt Romney’s use of several social media digital platforms in their presidential campaigns. Obama made use of Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Tumblr, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Spotify and Twitter. Romney only made use of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr,

and Google+. Romney included Tumblr and Spotify to his digital platforms after the study, but PEJ found that Obama was using twice as many digital tools as Romney and he was using these tools more frequently than Romney. After studying content from all the platforms mentioned above, Obama was found to have four times as much digital content as Romney (Degree, 2012, p. 5).

In response to Obama's Internet tactics, Romney's campaign decided to place more emphasis on digital platforms. In 2011, Romney hired Zac Moffatt to direct the campaign's digital communication. Romney's campaign uses social networking and video content websites at a rate similar to Obama's 2008 strategy. "We're going to have people watch one of our rich video units online, engage with our campaign, syndicate the message through social sharing, vote for us, and convince their friends to do the same," Moffatt told the *National Journal* (Scola, 2012, par. 10). While many politicians plead to constituents to visit their websites for more detailed explanations of their plans and policies, some voters do not feel comfortable with only hearing one side of the story. Social networking sites allow viewers to write comments and critique a candidate's positions. Further emphasis on the importance of Internet campaigning is created by the increasing number of people who do not watch television and receive information solely from the Internet. Moffatt called such people "off-the-gridders" (Scola, 2012, par. 11).

Before the Internet, politicians relied on the media to reach the masses, and journalists relied on politicians for the content necessary to create stories (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 43). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, politicians' ability to avoid the journalistic criticism, used to filter political messages in the past, has some concerned about credible coverage of candidates in a technological age. For example, the PEJ (2007) argued about the presidential election:

...the candidate Web sites really do serve as an information destination for the politically curious, with one important caveat. The campaign holds the editorial reins, and

for that, most of the content is patently self-serving, generally highlighting the positive and ignoring the negative (p. 9).

For example, *The Washington Post* political correspondent Dan Balz (2012) claims the media have accused Romney of continuing to give questionable welfare information on his campaign website, even after the information was deemed false by reporters. Journalists can critique what politicians place on their websites, but journalists do not control the messages on those sites. Although the Internet gives power to politicians, some argue that the journalists are not properly doing their jobs in covering these new forms of campaign communication. Balz argues that fact-checking and ad watch groups “have become robust and increasingly comprehensive. But they are not providing much of a check on the campaigns’ behavior” (par. 4, 2012).

Media critic Rosen (2012) adds, “So now we’re in a new phase: fact-checking alone is not enough. The campaigns seem able to override it...So what’s the next innovation? (par. 8). Rosen was asked about the next innovation. He replied, “I don’t know” (par. 9). Journalism scholars are unsure how journalists can successfully mediate messages from campaign websites. In addition, those working at media outlets are unsure how they will mediate politicians in this new environment with fewer resources (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 47-48).

This study aims to analyze how journalists reported candidates’ use of campaign websites and social media during the 2012 U.S. presidential election. Specifically, a content analysis was conducted on mentions of Obama’s or Romney’s campaign digital communication in the nation’s largest daily newspapers and the *Associated Press* that mentioned the two leading candidates’ use of websites, social media, and mobile applications. Stories were analyzed for prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and level of mediation. The goal of the study is to both describe the overall reporting on candidates’ digital communication and to compare coverage of

Romney and Obama. Further, this study analyzes whether the prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and level of mediation in coverage varied by the type of digital communication type (website, Facebook, Twitter, or mobile app) reported on.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review prepares the context for this study by explaining agenda setting theory and agenda building theory, a brief history of presidents' desires to reach large audiences, and a brief history of journalists' role political news coverage. This information helps describe how the issues focused on in this study developed over time. The literature review then turns to journalistic mediation of presidential candidates' communication outside the digital realm. The one previous study focused on journalistic coverage of presidential candidates' digital communication provided the foundation for this study (Greer, Mensing, Baughman, Moody, Petterson, Wright, Zhang, 2001). Research questions are presented at the end of this chapter.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

An understanding of how media organizations build a news agenda is needed for this study. Agenda setting and agenda building are not analyzed directly in this study, but the level of journalistic mediation of a message might determine who controls the media's agenda, which is communicated to an audience. The content to be delivered to an audience must exist before the media can set the public agenda. Agenda setting theory justifies the use of content analysis in this study.

Before agenda building theory, there was agenda setting theory. Walter Lippmann first presented the ideas that would eventually become agenda setting theory in his book *Public Opinion* in 1922. According to these ideas, public opinion responds to a pseudo-environment

created by news media, rather than the real environment (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) developed the first level agenda setting theory later. McCombs and Shaw stated that by affecting issue salience, or promoting the importance of certain issues to the public, the media set the agenda of issues for political campaigns.

Mitnick (1980) developed agenda building theory as an extension of agenda setting theory. According to Mitnick, agenda building is “the process by which issues are brought to a formal institutional agenda and transformed into policy intentions” (p. 168). For the purposes of this research, the institutions are those of the television news media and newspapers. The news media agenda was considered to be the choice made by a news station concerning what issues to broadcast.

The agenda-building process includes three general steps. The first step is the creation of an issue. This is usually an event produced outside the news organization. Events can be spontaneous or planned by the officials of institutions like the government or public relations. The second step occurs within the news organization where the issue is elaborated on by reporters and editors advocating for the issue. This elaboration is used to persuade others within the news organization to become advocates and build support so the issue can be presented to the gatekeepers of the news agenda. After gatekeeping decision makers have approved the issue, the third step is to add the issue to the news agenda. The more support and elaboration an issue receives, the more likely it will be presented to the public (Mitnick, 1980).

Gatekeepers include journalists, editors, and executives; however, journalists exercise most of their control in the second step and lose almost all of it by the third step. Although reporters have little involvement in the final gatekeeping decision, outside forces, such as

advertisers, can influence executives and editors by using positive and negative incentives (Bennett, 2005).

Agenda building theory provides a basic understanding of how stories are chosen to be reported, but it does not properly weigh the influence of political officials on gatekeeping (Mitnick, 1980). U.S. presidents, presidential candidates, and other politicians have sought to not only influence the media agenda, but also the public agenda since the U.S. democracy was founded.

### **Review of the Literature**

**The Rhetorical Presidency.** While agenda setting usually focuses on the media setting the agenda, the president is also capable of setting the agenda through his communication with the public. The president can set the agenda by using traits related to what is called the rhetorical presidency. Ceaser, Thurow, Tulis, and Bessette (1981) defined the rhetorical presidency model as one where the president's power lies in his ability to connect with the masses and be a "leader of the people." Before this model came to be, presidents would spend most of their words communicating with the judicial and legislative branches of government. When they did speak to the people, it was treated with suspicion and criticism. With the modern rhetorical presidency, candidates begin speeches during the campaign and presidents continue the campaign rhetoric throughout their terms (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 158-159, 161, 166).

While he was not the first rhetorical president, Woodrow Wilson was the first to set the trend of rhetorical presidents in 1913, which continues in the 21st century. Wilson used the rhetorical presidency to develop support through direct appeal to public opinion and use that support to pressure Congress into passing his policies (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 162-163).

The modern mass media encourage the rhetorical presidency. The rise of radio and television placed emphasis on orally delivered speeches and visual presentation. Political candidates and elected officials often seek as little mediation from news organizations as possible, while attempting to reach a large audience at the same time. Reporters rely on the president for soundbites, pictures, and the content necessary to create stories, while the president relies on reporters for news coverage so they can reach the masses (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 164-165) (Vergobbi, 2012 p. 43). This encourages politicians to give the media information that creates an advantage for the politicians.

The first television news programs emerged in the 1940s and in 1947, commercial television began regular programming (Stephens, 2000, p. 1-2). By the 1980s, politicians had become masters of manipulating television coverage to their advantage (Stephens, 2000, p. 7). President Ronald Reagan often was placed in colorful and appealing surroundings when seen on television, which created a positive appearance for audiences. By 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, government officials had learned to keep journalists away from negatively viewed, bloody violence on the ground. Instead, the U.S. Defense Department gave reporters pictures of bombings from the sky, which were seen by the public as relatively positive (Stephens, 2000, par. 16). While candidates enjoyed the new tools provided by television, many news professionals became concerned about emphasis being placed on the showmanship, rather than politicians' stances on the issues (Mickelson, 1989, p. 16).

**Rise of the Internet and Websites.** Advancements in technology allowed presidents to further advance the rhetorical presidency approach. In 1992, Bill Clinton's campaign used Internet modems, email, and fax machines to help him win the presidential office. Clinton set the first example for a successful Internet campaign, and later politicians followed his strategy.

During the 1996 presidential election, incumbent Clinton and challenger Bob Dole both created their own websites, making the first time html was used as a campaign communication language (Paletz, 2002, p. 233). At the time, few politicians had their own personal websites, and no one had thought of using websites for political campaign purposes before. Clinton's and Dole's websites featured campaign activities, commercials, positive background information, and vague descriptions of where they stood on certain issues. The sites also allowed viewers to sign up to volunteer to help the campaign and to make donations as well.

While Clinton and Dole incorporated new technologies into their campaigns, the candidates' websites contained mostly the same type of content that could be expressed in a pre-Internet campaign, according to Greer and LaPointe (2004). The candidates did not successfully use Internet tools that increase interactivity with citizens. However, they did have more pre-Internet style content on their sites than would have been publicized by prior existing media (Greer & LaPointe, 2004, p. 120).

During his 2000 presidential campaign, Al Gore added more advanced content on his website. Visitors watched live streaming video from his webcam. He had an interactive section where voters could type in the name of their home states and receive voter registration rules specifically for those states. Viewers were allowed to create their own web pages to discuss issues with the online community (Greer & LaPointe, 2004, p. 121).

Rosen (2012) places campaign websites in the unmediated communication category. Politicians place whatever truth or fiction they please on their own websites, and no matter what journalists say about these political messages, politicians can choose whether they want to delete false information or not, he argues. Political campaign websites are the property of the politicians, and the politicians have control over the content on such sites (Rosen, 2012).

**Rise of Social Media.** Besides traditional websites, social media sites are another popular online communication tool that has advanced the rhetorical presidency approach as well as change the way agenda setting functions. In August 2003, MySpace.com became the first dominant social networking site. Members of this site can post pictures, videos, and personal information and biographical information. Members can also post comments online and respond to the comments of others. In 2004, Facebook.com was developed and it quickly rivaled MySpace in members and became the new dominant social network. In 2006, Twitter.com became a dominant microblogging website. Twitter members can post comments of up to 140 characters in length. (Greer, 2012, p. 366-367).

Social networks can place agenda setting back in the hands of the public. On May 1, 2011, President Obama scheduled time broadcast networks to declare to America that Osama bin Laden was killed earlier that day by a U.S. Special Forces team. Obama was not scheduled to speak until 11:30 p.m., but many Americans already knew about the announcement approximately an hour in advance. This is because former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's chief of staff, Keith Urbahn, leaked the news on Twitter at 10:25 p.m. The news spread like wildfire. At first, reporters remained silent in order to let the president have his moment of triumph, but once most of America already knew about bin Laden, the reporters gave up their silence and reported the story. To remain silent at that point might have appeared as irresponsible journalism to some critics. Social media allows any opinion leader with a large audience to set the agenda (Greer, 2012, p. 373-374).

Journalists try to provide the public with factual clarity on issues. Journalists must cooperate with candidates to some degree in order to have access to them, but they must also ask candidates critical questions and hold politicians accountable for their actions. The media usually

control agenda setting; however, the president has opportunities to speak to the public directly on television and radio (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 165). The balancing of candidates' and journalists' goals leads to a give-and-take relationship. This relationship existed long before the development of the Internet and thus continued into the digital era.

## **Journalists' Role**

**News Coverage History.** Before the Internet or even television was accessible to voters and candidates, how journalists should critique politicians and political messages was a progressing issue. In 1906, Reginald Fessenden broadcast the first radio program (Crisell & Starkey, 2009, p.3). Consisting of music and the reading of a passage from the Bible, Fessenden's use of radio was limited, and it was several years before his procedure was copied and made into a common practice. In the 1920s, radio journalism programs were developed, and the radio technology and program type spread around the world. By the time radio journalism was developed, scholars were already concerned about the radio being used to spread propaganda. Governments made regular use of radio to send messages to the people (Crisell & Starkey, 2009, p.3).

Despite the frequent use of radio by the government, radio reporters found political coverage to be difficult in the United States. The same system was in place that existed before radio: candidates took trains with their campaign staffs and reporters around the country making brief stops at as many towns as possible along their route. The people of a town or region would know that a campaign train was stopping when the train's whistle sounded. This was called the "whistle-stop" campaign (Mickelson, 1989, p. 98). At each stop, reporters would quickly jump off the train, take notes and pictures of the candidate giving a speech from the caboose, and quickly jump back on the train before being left behind. This system gave reporters little time to

setup audio recording equipment, so radio reporters often did not cover the whistle-stops.

However sometimes, candidates would stop for longer periods of time in large cities for in-studio radio interviews (Mickelson, 1989, p. 99).

In 1950, politicians experimented with their use of television in campaigns. New York's governor, Thomas Dewey, hired media savvy professionals to his reelection campaign staff and produced several types of television ads, including answering citizen's questions relayed from a man-in-the-street, a common news practice (Mickelson, 1989, p. 22). His campaign strategy was a success. That same year, Ohio's senator, Robert Taft, also ran a television focused campaign and won (Mickelson, 1989, p. 34).

When television, invented in 1927, became a viable medium, politicians moved away from whistle-stop campaigns in favor of strategies that would make candidates more available for television reporters (Mickelson, 1989, p. 100).

Television only reached a small audience at first, but its influence quickly grew. The rapid increase in viewers, along with prior successes in the political use of the medium, made television viable for coverage of the 1952 presidential race (Mickelson, 1989, p. 21-22). That year, Walter Cronkite with the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) covered the first televised presidential campaign (Stephens, 2000, p. 4).

Television has been criticized for being more focused on politicians' physical looks and less with news value. In 1960, the first televised presidential debate of John F. Kennedy against Richard M. Nixon showed how television transformed politics. Those who listened to the debate on the radio, believed Nixon won, but those who watched the debate on television, believed Kennedy won. This is because television viewers were able to compare Kennedy's erect posture and elegance with Nixon's slumped posture and grey stubbly face (Stephens, 2000, p. 4).

**Political Advertisements, Ad Watches, and New Communication Forms.** Political campaigns have employed tactics used in modern advertising campaigns as far back as 1916, when politicians first experimented with radio spot commercials. Spot commercials were similar to the 30-minute speeches traditionally given by candidates, but shortened to a mere 60 seconds (Mickelson, 1989, p. 71). Political advertising did not play as large a role in radio as it previously did in newspapers, but ads made a comeback with television. Print advertisements had to be adapted for television, and the sloganeering of the past morphed into “sound bites” for television. This adaptation of political strategy was largely pushed by campaign managers (Mickelson, 1989, p. 17-18). In 1952, presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower made use of spot announcements (Mickelson, 1989, p. 16). Spot announcements and commercials played during breaks in popular television shows allowing politicians to reach a broader audience than ever before (Mickelson, 1989, p. 71).

Political ads grew throughout the next 30 years, and journalists began to take notice. In the 1980s, media reported on the effectiveness of political ads, but few critiqued the misleading information communicated by politicians (Rosen, 2012). Growing concerns about political advertisements’ truthfulness led some to call for more journalistic mediation of candidates’ messages. During the 1988 presidential election, the first “ad watches” were developed by television and newspapers (West, 2001, p. 84-85). The number of ads presenting false and negative claims about competing candidates continued to increase. To build-up the effectiveness of “ad watches,” the “truth box” was developed (West, 2001, p. 86). Newspapers printed “truth boxes,” where ads were assessed, and television news showed the ad followed by a news media assessment. Television media pushed back against some political ads and documentaries at first, but eventually caved to political influence (Mickelson, 1989, p. 71, 82-83). Sometimes,

television media still resists, but politicians know they can often force their way (Mickelson, 1989, p. 83).

To expose false political statements, fact-checking techniques were developed in the 1990s. Emphasis was taken off of effectiveness and directed toward message accuracy, a practice some termed as the “ad watch” (Rosen, 2012, par. 8). Despite this initial response to the ads, “ad watches” were not initially effective, West contends (2001, p. 86). Reporters would show the whole ad in full screen before analyzing it. The ads presented striking images only to be followed-up by verbal discussion. The result was audience members recalled the ad, but not the analysis. When journalists publicize the inaccuracies of a political advertisement, the candidate might then choose to remove the advertisement. However, whether the candidate removes the ad or not, the ad and the candidate receive media attention, and this attention reaches voters (Paletz, 2002, p. 233). In response, television news played the ad in a smaller “truth box” while reporters used the rest of the screen to present their own images and the “ad watch” (West, 2001, p. 86).

Over the 1990’s, more media outlets began to run “ad watches” with greater success. During the 1992 presidential campaign, candidates were influenced by the “ad watches” of the past and became more careful about the accuracy of their messages. They decided to run what West called “ads with footnotes” (West, 2001, p. 87). In these ads, candidates placed footnotes at the bottom of the ad showing where they received the information they were presenting.

Despite the call for more accuracy from candidates, campaign ads continued to run, accurate or not. In 2012, fact-checking was not as effective as some journalists hoped. While journalists implemented fact-checking techniques politicians continued to spread lies to the public (Rosen, 2012). Part of the reason “ad watches” were so ineffective was because many newspapers and news media companies did not use them enough, West argues (2001, p. 89). A

news television show might run an “ad watch” once on an ad, but the ad aired multiple times on that station. More people saw the ad than the “ad watch” (West, 2001, p. 89).

Websites and social networking sites can be cheap or free extensions of ads, wholly controlled by candidates. They contain enormous amounts of information that can be difficult to verify as facts. Gossip, rumors, and propaganda spread quickly on social networks. A new industry arose to verify the facts on news media social networks. This industry also checks the facts when politicians use social media to reach the public. CNN’s iReport, Al Jazeera’s social media site, and several other social networks for traditional news media developed their own verification teams. The verification industry made great success in fact-checking on social networks, but misinformation on social networks is still an issue (Silverman, 2012, p. 4-6).

Even when a social network message is debunked, some people choose to believe the lie. Some Internet users choose what they want to believe and seek information that supports their beliefs. However sometimes, the liars are more convincing than the fact-checkers. Journalists must find ways to be more persuasive when exposing lies (Silverman, 2012, p. 6).

**Levels of Mediation.** For a democracy to function properly, news media must check the accountability of public officials. The public needs information about the reliability of public officials so voters can make an educated decision on Election Day (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 53). James Madison’s “Public Instruction” (1822) argues, “A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it is but the Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy...A people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives” (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 41-42).

Paletz (2002) defines mostly mediated, partly mediated, and unmediated coverage as three general ways journalists can report on candidates and candidates’ messages. Some

coverage types are more convenient and constructive for candidates' needs. Politicians try to gain and use all three of these coverage types as much as possible (Paletz, 2002, p. 219).

Mostly mediated coverage is used when the media decide what to cover about candidates and how to report it. Even though news interviews fall under this category, the candidate is given little response opportunity. Interviewers control the questions asked and how much time is allowed to answer the question. Paletz (2002) argues, this type of coverage is crucial to candidates in the pre-primary phase of the election (Paletz, 2002, p. 219-220). Mostly mediated coverage can give attention to candidates who need more exposure to the public; however, mostly mediated coverage often focuses on frontrunners. While coverage might be positive or negative, a candidate who is unknown to the public could possibly lose an election if he or she receives little to no mostly mediated coverage (Paletz, 2002, p. 220-222).

Partly mediated coverage usually comes in the form of party conventions, debates, and talk shows. This coverage allows candidates to have some liberty to control the message they want to give to the public, according to Paletz (2002). Politicians can use this time to show an audience the personality and warmth that the public cannot see with mostly mediated coverage. Partly mediated interviews on talk shows are less critical and formal than mostly mediated interviews (Paletz, 2002, p. 225-226).

Unmediated content consists mostly of billboards, campaign movies, television ads, and other types of advertisements. Political campaigns spend a significant majority of their funds on advertising. In unmediated content, no outside force controls or mediates the campaign's message. Candidates can choose when and where to place their ads for optimum exposure to the focus audience (Paletz, 2002, p. 228-229).

The vastness of views and available information in the 21st century has left news corporations lacking the resources necessary to properly report the news. There are too many news events to cover, which leads to superficial coverage of as many stories as possible. Vergobbi argues many journalists do not have the resources to assess public officials in a way that would benefit voters and democracy (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 47-48). Some news groups have abandoned the concept of watchdog journalism entirely.

**Problems with Watchdog Journalism.** Many critics agree on the importance of journalists keeping politicians accountable, but journalists face several challenges in doing so. Political parties and candidates often attempt to influence the news industry. Public relations experts and political “spin doctors” sent by politicians can take advantage of reporters. John Street (2001) argues that these forces dictate what is reported on by the media. “Spin doctors” control journalists’ access to some politicians. When journalists are allowed to interview public officials, the experts coach the interviewees on what information to give and how to answer questions. Some “spin doctors” address the public themselves through television and radio. Public relations create press releases given to reporters that are often merely rewritten by journalists to create news stories (Street, 2001, p. 145-147).

While the unaccountability of government officials is important news, the news media’s economic supporters and ad space buyers influence which stories will run. Vergobbi argues college journalism programs indoctrinate student journalists into the old patterns, meaning new reporters will have to handle the same old issues (Vergobbi, 2012 p. 43-44).

Some journalists say modern objectivity conflicts with the concept of being more persuasive in delivering the truth. Objective reporters sometimes present misleading information as the opposing side to the verified truth. Greenhouse explains that conflicts over whether to use

objectivity or not led to the Society of Professional Journalists' removal of "objectivity" from its code of ethics in 1996 (Greenhouse, 2012, p. 21-23). Despite criticism of objective journalism, some journalism professionals say objectivity can be used as part of the fact-checking process (Greenhouse, 2012, p. 21-23).

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington's Executive Director Melanie Sloan argues that dwindling resources in the newsroom have made it difficult for journalists to fact-check. With daily deadlines for reports, the addition of writing on the company's news blog each day, and the downsizing of staffs, journalists have little time for verification. When journalists cover political ads, they might or might not be able to produce a small box of information in the report, where the messages in the ads are checked. In the end, a large audience sees the ad, but a smaller group of people also sees the report and decides to read the small box alongside it (Friedhoff, 2012, 26-27).

Some critics believe watchdog journalism is not what people have been led to believe. Owen (2005) and other critics say watchdog journalists focus more on government officials' personal issues rather than officials' accountability. An emphasis on fact-checking has decreased among some journalists making it difficult for them to legitimately conduct watchdog journalism (Owen, 2005, p. 168).

### **Foundational Study**

This study is built upon a similar study examining coverage of presidential campaign websites in 2000. During the year leading up to the 2000 presidential election, reports from 12 prominent news organizations, including newspapers, magazines, and news broadcasts, were analyzed by a team at the University of Nevada to see how the news media were covering presidential candidates' campaign websites (Greer et al., 2001, p. 4). Once the sample was

collected, 225 stories met the criteria for the study and were analyzed. A total of 334 mentions of candidate websites were found in those stories (2001, p. 12). While most of the candidates had their own websites, Internet campaigning was not as strong in 2000 as it became in years to come. That study of the 2000 presidential campaign examined prominence of coverage, journalistic tone toward the communication, and aspects about the websites covered.

The prominence of a story was examined by observing the placement of a story mentioning a candidate's website in the news media source presenting it, the amount of the story dedicated to the mention, and the placement of the mention within the story. Prominence was rated high, medium or low. With only a few sentences mentioning campaign websites within each of the articles examined, coverage of digital campaign communication in 2000 was seen as somewhat shallow.

Campaign coverage in a presidential election year will usually create several stories a day, but campaign website stories in 2000 had a frequency of less than one story a day. Even though relatively few stories were about campaign websites, the stories that were told had high prominence (Greer et al., 2001, p. 19-21). In total, 77 mentions (23.1% of the sample) were in stories that led in the publication or broadcast and, 240 mentions (71.9%) did not lead. Prominence could not be determined for stories containing 17 mentions (5%). For prominence in the story, 11 mentions (3.3%) constituted the whole story, 95 mentions (28.4%) were of medium length, and 228 mentions (68.3%) were brief. Within the stories, 116 mentions (34.7%) were in the first third of the story, 142 (42.5%) were in the middle third, and 76 (22.8%) were in the final third (p. 12).

Aspects covered were examined by looking to see if 11 aspects were present in a mention. The content on these campaign websites was mentioned in reports more frequently than

other aspects covered such as interactivity, political tools, and truthfulness. Out of 334 mentions, 41 mentions (12.3%) mentioned none of the attributes listed, 210 (62.9%) mentioned content, 90 (26.9%) mentioned resources, 88 (26.3%) mentioned political tools, 68 (20.4%) mentioned interactivity, 48 (14.4%) mentioned technology, 44 (13.2%) mentioned attacks, 32 (9.6%) mentioned traffic, 18 (5.4%) mentioned appearance, 18 (5.4%) mentioned functionality, 5 (1.5%) mentioned truthfulness, and 33 (9.9%) mentioned some other aspect not listed (Greer et al., 2001, p. 10-11, 17).

Tone was examined using a ranked scale from 1 (highly positive) to 5 (highly critical or negative), or coded as neutral. In total, 11 mentions (3.3%) were entirely positive, 53 (15.9%) were somewhat positive, 10 (3.0%) were balanced, 50 (15.0%) were somewhat negative, 4 (1.2%) were highly negative, and most (206 or 61.7%) were neutral (p. 16).

### **Research Questions**

Furthering research by Greer et al. (2001), this study measured tone, reported aspects, and prominence in 2012 presidential news coverage of campaign websites and other digital communication by mobile applications for Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. In addition, this study analyzed the level of mediation for campaign website coverage. While tone was used to describe how journalists cover candidates' digital communication, the level of mediation was used to describe how engaged journalists were with candidates' digital communication. A decade after Greer et al.'s findings, social media, has developed and become a key platform for politicians' digital communication. For this reason, the platforms were added in this analysis. Candidate websites and social network sites have become commonplace in political campaigns and voters' everyday lives. Politicians in 2012 know how these new technologies can be used to their advantage when reaching the public better than they have in the past, and more of the public

has access to these technologies than in the past. With these developments, research needs to be updated media coverage of politicians' digital communication.

The literature review above is used as context to propose the research questions to analyze news media coverage of Obama's and Romney's 2012 presidential campaign websites and social media sites. The research questions used in this study are categorized by prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and mediation.

### **Prominence**

- RQ1<sub>a</sub>: What was the prominence overall for coverage of leading U.S presidential candidates' digital communication?
- RQ1<sub>b</sub>: Did the prominence of coverage about candidates' digital communication coverage vary by candidate?
- RQ1<sub>c</sub>: Did the prominence of coverage about candidates' digital communication coverage vary by digital communication type?
- RQ1<sub>d</sub>: Did the prominence of specific digital communication types vary by candidate?

### **Aspects Mentioned**

- RQ2<sub>a</sub>: What aspects were mentioned overall for coverage of leading U.S presidential candidates' digital communication?
- RQ2<sub>b</sub>: Did the aspects mentioned in coverage of candidates' digital communication vary by candidate?
- RQ2<sub>c</sub>: Did the aspects mentioned in coverage of candidates' digital communication vary by digital communication type?

## **Tone**

- RQ3<sub>a</sub>: What was the overall tone for coverage of leading U.S presidential candidates' digital communication?
- RQ3<sub>b</sub>: Did the tone used in coverage of candidates' digital communication vary by candidate?
- RQ3<sub>c</sub>: Did the tone used in coverage of candidates' digital communication vary by digital communication type?
- RQ3<sub>d</sub>: Did the tone of specific digital communication types vary by candidate?

## **Mediation**

- RQ4<sub>a</sub>: What was the level of mediation overall for coverage of leading U.S presidential candidates' digital communication?
- RQ4<sub>b</sub>: Did the level of mediation given to candidates' digital communication vary by candidate?
- RQ4<sub>c</sub>: Did the level of mediation given to candidates' digital communication vary by digital communication type?
- RQ4<sub>d</sub>: Did tone vary by the level of mediation?
- RQ4<sub>e</sub>: What sources were mediating overall for coverage of leading U.S presidential candidates' digital communication?
- RQ4<sub>f</sub>: Did the mediating source for candidates' digital communication vary by candidate?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The 2012 presidential campaign was chosen for analysis because presidential campaigns and elected presidents have an assumed obligation to communicate with the public and the U.S. news media frequently (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 161). Romney and Obama were chosen as the primary candidates of interest for this study, and other presidential candidates were omitted, because Romney and Obama were the top two opponents for the office in 2012. In the election, Obama gained 51.02% of the popular vote, Romney had 47.16%, Gary Johnson had 0.99%, and Jill Stein had 0.36% (Leip, 2012). In addition, these two candidates represent the two major political parties in the United States: Republican (Romney) and Democratic (Obama).

**Defense of the Method.** Content analysis was chosen for the method of examination because the purpose of this study is to observe qualitatively how digital political communication is mediated. This method was deemed the best suited for evaluating the messages of journalists and presidential candidates. According to Stroud and Higgins (2011), “Content analysis is a *method of quantitatively analyzing communication messages*” (p. 123). Content analysis can be replicated and is a valid method for drawing conclusions about communicated messages. This method observes descriptive characteristics of messages and how they were delivered. Content analysis also can be used to analyze single or multiple sources (Stroud & Higgins, 2011, p. 123-125). In this study, stories from leading newspapers were collectively analyzed.

Content analysis has several strengths. This method can be used with large quantities of messages. This study looks at numerous newspaper articles. No engagement with human subjects is necessary with content analysis, and it allows for the evaluation of a moment in history (Stroud & Higgins, 2011, p. 126). The 2012 U.S. presidential election was over by time this study took place. The candidates were no longer campaigning, and their campaign websites and social media pages were not actively adding much new content. Further, content analysis allows researchers to objectively analyze past newspaper coverage of these messages (Stroud & Higgins, 2011, p. 126).

When the focus of content analysis is simple, data can be easily agreed upon and replicated. However, when the focus is more complex, like in this study, it can be more difficult to replicate the data (Stroud & Higgins, 2011, p. 126-127). To control for this, complex coding instructions were developed and intercoder reliability was tested (see Intercoder Reliability section below). Although this study analyzed the mediation of political candidates' messages in newspapers, it was not possible to observe the effect these messages had on their audiences. In addition, this method could not be used to determine why certain levels of mediation and the journalistic motivations behind the content were used.

**Population and Sample.** The theoretical population in this study was all U.S. newspaper articles discussing Obama's and or Romney's digital campaign communication during the 2012 general presidential election cycle. The actual population was all articles from select leading U.S. newspapers. These large daily newspapers are considered to be the elite media and other media outlets often follow their lead. This influence of the elite media over other media sources is called intermedia agenda setting or standardization (Breed, 1955, p. 277).

The sample included articles from *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Daily News* (New York), *New York Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Newsday*, and *Star Tribune* (Minnesota) were chosen for analysis because they were 10 of the top 20 newspapers in North America in terms of circulation rated by Alliance for Audited Media (“List of newspapers,” 2012). The *Associated Press* was added to the sample because newspapers with smaller circulation numbers often rely on this news source. The newspapers included in this study were independently owned by separate companies. Newspapers owned by separate companies were chosen because papers owned by the same company often print the same stories. These papers had daily circulation numbers above 300,000 in 2012. The only exceptions were *Newsday* and *Star Tribune*. *Newsday* decreased to 298,759 by time the circulation numbers were recorded. *Star Tribune* had a circulation number of 296,605. Together, these 10 newspapers reached 7,099,753 readers daily in 2012 (“List of newspapers,” 2012) (see full list in Appendix C).

**Time Frame.** In the study of the 2000 presidential election, the sample was taken for the entire year (November 7, 1999, to November 7, 2000) leading up to the general election. That study included all primary candidates from both parties (Greer et al., 2001, p. 9). However, the 2012 election did not have both Republican and Democratic primary elections, so only the two major party candidates were examined during the general election period. To include the Republican primary candidates without there being any Democratic primary candidates would skew the sample. Therefore, stories were examined that were published between May 31 and November 5, 2012. By May 31, Mitt Romney had established himself as the frontrunner among Republican candidates and most other primary candidates had announced their withdrawal from

the race. November 5, 2012, was the day before Election Day, and campaigning for the U.S. president formally ended that day.

**Inclusion Criteria.** News articles were accessed from the LexisNexis Academic database. A search was conducted for news in the above mentioned papers using the index terms “Romney, Mitt” and “Obama, Barack.” In LexisNexis’ “Search the News” section, an advanced search was used. On the advanced search page in the “Add Index Terms” section, the “People” link was used to search for “Romney, Mitt” and “Obama, Barack.” Also in the “Add Index Terms” section, the “Subject” link was used. In the subject directory under “Government & Public Administration,” the “Elections & Politics” subject was found. The “Elections & Politics” subject led to “Campaigns & Elections,” which then led to “Elections.” The “Elections” section led to “Presidential Elections,” which led to “US Presidential Elections.” Finally, “US Presidential Elections” led to “US Presidential Candidates 2012,” which was selected as an index term for the search. Using the above criteria, a search was conducted for all 2012 election coverage of Obama and Romney and was recorded before continuing to search for mentions of the candidates’ digital communication (see Table 1).

The goal was to find news articles mentioning, in any form, websites and social media pages that were in the possession of the Obama or Romney campaigns or the candidates individually. Terms generally relating to websites, mobile apps, Twitter, Facebook, and social media were entered in the search. In the 2012 election, <http://www.mittromney.com> and <http://www.barackobama.com> were the web links to Obama’s and Romney’s campaign websites. On Twitter, @MittRomney, @BarackObama, and @Obama2012 were Romney’s and Obama’s handles. Because newspapers do not always publish full links or Twitter handles, the full version of the candidates’ links and handles were added in the search along with shorter versions. To

find cases where one of the campaigns or candidates controlled the sites, as opposed to anyone else engaging in digital communication about the candidates, the following search strategy was used:

(Obama or Romney) w/100 (@MittRomney or mittromney.com or www.mittromney.com or http://www.mittromney.com or "digital media" or "social" or Internet or app or http://www.barackobama.com or www.barackobama.com or barackobama.com or @BarackObama or @Obama2012 or BarackObama or Obama2012 or tweet or Facebook or Twitter or Website or "Web site" or website or "web site" or tweet).

The “w/100” pulled articles that mention one or more of the candidates’ names within 100 words of all of the other terms. A total of 2,951 articles were in the search results using these terms (see Appendix C).

The digital communication types focused on in this study were campaign websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and mobile apps. Facebook and Twitter were the most popular social networking sites worldwide in 2012, with one billion and 500 million users respectively (“List of social,” 2013). Because YouTube videos often were posted on campaign websites, Facebook, or Twitter, YouTube was not considered to be a separate category for mentions. Other popular social media sites like Flickr, Pinterest, and Tumblr often contained messages that were repeated on Facebook and Twitter, and these platforms did not have the same following. Rarely, if at all, did journalists cite social networks other than Facebook and Twitter for the 2012 candidates.

Communication from the public aimed toward candidates or about the campaign was not considered to be mentions. For this reason, any mention of digital communication in any form from an organization other than the official campaigns or candidates was not a criterion for inclusion for the sample. To be included in the analysis, an article had to mention a personal or official campaign website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, or mobile application account used by

Romney's or Obama's 2012 presidential campaign. If these stories mentioned digital communication coming from Obama's or Romney's campaign, they were added to the sample. If stories contained information about Obama's or Romney's campaign websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, or mobile apps, they were added to the sample. Therefore, the researcher personally examined all 2,951 articles to exclude stories retrieved by the strategy.

Several types of mentions of digital communication were omitted from the sample. Because news coverage needed to be connected directly to Obama, Romney, or their campaigns, digital communication from running mates Paul Ryan and Joe Biden was not searched for or included. Some articles contained digital comments from the public. These were not considered mentions because the communication did not come from a leading candidate.

Many articles in the search asked readers to join a discussion on Facebook, Twitter, or other social media site. While the readers were invited to discussions about the candidates, they were not considered mentions because they did not mention Obama's, Romney's, or their campaigns' social media communication. For example, *The Washington Post* article "5 Myths about the electoral college," by George C. Edwards, was about the Electoral College, but it was not about digital communication from Obama or Romney. This article appeared in the search results because it mentioned Obama, Romney, Facebook, and Twitter. The article only mentioned Obama and Romney when Edwards stated, "That's why Obama and Romney have spent so much time this year in states like Ohio and Florida. In the 2008 general election, Obama and John McCain personally campaign in only five of the 29 smallest states" (Edwards, par. 3, 2012) and "Could Romney win the popular vote on Tuesday while President Obama captures a majority of the 538 electoral votes and a return trip to the White House?" (Edwards, par. 17, 2012). This was not a mention of the candidates' digital communication. Facebook and Twitter

were mentioned when Edwards stated, “Read more from Outlook, Friend us on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter.” This type of comment frequently appeared in the articles searched. This article, along with similar articles that had no mention of the candidates’ digital communication, was omitted from the sample.

Therefore, only the coverage of tools and messages from 2012 presidential candidates, Obama and Romney, or their campaigns directly were considered to be mentions and added to the sample. From the 2,951 articles found in the search, 292 (13.66%) articles met the criteria for this study and were retained for analysis (see Appendix C).

**Unit of Analysis.** Because the research questions focused on differences in coverage of candidates and the digital communication types they used, the unit of analysis was not the entire article. This means the number of data points in this study were larger than the 292 articles in the sample. The unit of analysis was each mention of the candidates’ use of each digital communication tool. A mention was defined in this study as any language from Obama’s or Romney’s digital communication or the candidates’ use of digital communication types in a newspaper article. Story headlines were considered part of the story and counted as a mention for each candidate connected to his own digital communication. If a story mentioned the digital communication of both Obama and Romney, it was coded as one mention specifically for Obama and another, separate mention for Romney. The introduction of a different candidate or digital communication type signified a new mention. Whenever the same candidate was mentioned with the same digital communication type or message, it was counted as the same mention.

Because a new mention was added with each candidate and each digital communication type, an article in the sample could have as few as one mention or as many as eight mentions.

There could be four separate mentions for Obama’s campaign website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and mobile app. Likewise, there could be four separate mentions for Romney’s campaign website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and mobile app. If the four digital communication types for both candidates were mentioned, eight mentions were recorded.

An example of an article with multiple mentions was Isabel Vincent’s and Melissa Klein’s “US Watched as Terror Raged Bam’s blind eye to illegal donors News Exclusive” from *The New York Post*. This article was about presidential candidate websites’ ability (or lack thereof) to screen out addresses from donors in foreign countries. In the article, Chris Walker stated, “Romney’s Web site wanted the code from the back of card. Barack Obama’s didn’t” (Vincent & Klein, par. 4, 2012). Based on this statement alone, two mentions were noted.

Romney’s website and Obama’s website counted as two separate mentions. When the article discussed Obama’s website further later in the story, this information was considered part of the Obama website mention. Following the rules in the codebook (Appendix B), any part of the story that mentioned one tool for one candidate was coded as a single mention.

The number of mentions contributed by a single news outlet varied greatly. The *Associated Press* had the greatest with 103 mentions (27.69% of the sample). *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both had the second greatest amount with 67 mentions (18.01%). The *Star Tribune* had the least with 3 mentions (0.81%). It is interesting to note that the *San Jose Mercury News* had a relatively moderate amount with 27 mentions (7.26%). The San Jose Bay area has a strong technological sector and is part of Silicon Valley, so it would be expected that the number of mentions of candidates’ digital communication would be higher (see Appendix C).

**Coding Instrument.** Two coders were used to analyze news articles in this study. The coders were given instructions in a codebook (See Codebook, Appendix B), and they conducted a content analysis of the mentions in sampled news articles. The coders first made note of story values, including the headline, date, word count, newspaper source, and the placement of the story. Then, the coders noted the candidates and the type of digital communication that appeared in the specific mention. The mention variables for each mention in the analysis were: candidate's name and type of digital communication source (See Codesheet, Appendix A). Coders then analyzed stories for prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and mediation level. Examples of the coding scheme are in the codebook.

**Prominence.** This variable was measured in four ways.

First, the placement of the story within the news media source carrying it was observed. If the story was placed on 1A, (the front page) of the newspaper, it was marked as "Highest Priority." If the story was placed on 1B, 1C, or the first page of any other section of the newspaper, it was marked as "Medium Priority." If the story was placed on any other page than the first page of a section of the newspaper, it was marked as "Low Priority."

Second, the number of mentions per candidate was observed by simply counting the data lines associated with each candidate. Once all mentions were found in all articles from the sample, the mentions were categorized by candidate. Then, the number of mentions for Obama and the number of mentions for Romney were counted and the percentage of mentions for each candidate was calculated.

Third, the placement of the mention within the story was observed. The story was divided into equal thirds by the number of paragraphs. For example if a story had nine paragraphs,

paragraphs one to three were “Top Priority,” paragraphs four to six were “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs seven to nine were “Low Priority” (see Codebook, Appendix B).

If the story could not be divided into equal thirds by the number of paragraphs, the remaining paragraphs were placed equally into the “Top Priority,” “Middle Priority,” and “Low Priority” sections. If the number of paragraphs was divided by three and had a remainder of one, a paragraph was added to “Middle Priority.” For example if a story had 10 paragraphs, paragraphs one to three were “Top Priority,” paragraphs four to seven were “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs eight to ten were “Low Priority.” If the number of paragraphs was divided by three and had a remainder of two, one paragraph was added to “Top Priority” and a second paragraph to “Low Priority.” For example if a story had eleven paragraphs, paragraphs one to four were “Top Priority,” paragraphs five to seven were “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs eight to eleven were “Low Priority.” If there is only one paragraph in the story, the instructions on how to divide a story into thirds by the number of paragraphs will be applied to the number of sentences in the single paragraph. (see Codebook, Appendix B).

Once the story was divided into thirds, the appropriate section for the placement of the mention was chosen. If the mention was placed in the last third of story, it was “Low Priority.” If the mention was placed in the middle third of story, it was “Middle Priority.” If the mention was placed in the first third of story or the headline, it was “Top Priority.” If the mention appeared in multiple places throughout the story, the first third of the story that the mention appeared in was chosen (see Codebook, Appendix B). The measurement of “Top Priority,” “Middle Priority,” and “Low Priority” were based on the methods used in Greer et al (Greer et al, 2001. p. 10).

After all mentions were found in all articles from the sample, the mentions were categorized for the placement of the mentions within the stories. Then, they were categorized according to low, middle, and top priority. Once they were categorized, the number of mentions for each placement and the percentage of mentions for each placement were calculated.

Fourth, the length of the story focusing on the specific mention was observed. If the digital communication was mentioned in from one or two sentences to one paragraph, it was labeled “Brief Mention.” If the digital communication was mentioned in less than the whole story, but more than one paragraph, it was labeled “In Between.” If the digital communication was mentioned throughout every paragraph in the story, it was labeled “Whole Story” (see Codebook, Appendix B).

**Aspects Mentioned.** The aspects noted were as follows: content, technology, look, traffic, politics, truth, and attack. If an aspect was mentioned that did not appear in the list above, it was called the aspect “Other.” All aspects in the mention were marked as present (1). If aspects were not in the mention, they were marked as absent (0). These aspects were based on the methods of Greer et al. (Greer et al., 2001, p. 11). Of the aspects used in the previous study, three were omitted. “Interactivity” was omitted because emails, forms, and other types of interactivity with visitors were not analyzed. The mention of an interactive message overlapped with the aspect “Content,” so it was defined as “Content.” “Site function” was omitted because functionality overlapped with the definition for “Technology.” For this reason, “Site function” was labeled as “Technology.” “Resources” was omitted because fund raising and the recruitment of volunteers overlapped with the definition for “Politics.” For this reason, “Resources” was labeled as “Politics.” It was possible for mentions to have as many as eight aspects (including

“Other”) or as few as no aspects (see examples of this and other aspects in Codebook, Appendix B).

Content included candidate’s biographies, calendars, policies, words, statements, messages, or any other information from the candidate’s digital communication mentioned. If the candidate’s digital communication type was mentioned, but the candidate’s digital communication message was not mentioned, content was absent from the mention.

Technology included the candidate’s or campaign’s data collection techniques, creation of a digital communication tool, and the use of digital tools. In addition, how a candidate’s or campaign’s digital communication site or app functioned was considered a technology aspect.

Look included graphics, photos, video, fonts, type face, and layouts found on the mentioned digital communication type’s site or app. Any mention of the physical appearance of a candidate’s digital communication type was considered to be a look aspect.

Traffic included visitors to the candidate’s mentioned digital communication site or app. With social media, traffic also included the following or sharing of the candidate’s digital communication messages by visitors. Any mention of visitors or the actions of visitors was considered to be a traffic aspect.

Politics included the candidate’s digital communication strategy and effectiveness. It also included fundraising through the candidate’s digital communication site or app. Any mention of a candidate using his digital communication site or app as a political tool was considered to be a politics aspect.

Truth included the truthfulness or completeness of information in the candidate’s digital communication message. This appeared in news articles as journalists fact-checking the candidate’s message. It also appeared as a mention of the absence of information on a

candidate's digital communication site or app. Any other form of correction to the candidate's mentioned digital communication message was considered to be a truth aspect.

Attack included attack campaigning from one candidate to another using the mentioned digital communication message. This aspect can only be present in the form of a message as opposed to the mention of a candidate's digital communication type. Any attack from Obama or Romney towards another candidate was considered to be an attack aspect.

**Tone.** Tone was measured using an observation of tone deemed in favor of or against the candidate's digital communication or digital communication type. Tone could originate from a reporter, and editor, or anyone else who has been quoted or mentioned in the article as commenting on the candidate's digital communication or tools. In the case of the author of a story, authors did not usually mention themselves in the story. For this reason, comments in the story in favor of or against the candidate's digital communication or digital communication type were considered to be tone. If a comment in the story came from the candidate and was for or against his own digital communication or tool, it was considered to be part of the candidate's message and not tone. Tone toward the candidate or campaign were not taken into account. Only the tone about the digital communication or tool was counted.

The tone was measured by individual mention. First, the presence of any mediation was measured. If no mediation was given in the story, tone was marked as "No Tone." If the tone was deemed neutral, it was also marked as "No Tone." If mediation was given in the story, tone was observed. The number of positive and negative comments toward the mentioned digital communication or tool was counted. These aspects were based on the methods of Greer et al. (Greer et al., 2001, p. 11). Instead of a rating scale from one (highly positive) to five (highly critical or negative), which was used in the foundational study, tone was divided into "Mostly to

all Critical/Negative,” “Balanced between Critical/Negative and Positive,” and “Mostly to all Positive.” “No Tone” was added to distinguish between balanced tone and no tone (see examples in Codebook, Appendix B).

The tone was decided based on whether there were more positive or more negative comments towards the mentioned digital communication or tool. If the story was mostly or entirely critical of the mentioned digital communication, it was marked as “Mostly to all Critical/Negative.” If the story was balanced between critical or negative and positive tone concerning the mentioned digital communication, it was marked as “Balanced between Critical/Negative and Positive.” If the story was mostly or entirely positive in tone concerning the mentioned digital communication, it was marked as “Mostly to all Positive.”

Examples of negative or critical and positive tone were given in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article, “Campaigns seek edge with edgy Twitter blitz,” by John Timpane, the journalist described how Obama and Romney were using Twitter differently in their campaigns. Obama’s campaign used his Twitter feed to organize a grassroots movement and maintain a positive and personal appeal, while Romney’s campaign used his Twitter feed to reiterate talking points (Timpane, par 5, 8, 2012). The journalist used numbers of Facebook likes and Twitter followers to show that Obama was in the lead on social networking sites (Timpane, par 9, 2012). In this article, Obama received positive tone when his Twitter feed was found to produce more content and have more followers than Romney. While negative or critical tone about Obama’s Twitter feed was used to mention that he uses Twitter to attack his opponents and the Republican party wants @BarackObama to lose the election, positive tone was used more often when discussing Obama’s Twitter (Timpane, par 8, 13, 2012). Romney received negative tone when his Twitter feed was found to produce less content and have fewer followers. While positive tone was used

to mention that Romney is trying to damage Obama's reputation, this was only one positive against several negative statements (Timpane, par 25, 2012).

An example of no tone was given in the *Daily News* article, "Mitt Bam slam No one's ever asked to see my birth certificate: Romney," by Kirsten A. Lee. The journalist who wrote the article did not give a critical response to Obama's tweeting of a link to Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" (Lee, par 7, 2012). Instead, Lee discussed how Obama has been ridiculed by those who falsely believed Obama was not an American citizen for years (Lee, par 8, 2012). She also explains how Obama let the public see his Hawaiian birth certificate in 2008 and a long form certificate in 2011 (Lee, par 9, 2012). Because this information is historical context and does not favor or disfavor Obama, it has no tone.

An example of balanced tone was given in the *The Washington Post* article, "Pass the pizza, Kumar." This article explains how the star actors from "Harold & Kumar" were in an advertisement made by the Obama campaign (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). The journalist commented, "Party on!" (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). However, an expert from the campaign to legalize marijuana disapproved of the president's ad, which encourages marijuana usage while, to the contrary, the president has arrested marijuana users (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). The positive comment from the journalist and the negative comment from the expert balance the tone.

**Mediation Level.** Mediation level was measured using an observation of a story's engagement with the candidate's digital communication or digital communication type. Mediation was defined in this study by the presence of comments about a candidate's digital communication or digital communication type other than the initial mention of the candidate's communication or type. Additional comments about the mention showed a level of engagement

that described mediation. The mention of a candidate's digital communication without further comment on the mention was not considered to be mediation.

Before the type of mediation could be determined, the presence of mediation had to be found. If the mention was not interpreted or critiqued, the mention was marked as "Unmediated." If a candidate's digital communication or digital communication type was mentioned in an article along with additional comments relating to the mention, the mention was mediated. For example, if the mention stated that Romney sent a message via his campaign mobile app, that alone would not be a mediated mention. However, if a comment was added showing that Obama, a reporter who wrote the article, or anyone other than Romney or his campaign staff commented on Romney's message, the mention would be mediated (see Codebook, Appendix B).

After mediation was found to be present for the mention, mediation level was measured based on the length of the mediation. If reporters interpreted or critiqued the mention for a length of a paragraph or shorter, the mention was marked as "Mediated – Superficial." If reporters interpreted or critiqued the mention for a length of two paragraphs or longer, the mention was marked as "Mediated – Substantial." (see Codebook, Appendix B).

An example of an unmediated mention was given in the *Los Angeles Times* article, "Candidates' views on arts compared," by Mike Boehm. In this article, it was said that Romney plans to save \$600 million by making cuts to several federal agencies (Boehm, par 8, 2012). Because Romney's plans were not commented on or critiqued by the journalist or anyone else, the mention was not mediated.

An example of superficial mediation was given in the *Daily News* article, "GOP Veep-stakes head Down South," by Jonathan Lemire. The article stated Romney's mobile app would

give its users the name of Romney's running mate once he was chosen. Lemire further mediated that Romney's campaign was protecting the secret of who might be Romney's choice (Lemire, par 8, 9, 2012). The additional comment from Lemire meant that the mention of Romney's app was mediated. Because Lemire's comment was only a sentence long, it was labeled as superficial mediation.

An example of substantial mediation was given in *The New York Post* article, "Campaign's bad spell," by Gerry Shields. The article stated that Romney's mobile app misspelled "America" as "Amercia." Through out three paragraphs, Shields added that the app had a list of slogans, of which "Amercia" was in one, and the misspelling was later fixed (Shields, par 1-4, 2012). Because the journalist's mediation was longer than a paragraph, it was labeled as substantial mediation.

If a candidate commented on his own message, it would not be counted as mediation. When a candidate commented on his own message, it was considered to be a continuation of the message. If a candidate continued his message via the same digital communication type as the original message, it was considered to be part of the mention. In other words, the candidate could not mediate his own message (see Codebook, Appendix B).

**Intercoder Reliability.** To establish reliability for the instrument for this study, two coders first worked through the codebook and codesheet together with 10 articles. After that session, coders then discussed the variables and refined the codebook. After a training session, the second coder independently coded 30 articles, 12% of the sample. Those stories included 44 mentions. The first coder coded all 372 mentions from 292 stories. It should be noted that on two of the 35 stories, the coders did not agree on the total number of mentions. The issues with the

varying mentions coded in these two stories are related to a few of the low reliabilities noted below.

Intercoder reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa, a method that controls for the likelihood of coders matching by chance. Fleiss (1981) argued that a Kappa higher than .75 is considered excellent, .40 to .75 is good, and below .40 is poor. Agreement on all variables in the study ranged from low (Cohen's Kappa = .27) to perfect (1.00). Overall, across all variables, the two coders had excellent agreement (.85).

The two coders matched perfectly to almost perfectly on identifying variables, including the month, day, source of news media, candidate's name, and type of digital communication (Cohen's Kappa = 1.00).

For the prominence variables, all had good to excellent agreement. The word count of the story matched almost perfectly (Cohen's Kappa = .95), and placement of the story (.89) and placement of mention within the story (.86) had excellent agreement. Agreement on length of the mention within the story (.65) would be considered good.

For the aspects mentioned variables, agreement was mostly strong, with a few problem areas. Look (Cohen's Kappa = .66), Content (.54), Technology (.46), and Politics (.40) all had good agreement. Truth (.22) and attack (.31), however, had poor agreement, which could limit the findings in that area.

The single tone variable had good agreement (Cohen's Kappa = .51).

Mediation variables had varied agreement. Mediation by opponents (Cohen's Kappa = 1.00) was a perfect match. Most of the others were good: level of mediation overall (.46), mediation by journalist (.43), mediation by public (.55), and mediation by the candidates' supporters (.65). Only mediation by an expert was problematic (.24).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Demographics of the Sample

Articles from 10 newspapers and the *Associated Press* were analyzed. In total, 292 articles were found in these news sources that met the inclusion criteria noted in Chapter 3. In these articles, 372 mentions of Obama's or Romney's campaign websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and mobile apps were found. These mentions comprised the final sample used in the analyses below.

The articles used for analysis were published between May 31, 2012, and November 5, 2012, the day before Election Day. The first four mentions were published on May 31, and one mention was published on November 5. Most days in the time range had at least one mention, and any gaps in found mentions were fewer than seven days. The greatest number of mentions was found in August, when 105 mentions (27.8% of the sample) were identified. This was expected because the Democratic and Republican political conventions were held in August, and campaign coverage often has peaked at this time during past U.S. presidential elections. The second greatest number of mentions was in October, when 95 mentions (25.1%) were identified. As October is the last full month before the general election, stories should increase during this time. Because only a few days in May and November were searched according to the inclusion criteria, it was expected that these two months would have the fewest mentions.

## Research Question 1

Research Question 1<sub>a</sub> analyzed prominence overall for the candidates' digital communication tools during the study period. Overall prominence was measured using total number of stories compared to overall campaign coverage, story word count, placement of stories, and the placement of the mention within the story. For this part of the first question, the story-level data is analyzed. All other analyses use mention data.

First, as Table 1 shows, of 20,968 stories mentioning either candidate's campaign activities in all the news outlets analyzed, only 292 (1.4%) mentioned the candidates' use of digital communication tools. The percentage of campaign stories mentioning the candidates' digital communication tools varied by news outlet. The *Los Angeles Times* (with 4.4% of its campaign stories mentioning the candidate tools), *Newsday* (2.6%), and *USA Today* (2.1%) were most likely to discuss digital communication in their presidential campaign coverage. For most other news outlets, the percentage of campaign stories even briefly referencing candidates' use of these digital tools was between 1.0% and 2.0%. *The New York Times* (.9%) and *Star Tribune* (.9%) had the lowest percentage of campaign stories with digital communication mentions.

The 292 stories containing mentions ranged in length from 49 to 7,322 words. The mean story length was 839.78 words (sd = 674.19). The median length was 792.50 words. Approximately 65.4% of the stories containing mentions were shorter than 1,000 words. Only 3.1% were longer than 2,000 words.

For story placement, only 18 stories (6.2% of the sample) were given the highest priority and placed on the front page of the newspaper, and 7 articles (2.4%) were given medium priority (placed on another section front). Most articles (156, 53.4%) were given low priority (placed inside any section of a paper). A total of 111 stories (38.0%) did not have placement information.

This included 85 *Associated Press* articles and 26 articles from other sources where data was missing on Lexis/Nexis.

Table 1

*Percentage of Campaign Articles Mentioning Digital Tools*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Articles about the Campaigns</b>	<b>Articles Included in Sample</b>	<b>Percent of Campaign Articles</b>
USA Today	1,167	24	2.1%
The New York Times	6,038	55	0.9%
Los Angeles Times	248	11	4.4%
San Jose Mercury News	1,165	16	1.4%
Washington Post	3,855	55	1.4%
Daily News	884	12	1.4%
New York Post	1,282	13	1.0%
Philadelphia Inquirer	848	15	1.8%
Newsday	115	3	2.6%
Star Tribune	336	3	0.9%
Associated Press	5,030	85	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,968</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>1.4%</b>

Turning to mention-level data, the length of a mention of a specific campaign tool was analyzed within the 292 stories. Most of the mentions were brief mentions of no more than a paragraph in length. Of the 372 mentions, 277 (74.5%) were brief. Another 87 mentions (23.4%)

were greater than a paragraph, but shorter than the whole story. Only 8 mentions (2.2%) comprised the entire story.

Placement of the mentions within the stories was spread relatively evenly. Most mentions were found in at the top or middle of a story. Of the 372 mentions, 139 (37.4%) were found in the top third of the story, and 136 (36.6%) were found in the middle third of the story. Another 97 (26.1%) were in the bottom third of the story.

Research Question 1<sub>b</sub> asked whether prominence differed by candidate. Because about a third of the stories in the sample included mentions for both candidates, story-level data is inappropriate to include here. For mentions, it should be noted that 200 (53.8%) of the mentions in the sample were about Obama's use of digital campaign communication, compared with 172 (46.2%) for Romney. However, looking at placement of the mention within a story and length of the mention within a story, no statistical differences emerged by candidate or length, as indicated through Crosstab analyses using Chi Square statistic.

Research Question 1<sub>c</sub> asked whether prominence differed by the type of digital communication tool mentioned. Again, as multiple digital tools could be mentioned in a story, only mention-level prominence data could be examined. As the last column of Table 2 shows, most mentions were about candidates' websites (153), followed by mentions focusing on Twitter (139). Few mentions focused on mobile applications (41) and about an equal number mentioned Facebook (39).

No differences emerged by tool for placement of the mention within the story. However, websites and mobile applications were significantly more likely to be mentioned throughout an entire story, as Table 2 shows. Twitter, interestingly, while having a large number of mentions,

was most likely to be included in very brief mentions and was never the subject of an entire story.

Table 2

*Crosstab Analysis of Tool by Length of Mention within Story*

Tool	Brief	In Between	Whole Story	Total
Website	100 (71.9%)	38 (24.8%)	5 (3.3%)	153 (100%)
Twitter	113 (81.3%)	26 (18.7%)	0 (0.0%)	139 (100%)
Mobile App	27 (65.9%)	11 (26.8%)	3 (7.3%)	41 (100%)
Facebook	27 (69.2%)	12 (30.8%)	0 (0.0%)	39 (100%)
Total	277 (74.5%)	87 (23.4%)	8 (2.2%)	372 (100%)

$X^2(6) = 13.92, p < .031$

Research question 1<sub>d</sub> asked whether coverage of digital communication tool varied by candidate. This was analyzed simply by looking at the total number of mentions by candidate and tool. As Table 3 shows in bold, the majority of Obama’s mentions were about Twitter, and the majority of Romney’s mentions were about his website. Further, Romney had more mentions about his mobile applications than did Obama. The candidates received a fairly equal percentage of mentions about their Facebook pages. It should be noted, again, that Obama did have more mentions than Romney in the sample, so these findings are based on expected percentage differences.

Table 3

*Crosstab Analysis of Tool by Candidate*

Candidate	Website	Twitter	Mobile App	Facebook
Obama	67 (43.8%)	<b>101 (72.7%)</b>	12 (29.3%)	20 (51.3%)
Romney	<b>86 (56.2%)</b>	38 (27.3%)	<b>29 (70.7%)</b>	19 (48.7%)
Total	153 (100%)	139 (100%)	41 (100%)	39 (100%)

$X^2(3) = 36.09, p < .001$

**Research Question 2**

The second research question examined the aspects present in the mentions. As the “Total” column of Table 4 shows, content (mainly the candidates’ messages) was the most likely to be covered overall in the mentions, followed by the political use of the digital tools. Truth of the content and technology used were subjects in fewer than a fifth of the mentions. Traffic to the websites or apps, the use of digital tools for attacking, and the design or look of the digital tool were hardly ever discussed. Because multiple aspects could be discussed in each mention, the percentages in the “Total” row of Table 4 add up to greater than 100%

Research question 2<sub>b</sub> asked whether the aspects mentioned varied by candidate. Significant differences were found for three categories, as Table 4 shows. A significantly higher percentage of the mentions of Obama’s use of the tools were focused on their role in political strategy. As the “Obama” column of Table 4 shows, about half of Obama’s 200 mentions discussed the political goals, compared to fewer than a third of Romney’s 172 mentions that focused on political strategy. The opposite trend was found for truth or fact checking of the digital content. More than a quarter of Romney’s mentions discussed truth (see third column of

Table 4), compared with 10% for Obama. A significantly higher percentage of Obama’s mentions included a discussion of the digital tool’s look than did Romney’s mentions. No significant differences were found in the rates of discussion about the digital tools’ content, technology, traffic, or attack campaigning.

TABLE 4  
*Crosstab Analyses of Candidate by Aspect Mentioned*

Aspect mentioned	Obama (N, % of 200)	Romney (N, % of 172)	Total (N, % of 372)	Chi Square value
Content	107 (53.3%)	108 (62.8%)	215 (57.5%)	n.s.
Politics	102 (51.0%)	52 (30.2%)	154 (41.4%)	16.44***
Truth	20 (10.0%)	48 (27.9%)	68 (18.3%)	19.85***
Technology	31 (15.5%)	34 (19.8%)	65 (17.5%)	n.s.
Traffic	24 (12.0%)	25 (14.5%)	49 (13.2%)	n.s.
Attack	24 (12.0%)	16 (9.3%)	40 (10.8%)	n.s.
Look	23 (11.5%)	8 (4.7%)	31 (8.3%)	5.68*
Total	331	291	622	

\*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

Research question 2<sub>c</sub> asked whether the aspects mentioned varied by digital communication type. As the bold numbers in Table 5 show, a significantly higher percentage of the mentions that were focused on a mobile application discussed the political or campaign strategy of the mentioned digital tool’s use, compared with mentions focused on the websites,

Twitter, or Facebook. This also was the case for technology, as about two thirds of the mentions focused on mobile apps included a discussion of technical aspects (see “App” column in Table 5).

TABLE 5  
*Crosstab Analyses of Digital Tool by Aspect Mentioned*

Aspect	Website (N, % of 153)	Twitter (N, % of 139)	App (N, % of 41)	Facebook (N, % of 39)	Total (N, % of 372)	Chi Square Value
Content	102 (66.7%)	79 (56.8%)	16 (39.0%)	18 (46.2%)	215 (57.5%)	n.s.
Politics	48 (31.4%)	57 (41.0%)	<b>30 (73.2%)</b>	19 (48.7%)	154 (41.4%)	24.27***
Truth	<b>50 (32.7%)</b>	12 (8.6%)	4 (9.8%)	2 (5.1%)	68 (18.3%)	36.40***
Tech.	19 (12.4%)	10 (7.2%)	<b>26 (63.4%)</b>	10 (25.6%)	65 (17.5%)	74.71***
Traffic	14 (9.2%)	17 (12.2%)	2 (4.9%)	<b>16 (41.0%)</b>	49 (13.2%)	31.19***
Attack	<b>17 (11.1%)</b>	2 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.1%)	40 (10.8%)	8.99*
Look	10 (6.5%)	<b>18 (12.9%)</b>	0 (0.0%)	3 (7.7%)	31 (8.3%)	8.27*
Total	260	195	78	70	622	

\*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

A significant difference also was found in truth or fact-checking mentioned with websites gaining almost a third of fact-checking mentions. Mentions of websites also were most likely to mention attack campaigning (see “Website” column in Table 5). A significant difference in probability was also found in site or digital traffic mentioned with Facebook being most likely to mention traffic (see “Facebook” column in Table 5). Finally, the look of the digital tool was

mentioned most often for Twitter (see “Twitter” column in Table 5). All aspects showed significant difference by tool, except for the content of candidates’ digital messages.

### Research Question 3

Research question 3<sub>a</sub> analyzed the overall tone of the mentions as related to the candidates’ use of the tools. As the bottom row of Table 6 shows, mentions were most likely to have no tone (43.3% of mentions fell in this category), followed by a negative tone (35.5%). Positive tone was found in about one sixth of the mentions. A balanced tone was rarely used, likely because most mentions were brief, which would make multiple tones within a mention unlikely.

Table 6

*Crosstab Analysis of Tone by Candidate*

	No Tone	Negative	Balanced	Positive
Obama	<b>98 (49.0%)</b>	55 (27.5%)	8 (4.0%)	39 (19.5%)
Romney	63 (36.6%)	<b>77 (44.8%)</b>	6 (3.5%)	26 (15.1%)
Total	161 (43.3%)	132 (35.5%)	14 (3.8%)	65 (17.5%)

$X^2(3) = 12.12, p < .007$

Research question 3<sub>b</sub> analyzed whether tone of mention differed for the candidates. Statistically significant differences were discovered by candidate. As Table 6 shows, this difference was driven by the no tone and negative categories. The largest portion of Obama’s mentions had no tone, while the largest portion of Romney’s mentions had a negative or critical tone. No real differences emerged by candidate on balanced or positive mentions.

Research question 3<sub>c</sub> analyzed whether tone differed by digital communication tool. As bold parts of Table 7 show, a majority of Twitter (50.4%) and mobile application (51.2%) mentions were more likely to have no tone. Website (44.4%) mentions were most likely to have a negative or critical tone. Facebook mentions were most likely to be balanced (7.7%) or positive (33.3%). Few mentions had a tone that was balanced between negative and positive.

Table 7

*Crosstab Analyses of Tone by Tool*

Tool	No tone	Negative	Balanced	Positive	Total
Website	59 (38.6%)	<b>68 (44.4%)</b>	6 (3.9%)	20 (13.1%)	153 (100%)
Twitter	<b>70 (50.4%)</b>	42 (30.2%)	5 (3.6%)	22 (15.8%)	139 (100%)
Mobile App	<b>21 (51.2%)</b>	10 (24.4%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (24.4%)	41 (100%)
Facebook	11 (28.2%)	12 (30.8%)	<b>3 (7.7%)</b>	<b>13 (33.3%)</b>	39 (100%)
Total	161 (43.3%)	132 (35.5%)	14 (3.8%)	65 (17.5%)	372 (100%)

$\chi^2(9) = 23.07, p < .006$

Research question 3<sub>d</sub> asked whether tone of specific digital communication types differed by candidate. To perform this analysis, two of the tools with the most mentions (website and Twitter) were isolated and tone was run by candidate for each. Chi square analyses showed that the patterns by candidate didn't differ from what the earlier data revealed. More of Romney's mentions were about the website, and more of the website mentions were negative. More of Obama's mentions were about Twitter and more of the Twitter mentions were neutral.

#### Research Question 4

Research question 4<sub>a</sub> observed the overall level of mediation for mentions. As is shown in Table 8, column 4, the largest portion of mentions (145, 39.0%) was likely to have substantial mediation. Almost one third of mentions had no mediation. The smallest portion (110, 29.6%) had superficial mediation.

Research question 4<sub>b</sub> asked whether the level of mediation for mentions differed by candidate. As bold parts of Table 7 show, the largest portion of Obama's mentions (37.0%) had no mediation. The largest portion of Romney's mentions (41.9%) had substantial mediation.

Table 8

*Crosstab Analysis of Level of Mediation by Candidate*

Mediation level	Obama	Romney	Total
None	74 ( <b>37.0%</b> )	43 (25.0%)	117 (31.5%)
Superficial	53 (26.5%)	57 (33.1%)	110 (29.6%)
Substantial	73 (36.5%)	72 ( <b>41.9%</b> )	145 (39.0%)
Total	200 (100.0%)	172 (100.0%)	372 (100.0%)

$$X^2(2) = 6.29, p < .05$$

Research question 4<sub>c</sub> asked whether mediation levels differed by the type of tool focused on in the mention. A crosstab analysis using Chi Square found no significant differences by type of digital communication. Mediation levels were relatively equal for all the four types of communication investigated in the study.

Research question 4<sub>d</sub> asked whether tone differed by the mediation levels. As is shown in Table 9, 100% of unmediated mentions had no tone. Both superficial (45.5%) and substantial (56.6%) mediation were most likely to have a negative tone.

Table 9

*Crosstab Analysis of Tone by Level of Mediation*

Tone	Unmediated	Superficial	Substantial	Total
No Tone	<b>117 (100.0%)</b>	32 (29.1%)	12 (8.3%)	161 (43.3%)
Negative	0 (0.0%)	<b>50 (45.5%)</b>	<b>82 (56.6%)</b>	132 (35.5%)
Balanced	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.7%)	11 (7.6%)	14 (3.8%)
Positive	0 (0.0%)	25 (22.7%)	40 (27.6%)	65 (17.5%)
Total	117 (100.0%)	110 (100.0%)	145 (100.0%)	372 (100%)

$X^2(6) = 236.89, p < .001$

Research question 4<sub>e</sub> asked which sources are mediating candidates' digital messages overall. To analyze this, only the 255 mentions with mediation were selected for analysis. As is shown in Table 10, the journalist mediated most of the mentions (88.6%), followed by an expert (26.3%). There was very little mediation from other sources.

Research question 4<sub>f</sub> asked whether the mediation source varied by the candidate. To analyze this, a Chi Square analysis was run on all mediation sources by candidate. No differences emerged for public, supporter, opponent, or expert mediators. Only mediation by journalists showed significant difference by candidate. Journalists were significantly more likely

to mediate Romney's mentions (93% or 120 of 129 mediated Romney mentions), than Obama's mentions (84.1% or 106 of the 126 mediated Obama mentions) ( $X^2(6) = 5.05, p < .025$ ).

Table 10

*Number of Mentions Mediated by Source*

Mediating Source	Number of mentions, % of 255
Journalist	226 (88.6%)
Expert	67 (26.3%)
Opponent	36 (14.1%)
Supporter	26 (10.2%)
Public	25 (9.8%)
Total	380

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study was designed to assess how 10 of the nation's largest daily newspapers and the *Associated Press* reported the two leading candidates' use of campaign websites and other social media during the 2012 U.S. general presidential election cycle. News articles mentioning these tools in any form and published between May 31 and November 5, 2012, were analyzed. A content analysis was conducted on mentions of Obama's or Romney's campaign digital communication from the chosen news outlets. In total, 292 articles were found, and these contained 372 mentions of Obama's or Romney's campaign websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and mobile apps. The study analyzed stories and mentions for prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and mediation level.

This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to theories and past research presented in Chapter 2. First, the overall findings are summarized for the prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and mediation variables. Findings are discussed in relation to the foundational study on coverage of digital communication used in the 2000 U.S. presidential election (Greer et al., 2001). Possible reasons for these findings are discussed along with their implications. Second, the findings comparing candidates on prominence, aspects mentioned, tone, and mediation variables are discussed, followed by discussion related to theory and literature. Third, differences in coverage based on digital communication type are discussed in relation to theory and possible implications. Fourth, the limitations of this study are presented, and possibilities for

future research that could correct these issues and expand on this study are laid out. The chapter ends with a conclusive statement.

## **Overall Prominence**

**Summary of Findings.** Relatively few articles in the 2012 general election cycle about the candidates and their campaigns even mentioned their digital communication. Of about 21,000 articles reporting on the candidates produced by the news outlets examined in the study, a mere 292 (1.4%) mentioned the candidates' digital messages and tools. The number of articles mentioning campaign digital communication varied from publication to publication, but the highest portion of campaign coverage mentioning these tools for a single newspaper was 2.6%.

Going beyond the percentage of all campaign stories including even a brief mention of the tools, this study looked at story- and mention-level prominence variables. The few stories that did appear had strikingly low prominence. Only 6.2% of the stories were on the front page. In contrast, more than half were placed inside papers. It should be noted here that some of *The Associated Press* articles may have appeared on newspaper front pages, but placement information was not available for those stories.

Story length was about average for a newspaper copy, with a median word count of about 800. However, the mentions within the stories were quite brief, with nearly 75% of the mentions comprising a paragraph or less. Only eight of the stories in the sample were wholly about the candidates' use of digital tools. To put this in context, these stories comprised less than 0.04% of the total general election campaign coverage from the news outlets analyzed.

Only one variable did not indicate low prominence. Overall, mention placement tended to be in the middle or top of a story, but given that the stories were so few in number, the stories

were buried within the newspapers, and the mentions were so brief, good mention placement is inconsequential.

**How does 2012 Compare to 2000?** One of the goals of this study was to replicate and update the findings of Greer et al. (2001)'s study of the 2000 presidential election. Although the measurements used here were identical to those used in the earlier study, most operational definitions were based on that earlier work, allowing comparisons to be made. Clearly, candidates in 2012 were more active campaigners through digital tools than during the 2000 campaign. Indeed, Facebook, Twitter, and mobile applications did not even exist in 2000. Candidates and the media were just beginning to understand the power of digital communication in 2000, and the sophistication of these tools and the volume of content carried on these tools has grown exponentially in each election.

Further, overall Internet use among the U.S. voting public has soared between 2000 and 2012. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, the percentage of U.S. adults using the Internet increased from 47% in June 2000 to 78% in August 2011 (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). More than 67% of the U.S. public used social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter in December 2012 (Brenner, 2013), and more than 45% of the public owned a smart phone capable of supporting mobile applications in September 2012 (Rainie, 2012). The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found the percentage of people using the Internet as a main source of presidential campaign news increased 11 points between 2008 and 2012. About 47% of U.S. adults cited the Internet as a main source of political news in 2012, making that venue second only to television news (Low Marks, 2012). Clearly both candidates and voters are flocking to digital venues to connect – and learn about the presidential election and candidates.

What is striking, then, is how little has changed on how journalists covered these digital tools during the two time periods. In both studies, researchers found very few articles mentioning candidates' digital communication (225 stories and 334 mentions in 2000, 292 stories and 372 mentions in 2012, although it should be noted that the sampling frame was different in 2000. The 2000 study did not include a comparison to total campaign stories, so it's unclear if the proportion changed over time.

Most prominence variables actually declined over time. In 2000, articles were most likely to be placed on the front page of a section or lead a newscast (23.1% of that sample). In 2012, front page and section front stories were rare (8.6%). Mentions coded in both studies were short. A higher percentage of the mentions analyzed in 2012 were brief than in 2000 (74.5% compared with 68.3%). Strikingly, only 8 of 292 articles coded in this study (2.7%) were wholly about digital campaigning compared with 11 of 225 (4.9%) in the Greer et al. study (p. 12). Therefore, on many variables, prominence of digital campaigning coverage actually decreased in a political environment where digital communication has moved to center stage. Only mention placement within the story appeared to increase in prominence in 2012 compared with 2000.

### **Overall Aspects Mentioned**

**Summary of Findings.** Mentions were mostly about the candidates' messages and strategies, rather than components more typically associated with watchdog journalism, like attack and truthfulness. Content of the candidates' messages was included in 57.5% of the mentions, and use of digital tools for political means was included next often (41.4%). Fact-checking (present in 18.3%) and the use of digital tools for attacking other candidates (10.8%) were rarely discussed. This shows a lack of coverage of critical aspects that could be tied to meaningful mediation, discussed fully below.

**How does 2012 Compare to 2000?** In 2000 and 2012, the results for aspects mentioned were similar. Content was most likely to be mentioned (62.9% in 2000 vs. 57.5% in 2012), followed by the use of digital tools for political strategy (26.3% in 2000 vs. 41.4% in 2012). However in 2012, content as the focus of the mentions decreased slightly, while political strategy discussion increased. Critical aspects such as truthfulness of the candidates' messages or attack campaigning that could provide criticism of campaign communication, were low for both studies (Greer et al., 2001, p. 10-11).

### **Overall Tone**

**Summary of Findings.** Tone variables analyzed showed mixed results. Overall, a majority of mentions had some form of tone. However, mentions were more likely to have no tone (43.3%) than any other tone. The use of a negative or critical tone (35.5%) in mentions was second, meaning that when coverage moved beyond the objective voice, it was most likely to be negative. Few mentions had a positive tone (17.5%) or tone balanced between negative and positive (3.8%). The lack of balanced mentions could be because most mentions were brief, which allows little space for multiple critical statements of positive and negative tone.

**How does 2012 Compare to 2000?** Tone was most likely to be neutral or nonexistent in both 2000 and 2012. The probability of mentions with balanced tone also was similar between the studies. However, the probability of mentions having no tone decreased from about 3 in 5 in 2000 to about 2 in 5 to 2012, while the number of mentions with some form of tone increased. Not did more mentions have a tone in 2012, but the percentage of mentions that were negative increased. In 2000, those with a tone were fairly evenly divided between positive and negative. In 2012, when a tone was present it was twice as often negative as positive. This suggests a

cynical version of mediation, rather than analysis that highlights what the candidates are doing right in the digital realm.

## **Overall Mediation**

**Summary of Findings.** Definitions for superficial and substantial mediation were not developed for the analysis of mediation content. Instead, the level of mediation was measured solely by length of the mediation. Mediation variables analyzed showed mixed results. Overall, a majority of mentions had some form of mediation. In fact, mentions were more likely to have substantial mediation (39.0%) than either no mediation or superficial mediation. However, looked at another way, 61% of the mentions had little to no mediation, suggesting little critical analysis of digital communication produced by the presidential candidates.

Mediation was not analyzed in the previous study of the 2000 election, although it can be argued that the three preceding variables analyzed (prominence, aspects, and tone) all paint a picture of mediation. That study concluded that coverage of the candidates' website content was brief and lacking in substance. In the current study, mediation was measured as a separate variable to provide more clarity in examining coverage through the lens of Paletz's (2002) framework. Consistent with the findings of Greer et al., this study found that about 3 in 5 mentions lacked substantial mediation.

However, some substantive analyses were found in the current sample. For example, *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* article, "FactCheck: Obama's inflated jobs claim; 5.2 million new jobs? The real number is about 325,000" explained that Obama's statistic did not factor in 4.3 million jobs lost in the first year of his presidency (FactCheck, par 3, 4, 2012). The mediation of this statistic, released by Obama through digital channels, shows critical analysis of Obama's message.

However, unmediated mentions were almost equally as plentiful. For example, the *Daily News*' article "SAY 'SI' TO ME! Mitt, Bam chase swing-state Latinos" by Celeste Katz described how Latinos could receive Spanish-language text updates from Obama's campaign or visit Obama's Spanish-language webpage (Katz, par 17, 2012). Romney, in contrast, used a Facebook page for Latino supporters. Katz did not show Latino responses to these strategies nor include reaction from experts to analyze the effectiveness of the tools. These are two opportunities where the journalist could have had others provide mediation or critical analysis, but failed to do so.

This study also examined who was doing the mediation. As stated above, journalists can mediate on their own, or quote voters, experts, opponents, and others to provide analysis. However, mediation was commonly done by only two of the five sources examined in this study. In an overwhelming majority of mentions with mediation (88.6%), mediation of the tools was attributed to the journalists using his or her own words. The second most likely source of mediation was an expert, used in about 25% of the mentions with mediation. Little mediation came from a candidate's opponent, a supporter, or from a voter or other member of the general public. The example above illustrates several paths the journalists could have taken to provide analysis. However, the story simply reported that these tools were present and being used, without looking in depth at the efficacy, the potential complications, or the value of these tactics.

### **Implications of Overall Findings**

Summing up the results overall, this study found a low level of mediation of digital campaign communication in 2012, and in some cases, a decreased level of mediation from the earliest days of cyber-campaigning in 2000. Digital communication was rarely covered, and when it was, coverage was brief and, for the most part, lacked substance. A miniscule percentage

of the campaign coverage from leading print U.S. news outlets had substantial mediation, carried a critical tone, or discussed aspects crucial to whether messages to voters carried via digital communication were truthful. This stands in stark contrast to substantial fact checking devoted to advertising (Rosen, 2012) and debates, for example. These findings have clear implications for journalists, as well as the relationship between candidates and voters.

**Journalists.** Paletz (2002, p. 233) defined the levels of mediation for political communication as mostly mediated, partly mediated, and unmediated. Using these definitions, mentions from the 2012 presidential election were likely to be unmediated or partially mediated. When newspapers published stories on candidates' digital communication, few were substantially mediated and about a third had a critical or negative tone.

A low percentage of campaign-related articles mentioned candidates' digital communication. When candidates' digital communication was mentioned, journalists were most likely to report the content of the candidates' messages and the political strategy in using digital tools. They rarely reported on the truthfulness and attack strategies. This further shows weak mediation for candidates' digital communication. If journalists only reported what the candidates' messages were and how digital tools were being used politically, they were merely exposing more voters to the candidates' messages without providing a filter. In the relatively few times that stories mentioning candidates' digital tools were published, journalists were not giving critical analysis to candidates' messages.

Agenda building theory suggests the possibility those setting the media agenda may not be focusing on this realm of political communication. *The New York Times* often sets the example for other newspapers (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980, p. 587). Because the percentage of that publication's articles mentioning candidates' digital tools was one of the

lowest in the study, perhaps other papers were following *The New York Times*' example. It is also possible that stories about digital tools were not presented to gatekeepers in the first place. Perhaps the candidates like the unfiltered access they have to voters in their digital worlds. They could prefer to keep what happens on their websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds between them and their most ardent supporters; therefore, they might not highlight these communications in media releases. However, gatekeepers are known to be a limiting factor for what news is published (Mitnick, 1980).

Another possible explanation for the lack of coverage may also be simply that reporters do not find what was happening in digital campaigning to be newsworthy. The messages found on candidates' websites and Twitter feeds were sometimes a reflection of what the candidates said in speeches or through other forms of communication with the press or the public. If a majority of digital messages merely reiterated what had already been said on the campaign trail, there would be no reason for journalists to cover the same message twice.

In addition, reporters might not have found digital campaigning to be newsworthy is a difference in audiences. Most voters who signed up for and received messages from Obama's or Romney's websites, Twitter feeds, or other digital communication types were already supporters of the candidate they chose to follow. However, many undecided voters relied on journalists for information while they continued to decide who to vote for. While Obama's and Romney's supporters were included in newspaper intended audiences, undecided voters were not included in the intended audience for candidates' digital messages. Because of the intent of candidate's digital messages, it is possible that journalist did not find candidates' digital messages to be newsworthy.

A final explanation for the lack of mediation and coverage could be that modern-day journalists maybe overwhelmed by a large amount of candidates' digital communication in an era when newspapers have made cutbacks and news staffs are dwindling. At the end of 2012, for example, *The New York Times* offered buyouts to 30 newsroom employees. With shrinking advertisement revenue, the newspaper was forced to offer buyouts or begin layoffs. *The New York Times* faced 100 layoffs in 2008 and 20 in 2011 (Mirkinson, 2012). Even one of the most successful newspapers in the U.S. faced hard economic times in 2012, and the newsroom resources were reflecting these issues.

Despite the overall findings, some mediation did occur. The largest percent of mentions was mostly mediated. A negative or critical tone was the second most likely tone. Within the few mentions where mediation did occur, mediation was attributed to the journalist, indicating that journalists were able to analyze these messages and find experts to mediate as well. Watchdog journalists playing their role in western democracy play a role are critical of politicians and mediate politicians' messages. Through analysis, journalists can find experts to testify to certain points (Vergobbi, 2012). It is possible that mediation issues in watchdog journalism lay in quantity – not quality.

Some critics argue that objective journalism should be replaced by interpretation of the facts (Greenhouse, 2012, p. 21-23). Other critics argue that some newspapers do not have the resources for investigative reporting (Friedhoff, 2012, 26-27). In 2012, mentions were most likely to have no tone. The second most likely level of mediation was no mediation. These dichotomous findings of the current study show parallels to current debates about the future of journalism.

Rosen (2012) argued that something other than fact-checking needed to be created to allow journalists to mediate politicians' digital communication (par. 8). However, journalists do not always mediate politicians' messages or mediate critically. Journalists often do not present aspects that would be involved in critical mediation. Journalists might need to place more effort into critical mediation before deciding that the current forms of mediation are ineffective. If a journalist cannot find better strategies for reporting on candidates' digital communication, they will continue to be left out of political dialog and become irrelevant in digital communication.

**Candidate-Voter Relationship.** If journalists are left out of political dialog on the Internet, candidates can communicate directly to voters. This communication is unfiltered, and candidates can say whatever they want, fact or fiction. While journalists are busy reporting the facts on debates and advertisements, candidates can shift more of their messages to digital communication where they can have more freedom. Without mediation, candidates can distort the facts with fewer repercussions.

Rosen discussed the unmediated freedom candidates can acquire through the use of digital tools (par. 8). This power can be seen in the amount of digital messages sent by candidates. Some journalists have tried to mediate messages and have reported on a few distortions of the facts. However, the candidates have not reacted to the mediation and have continued to stand by their distortions (Balz, 2012).

Candidates have become comfortable with digital communication tools and used them frequently in 2012. The number of people these candidates reached was huge. On Facebook, Obama had about 35 million likes and Romney had 11 million. On Twitter, Obama had about 31 million followers and had sent more than 9,000 tweets, while Romney had about 1.5 million followers and 1,000 tweets. With only 292 stories in this study on several of the candidates'

digital communication tools, a large amount of political messages reached large numbers of people without any journalistic reporting or mediation. Further, these messages are reaching people already in the candidates' camp. Because the intended audience for a candidate's digital messages was voters already in favor of and following the digital communication types of that particular candidate, candidates could send whatever messages they wanted to without fear of voter skepticism. If journalists revealed a candidate's messages to be false, the candidate's supporters were less likely to agree with what journalists reported and the supporters might not even see the journalists' reports.

With candidates sending messages via the Internet unchecked, voters cannot be sure if the information they are receiving is true or false. Voters count on journalists to mediate candidates' messages, so they can make educated decisions at the voting booth (Vergobbi, 2012, p. 41-42). Rather than receiving fact-checks from journalists on candidates' digital communication, voters were left with "he-said-she-said" messages from the candidates themselves. The fact-checking was left in the hands of opposing candidates who might have distorted the truth even more with their counter-arguments. Large numbers of voters saw these messages and did not know if the messages were true or not come Election Day. Voters might need to do their own investigative reporting in future elections.

### **Differences by Candidate**

**Summary of Findings.** When variables were compared to mentions of specific candidates, mixed results were found. Some variables indicated differences between candidates. Obama's use of digital communication received the majority of the coverage, but only slightly more than Romney (53.8% vs. 46.2%). Obama's mentions were most likely to involve Twitter (nearly 75% of Twitter mentions), while Romney's mentions were most likely to involve his

campaign website (more than 50% of website mentions). No other significant differences were found for prominence variables.

Significant differences were found by candidate on three of the seven aspects mentioned. Mentions discussing the use of digital tools for political strategy were more likely to be about Obama (51.0%) than Romney (30.2%). Several stories described Obama's 2012 campaign as a continuation of his 2008 digital campaign strategy. Mentions that involved fact-checking of the candidates' digital messages were more likely to be about Romney than Obama (27.9% vs. 10%). Several stories checked the spelling of "America" in Romney's mobile application. When the app first reached the public, "America" was spelled "Amercia," and six mentions focused on this. Obama (11.5%) was more likely than Romney (4.7%) to have mentions discussing the look of his digital tools. Along with his other frequent Twitter activities, Obama often tweeted pictures, which were then described in the mentions.

The tone and mediation variables indicate a significant trend. Obama's mentions were more likely to be unmediated (37%) and have no tone (almost 50%). On the other hand, Romney's mentions were more likely to be mediated substantially (41.9%) and have a negative tone (44.8%). A majority of Twitter mentions, which Obama had the most of, had no tone (about half of all Twitter mentions), while a majority of website mentions, which Romney had the most of, had a critical or negative tone (44.4% of all website mentions). Romney's mentions (93%) were more likely to be mediated by journalists than Obama's mentions (84.1%).

These trends in coverage were shown in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article, "Campaigns seek edge with edgy Twitter blitz," when journalist John Timpane described how Obama and Romney were using Twitter differently. Obama's campaign used his Twitter feed to organize a grassroots movement and maintain a positive and personal appeal, while Romney's campaign

used his Twitter feed to reiterate talking points (Timpane, par 5, 8, 2012). The journalist used numbers of Facebook likes and Twitter followers to show that Obama was in the lead on social networking sites (Timpane, par 9, 2012). The use of these numbers is an example of the common reporting tactic, horserace journalism. Horserace journalism gives little attention to the substance of the candidates' messages and the implications of those messages if a particular candidate is elected, while focusing on how the messages will help a candidate win (Patterson, 1977, p. 74). This type of journalism can be easily used to develop a story; however, voters who see political horserace stories are left with little more information than those who do not see them (Patterson, 1977, p. 76-77).

No difference was found for mediation by expert, opponent, supporter, or the public. Journalists were more likely to critically mediate Romney's digital communication, while Obama's messages were more likely to pass by unchecked. Because journalists used their own words to do a majority of Romney's mediation, it was the journalists' conscious decision to critically mediate Romney more often than Obama. It is possible that this decision was made based on Romney's relatively unsuccessful use of digital communication.

**Implications.** President Obama's dominance of mentions and a lack of mediation portrays a different picture from the one described in the overall section above. Obama's likeliness to have more mentions and more mentions discussing his political use of digital tools points toward the rhetorical presidency model. The rhetorical presidency model states that the president will seek media attention to reach the public and the media will seek responses from the president as well. This outreach begins during the president's initial run for office and continues during his term as president. Journalists have grown accustomed to the rhetorical presidency model and now expect it. The president reaches out to journalists to spread his

messages, and the journalists reach out to the president for those messages as well. It is possible that the president's relationship with the media has made journalists more likely to mention him in articles (Ceaser et al., 1981, p. 164-166; Vergobbi, 2012 p. 43).

In addition, some of the mentions discussing Obama's political use of digital tools were on the continuation of the president's campaign digital tools from his initial run for office in 2008. Obama has proven himself as a master of digital communication. One example in the sample illustrates how Romney was compared with Obama, often unfavorably, in coverage of digital communication. In *USA Today's* article "Study: Obama tops Romney in online activity writer," Martha T. Moore reported on a PEW study showing how Romney was following Obama in social media (Moore, par 3, 2012). Romney was found to be tweeting less than Obama and had fewer likes on Facebook (Moore, par 5, 9, 2012). The coverage, akin to traditional "horse race" journalistic coverage, clearly presented Obama positively and Romney negatively as walking in the shadow of Obama's digital success.

This coverage, while seemingly lopsided toward Obama, does reflect that Obama distinctly had more Twitter messages than Romney. This gave journalists more content to report on. Future battles for the presidency may become battles won by digital content. The example clearly shows that reporters are covering the digital campaigning in a "who's ahead/who's behind" framework that has been criticized as overly simplistic in the past when it was applied to polls, campaign finance, and other aspects of the campaign.

Problems with watchdog journalism state that interpretation might be favorable over objectivity (Greenhouse, 2012, p. 21-23). If this is the case, journalists might have interpreted Romney's messages in a negative light. However, Obama's messages received little interpretation. Because reasons why journalists used certain tones and levels of mediation were

not analyzed in this study. It is uncertain why Obama's mediation was more likely to have no tone and mediation while also receiving more mentions.

Critics have argued that some newspapers have a liberal bias (Groseclose, & Milyo, 2005, p. 1192). This claim has been disputed for some time, but a clear answer has not been found. If the newspapers analyzed in this study had a liberal bias, it would explain why Romney had less mentions and more critical mediation than Obama. However, with little coverage for analysis, it was difficult to tell if there was any bias in the findings for this study.

Although the reason why coverage appeared to favor Obama and disfavor Romney was unexplained by this study, it is important to notice the trend in imbalance of reporting. Journalists' framing of Romney's digital messages negatively portrayed him to the public. An example of negative coverage of Romney was when his mobile application misspelled "America" as "Amercia." This study found six mentions (1.6%) from *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Post* reporting on this misspelling. However, when it was found that Obama's campaign website could accept donations from foreigners, which could be in violation of campaign finance laws, only one mention (0.3%) from *The New York Post* was published. A serious technical flaw that could lead to illegal donations received little coverage, while Romney received substantial coverage for a typo. This example shows that even when a substantial amount of mediation was given, the topic of the mediation could still be superficial. If the topic of the mediation was superficial, a substantial level of mediation would be of little use. Likewise, a superficial amount of mediation for a substantial topic would be ineffective.

### **Differences by Tool**

**Summary of Findings.** Candidates' campaign website and Twitter mentions dominated other digital tool mentions, accounting for the vast majority of all mention coverage. Websites

have been present far longer than any of the other mentioned digital tools and have been covered in campaigns since the late 1990s. Mobile applications and Facebook were covered rarely.

The digital communication type variables, except when related to prominence and mediation, complemented the candidate variable findings above. Most Twitter mentions were coded as brief, which might explain why Obama's mentions were less likely to be mediated. This is because most mentions of Obama were about his Twitter activity. Substantial mediation was rarely found in brief mentions. On the other hand, website and mobile app mentions were the only digital communication types to have whole stories devoted to them. Extensive mediation was common in whole stories devoted to the tools.

The whole stories about mobile apps were about the creation of the app and focused on several functions of the app. Mentions of mobile apps were more likely to discuss the political use and technology. The technology aspect often was used when introducing newly created digital tools, especially mobile applications. For example, one article in the sample from *The New York Post*, "Veep app" by Geoff Earle, covered the creation of Mitt Romney's campaign mobile app "Mitt's VP." The article explained how the app would be used politically to announce to users Romney's choice for a vice presidential running mate (Earle, 2012). This article was only 49 words long. Whole stories about candidates' digital tools were often short.

When crossed with aspect variables, digital communication type variables related to the candidate findings above. Website mentions were more likely to contain fact-checking. It is no surprise then that Romney had more fact-checking mentions because more of his mentions focused on his website. Twitter mentions were more likely to focus on the look of the digital tool. Because Obama's coverage focused on his Twitter feed, the focus on look for his mentions is expected.

For tone, about half of Twitter mentions had no tone. Website mentions were most likely to have a negative or critical tone. Because Twitter mentions were neutral and Obama's Twitter was covered more, the lack of critical tone for Obama is expected. The same is true for mentions of Romney and his website.

**Implications.** The implications of coverage of the digital communication types analyzed could be related to the progress of evolving technologies. When a new technology is presented to society, journalists must develop strategies for how to report on it. Websites have been present in the American society for longer than the other digital tools analyzed in this study. For this reason, journalists have had more time to develop website reporting strategies. This could be supported through more campaign website coverage and more critical tone and mediation of website mentions.

Twitter is a relatively new social networking platform and could be more difficult to report on. Because Twitter messages are brief (140 characters or less), it is possible that journalists had difficulty mentioning candidates' Twitter messages more than briefly. The brevity of communication via Twitter also could create difficulties with creating more substantial mediation. Candidate websites are clearly more content rich than the brief messages showed on Twitter. Mobile applications are one of the newest forms of digital communication types used by candidates. For this reason, journalist often focused on the creation of mobile apps and how they were used for political purposes. There were few mentions of mobile apps and no tone was rarely used in the coverage. Even though Facebook is the second oldest digital tool, it is often seen as a personal and non-policy oriented medium.

Although journalists might have had difficulty reporting on digital tools, this is no excuse for why articles on candidates' digital tools are so few. However, journalists have adopted

Twitter as a professional tool, and they are quite familiar with it. Journalists use Twitter for breaking news and live tweeting events. With so many digital messages sent by candidates, a reasonable observer would expect a comparable increase in reporting. In the Age of Technology, digital tools should have been a central theme.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While the findings of this study point to several conclusions about lack of coverage and variance in covers, the method used brings certain drawbacks. Most of these are related to sampling frame and data collection. First, the findings can only be generalized to leading traditional print newspapers and *The Associated Press*, which has traditionally fed those papers content). Because of the database used to collect the sample, not all leading newspapers could be examined. Further, the search strategy was not effective at gathering information from radio and television (broadcast and cable) news coverage, and therefore these outlets were not included in the study. The biggest issue with the sampling frame is that web-only news outlets and blogs, which might more extensively cover digital communication because of their orientation, were not included in the sample. Coverage may be much more extensive in other types of media, but this study was not able to determine that because of the sampling framework. Future studies on this topic would benefit from examining traditional print coverage compared with these other news organizations.

The sampling frame also only looked at a specific time frame. This study only analyzed stories that were published from between May 31 and November 5, 2012. However, candidates in the Republican primary began their campaigns about a year earlier. To include the Republican primary candidates without there being any Democratic primary candidates would have skewed the sample. Because no incumbent candidate will run for president in 2016, a follow-up study

could examine the Democratic and Republican primaries along with the general election.

Without an incumbent candidate, the rhetorical presidency model would no longer be a factor.

Another limitation was that an automated search strategy could not be created where the Lexis/Nexis Academic search engine would find newspaper articles that met the inclusion criteria. After several attempts, a specific search strategy was employed, but it was not highly effective at finding the stories of interest to the researcher. Therefore, a researcher had to manually examine nearly 3,000 articles for the inclusion criteria. One person dealing with this volume of stories surely could not be 100% accurate in pulling the stories. This factor also limited the number of sources and mentions included in the final sample. Because sifting through the stories manually was time consuming, the researcher was not able to add more news outlets to the sample. Broadcast transcripts, which could be more than 10,000 words in some cases, were even more problematic to sift through, which is why they were not included in this study as they had been in the study by Greer et al. (2001).

In addition to focusing on certain outlets during a specific timeframe, only certain digital tools were analyzed in this study. While other social media tools like Flickr and Pinterest were used by the candidates, they were not deemed to be nearly as popular as the tools analyzed in this study ("List of social," 2013). Content on these sites was often repeated on campaign Twitter feeds and websites. However, an analysis of all digital tool used by candidates in 2012 might provide more information. In addition, all of the digital tools available for use might rise or fall in popularity and effectiveness overtime. Some tools might be shut down, and new tools will be created. In the future, a follow up study for the 2016 presidential election might reveal a trend in available digital tools and their use by candidates.

The coverage of the digital tools available to candidates might change in four years. With more time to learn how to cover tools such as mobile applications and Twitter, journalists might mediate and report more on them in the future. It would also be telling to find that journalists continued to report on campaign digital tools in the same way as they did in 2012.

Beyond sampling, timeframe and tools covered, measurement issues in some cases posed limitations. Analyzing a wide range of aspects mentioned made coding more complex and created a greater possibility of lower intercoder reliability. To ensure higher intercoder reliability, aspects mentioned were coded as either “Yes” or “No.” However, because of the simplicity of the coding strategy, little depth was provided for such variables. While aspects were merely coded as present or absent, other aspect characteristics were not analyzed.

Definitions for superficial and substantial mediation were not developed for the analysis of the mediation content. Individual interpretations of mediation content could have led to lower intercoder reliability. Instead, the level of mediation was measured based on the length of the mediation within articles. Although some journalists might have provided strong mediation within a brief statement, such a statement would be coded as superficial mediation. For example, in *The Associated Press* article, “Romney campaign trail in crucial ground game,” the author of the article Nicholas Riccardi wrote, “Republicans also are trying to eat into the Obama campaign’s technological edge, but Democrats appear to still have the lead” (Riccardi, par 16, 2012). The only line of mediation in this article described a competition between candidates for success in the digital domain, Obama’s dominance in this domain, and his continued dominance after Romney attempted to take control by creating a mobile app (Riccardi, par 17, 2012). There was a relatively great deal of critical analysis of Romney’s app in this single statement.

Some mentions were coded as having substantial mediation because the mediation was lengthy while the mediation had little critical analysis. For example, the *Daily News* article, “Mitt Bam slam No one’s ever asked to see my birth certificate: Romney,” by Kirsten A. Lee, was coded as having substantial mediation. However, the journalist who wrote the article did not give a critical response to Obama’s tweeting of a link to Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the USA” (Lee, par 7, 2012). Instead, Lee discussed how Obama has been ridiculed by those who falsely believed Obama was not an American citizen for years (Lee, par 8, 2012). She also explains how Obama let the public see his Hawaiian birth certificate in 2008 and a long form certificate in 2011 (Lee, par 9, 2012). While this type of mediation gives background information to the myth of Obama not being eligible to run for president, it does not discuss a possible endorsement by Springsteen or approval for Obama to use the song in his campaign communication. These are just two opportunities for critical analysis that the journalist could have used for mediation.

Despite efforts to simplify the coding strategy, intercoder issues still presented themselves in this study. Cohen’s Kappa presented several issues with intercoder reliability. Coders had poor agreement when examining whether truth and attack aspects were covered in the mentions. Mediation by an expert had issues with intercoder reliability as well. Therefore, the results based on these variables should be viewed with caution.

Beyond methodological issues, other issues arise in explaining why certain results were found. Without an agenda building analysis, it cannot be determined why there were so few mentions of candidates’ digital communication. Agenda building analysis also is needed to better understand weaknesses in tone and mediation. Journalists need to be interviewed to understand the why they had had little mediation, tone, and reporting on emerging technologies. Because content analysis was used in this study, there was no engagement with reporters or editors.

This study points to several possible influences on voter behavior, but voter behavior was not analyzed. While it is a viable assumption that more mentions with less mediation for Obama might have led to a positive view of him by voters, there were too few mentions to judge the impact that such coverage would have on voters. Agenda building cannot be a predictor of how voters make decisions on Election Day. Other factors are involved that can only be explored by collecting and analyzing information from the voters directly.

## **Conclusion**

The data for this study suggests relatively few articles on Obama's and Romney's campaigns for the 2012 U.S. presidential election mentioned the candidates' campaign websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and mobile applications. Less than 2% of all campaign articles even mentioned candidate communication via these tools. Mentions were brief and were unmediated or superficially mediated. When coverage did occur, content of the candidates' messages and the use of digital tools for political strategy were frequent aspects mentioned, while truthfulness of the candidates' messages and attack campaigning aspects were seldom discussed. This suggests that journalists did not mediate some key points of elections coverage, a finding supported by the lack of tone in most coverage. With the importance candidates and pundits placed on digital political campaigning in 2012, the lack of coverage for presidential candidates' campaign digital communication tools is alarming. Some differences emerged in the way the candidates and types of tools were covered, but those differences seem inconsequential in light of the dearth of coverage overall.

The founders of the United States envisioned a vigorous press with journalists checking government actions. In the modern day, journalists see their role as mediating politicians' messages and keeping voters informed so voters can make educated decisions on Election Day.

In recent decades, journalists turned this watchdog role toward traditional forms of political communication, including political stump speeches, debates, and ads on television and radio. However, they are not bringing this engagement to candidates' digital messages, which may tip the balance in the favor of politicians increasingly relying on digital tools to directly communicate with voters. In the worst case scenario, candidates would have free reign through these tools to say whatever they want to say without any fear of being caught telling a lie. Fellow candidates might catch them telling lies, but the claims those candidates make would be unchecked as well. In the end, voters could be left to fend for themselves to sort out what is truth and fiction.

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**Appendix A**  
**CODESHEET**

**Standardized Coding Sheet for News Report Description**

A. First two words of headline \_\_\_\_\_

B. Date of news report \_\_\_\_\_

C. Word count of story \_\_\_\_\_

D. Source of news media

1-The New York Times

7-New York Post

2-USA Today

8-The Philadelphia Inquirer

3-Los Angeles Times

9-Star Tribune

4-The Washington Post

10-Newsday

5-San Jose Mercury News

11-Associated Press

6-Daily News

E. Placement of story

0-No Page was Given

1-Low Priority(Page other than the front page of a section)

2-Medium Priority (Front page of section other than 1A)

3-Highest Priority (Section 1A, front page)

F. Candidate name mentioned

1-Barack Obama

2-Mitt Romney

G. Type of Internet communication mentioned

1-Website

2-Facebook

3-Twitter

4-Mobile App

H. Placement of mention within the story

1-Low Priority (last third of story)

2-Middle Priority (middle third of story)

3-Top Priority (headline or first third of story)

I. Percentage of mention within the story

1-Brief Mention (from one or two sentences to one paragraph)

2-In Between (less than whole story, more than a paragraph)

3-Whole Story (every paragraph)

J. Mediation level of mention

1-Unmediated

2-Mediated – Superficial (one sentence to one paragraph)

3-Mediated – Substantial (two paragraphs to entire story)

K. Mediated by who(if mediation present, choose 1 or 0 for each)

\_\_\_Journalist

\_\_\_Mentioned Candidate's Supporters

\_\_\_Opponent or Opponent's Supporters

\_\_\_Expert

\_\_\_Public

L. Tone of mention (if mediation present)

0-No Tone

1-Mostly to all Critical/Negative

2-Balanced between Critical/Negative and Positive

3-Mostly to all Positive

M. Aspects mentioned (choose 1 or 0 for each)

\_\_\_Content (biography's, calendars, and messages)

\_\_\_Technology (data collection, digital tools, and functionality)

\_\_\_Look (graphics, photos, video, fonts, type face, layouts)

\_\_\_Traffic (visitors, sharing, or following)

\_\_\_Politics (strategy, effectiveness, fundraising, and political tools)

\_\_\_Truth (truthfulness or completeness of information or fact-checking)

\_\_\_Attack (Attack Campaigning)

\_\_\_Other\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **CODEBOOK**

#### **News Report Description Coding Sheet Instructions**

For each mention of a candidate's digital communication, one code sheet must be reported. A mention is defined in this study as a story's mention of Obama's or Romney's digital communication or the candidates' type of digital communication in a newspaper article.

Obama's or Romney's digital communication was identified by the search terms

“@MittRomney,” “mittromney.com,” “www.mittromney.com,” “http://www.mittromney.com,”

“http://www.barackobama.com,” “www.barackobama.com,” “barackobama.com,”

“@BarackObama,” “@Obama2012,” “BarackObama,” or “Obama2012.” In addition, Obama's

or Romney's digital communication was identified by the search terms “app,” “application,”

“tweet,” “Facebook,” “Twitter,” “website,” “web site,” or “tweet” used in affiliation with or

possession or control of either Obama or Romney. Use the above conditions to identify mentions

in articles. If these terms were not used in affiliation with or possession or control of either

Obama or Romney, a mention has not been found.

Communication from the public aimed towards candidates or newspapers does not define a mention. For this reason, tweets, other forms of digital communication, and letters to the editor are not included as mentions. However, communication from the public, along with other information found in the articles, are used in the analysis of mentions.

If a story mentioned the digital communication of both Obama and Romney, it is coded as one mention specifically for Obama and another, separate mention for Romney. Story headlines are considered part of the story and counted as a mention for each candidate connected to his own digital communication. The introduction of a different candidate or digital communication type signifies a new mention. Once a mention is identified, all statements in the story about the mentioned candidate's mentioned digital communication, above or below the search terms used to identify the mention, are considered part of the mention. If the above criteria were not met within a news article, no mention was found in the article. After identifying a mention, follow the instructions below:

- A. First two words of headline, write the first two words of the headline for the analyzed article.
- B. Date of news report, write the date that the news report aired or was published as follows: MM/DD.
- C. Word count of story, write the number of words in the story.
- D. Source of news media, choose the newspaper that published the article.

1-The New York Times	7-New York Post
2-USA Today	8-The Philadelphia Inquirer
3-Los Angeles Times	9-Star Tribune
4-The Washington Post	10-Newsday
5-San Jose Mercury News	11-Associated Press
6-Daily News	
- E. Placement of story, choose where the story was mentioned within the newspaper. If the story was placed in section 1A of the newspaper, choose "3-Highest Priority." If the story

was placed in section 1B, 1C, or the first page of any other section of the newspaper, choose “2-Medium Priority.” If the story was placed on any other page than the first page of a section, choose “1-Low Priority.” If the page number was not listed, choose “0-No page was given.” If the article was published by *New York Post* or *Newsday*, choose “1-Low Priority.” These two newspapers are printed in tabloid form and their articles do not appear on the front page of any section.

- F. Candidate’s name mentioned, choose the candidate named in the mention. This candidate should be in control of the digital communication or digital communication type mentioned. If Barack Obama was mentioned, choose “1-Barack Obama.” If Mitt Romney was mentioned, choose “2-Mitt Romney.”
- G. Type of digital communication mentioned, choose the candidate’s mentioned digital communication type. If the candidate’s campaign website was mentioned, choose “1-Campaign Website.” If the candidate’s Facebook page was mentioned, choose “2-Facebook page.” If the candidate’s Twitter page was mentioned, choose “3-Twitter page.” If the candidate’s mobile app was mentioned, choose “4-Mobile App.”
- H. Placement of mention in the story, choose where the digital communication was mentioned in the story. Divide the story into equal thirds by the number of paragraphs. For example if a story has nine paragraphs, paragraphs one to three are “Top Priority,” paragraphs four to six are “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs seven to nine are “Low Priority.”

If the story cannot be divided into equal thirds by the number of paragraphs, the remaining paragraphs must be placed equally into the “Top Priority,” “Middle Priority,” and “Low Priority” sections. If the number of paragraphs is divided by three and has a

remainder of one, add a paragraph to “Middle Priority.” For example if a story has ten paragraphs, paragraphs one to three are “Top Priority,” paragraphs four to seven are “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs eight to ten are “Low Priority.” If the number of paragraphs is divided by three and has a remainder of two, add one paragraph to “Top Priority” and a second paragraph to “Low Priority.” For example if a story has eleven paragraphs, paragraphs one to four are “Top Priority,” paragraphs five to seven are “Middle Priority,” and paragraphs eight to eleven are “Low Priority.” If there is only one paragraph in the story, the instructions on how to divide a story into thirds by the number of paragraphs will be applied to the number of sentences in the single paragraph.

Once the story is divided into thirds, choose the appropriate section for the placement of the mention. If the mention was placed in the last third of story, choose “1-Low Priority.” If the mention was placed in the middle third of story, choose “2-Middle Priority.” If the mention was placed in the first third of story or the headline, choose “3-Top Priority.” If the mention appears in multiple places throughout the story, choose the first third of the story that the mention appeared in.

- I. Percentage of mention in story, choose how long the digital communication was mentioned in the news story. If the digital communication was mentioned in from one or two sentences to one paragraph, choose “1-Brief Mention.” If the digital communication was mentioned in less than the whole story, but more than one paragraph, choose “2-In Between.” If the digital communication was mentioned throughout every paragraph in the story, choose “3-Whole Story.”
- J. Mediation level of mention, choose the level of engagement with the mention in the story. Mediation was defined in this study by the presence of comments about a

candidate's digital communication or digital communication type other than the initial mention of the candidate's communication or type. Additional comments about the mention showed a level of engagement that described mediation. The mention of a candidate's digital communication without further comment on the mention was not considered to be mediation.

Before the type of mediation could be determined, the presence of mediation had to be found. If the mention was not interpreted or critiqued, the mention was marked as "Unmediated." If a candidate's digital communication or digital communication type was mentioned in an article along with additional comments relating to the mention, the mention was mediated. For example, if the mention stated that Romney sent a message via his campaign mobile app, that alone would not be a mediated mention. However, if a comment was added showing that Obama, a reporter who wrote the article, or anyone other than Romney or his campaign staff commented on Romney's message, the mention would be mediated (see Codebook, Appendix B).

After mediation was found to be present for the mention, mediation level was measured based on the length of the mediation. If reporters interpreted or critiqued the mention for a length of a paragraph or shorter, the mention was marked as "Mediated – Superficial." If reporters interpreted or critiqued the mention for a length of two paragraphs or longer, the mention was marked as "Mediated – Substantial." (see Codebook, Appendix B).

An example of an unmediated mention was given in the *Los Angeles Times* article, "Candidates' views on arts compared," by Mike Boehm. In this article, it was said that Romney plans to save \$600 million by making cuts to several federal agencies

(Boehm, par 8, 2012). Because Romney's plans were not commented on or critiqued by the journalist or anyone else, the mention was not mediated.

An example of superficial mediation was given in the *Daily News* article, "GOP Veep-stakes head Down South," by Jonathan Lemire. The article stated Romney's mobile app would give its users the name of Romney's running mate once he was chosen. Lemire further mediated that Romney's campaign was protecting the secret of who might be Romney's choice (Lemire, par 8, 9, 2012). The additional comment from Lemire meant that the mention of Romney's app was mediated. Because Lemire's comment was only a sentence long, it was labeled as superficial mediation.

An example of substantial mediation was given in *The New York Post* article, "Campaign's bad spell," by Gerry Shields. The article stated that Romney's mobile app misspelled "America" as "Amercia." Throughout three paragraphs, Shields added that the app had a list of slogans, of which "Amercia" was in one, and the misspelling was later fixed (Shields, par 1-4, 2012). Because the journalist's mediation was longer than a paragraph, it was labeled as substantial mediation.

If a candidate commented on his own message, it would not be counted as mediation. When a candidate commented on his own message, it was considered to be a continuation of the message. If a candidate continued his message via the same digital communication type as the original message, it was considered to be part of the mention. In other words, the candidate could not mediate his own message (see Codebook, Appendix B).

Once a mention has been identified as either superficially mediated, substantially mediated, or unmediated, choose the appropriate option. If the mention did not interpret

or critique the digital communication or digital communication type, choose “1-Unmediated.” If the mention was interpreted or critiqued in one sentence to one paragraph, choose “2-Mediated - Superficial.” If the mention was interpreted or critiqued in two paragraphs to the entire story, choose “3-Mediated – Substantial.”

K. Mediated by who, if mediation of the mention is present, choose who is a source of the mediation. Write “1” on the blank line for each of the following sources if they were sources of the mention’s mediation. If a source was not present in the mediation, write “0.” Write “1” or “0” for all sections in “K.” It is possible for mediation to have as many as five sources, or as few as one source. At least one source must be marked as present.

- 0 or 1-Journalist, if the article sites no source for the mediation or the journalist declares himself to be the source, the journalist is considered to be the source and “1” should be written for “Journalist.” While a journalist might consciously choose to include any or all comments that are in a story, do not mark the journalist as a source of mediation unless the above criteria have been met.
- 0 or 1-Mentioned Candidate’s Supporters, if the source of the mediation is the mentioned candidate’s own supporters, write “1” for “Mentioned Candidate’s Supporters.” Mentioned candidate’s supporters include Republicans if Romney is mentioned, Democrats if Obama is mentioned, or anyone who otherwise affiliates themselves with the mentioned candidate. However, if a Republican declares that he supports Obama or a Democrat declares support that he supports Romney, he is deemed to be a supporter of the candidate he claims to support.
- 0 or 1-Opponent or Opponent’s Supporters, if an opponent or the supporter of one opposing the mentioned candidate is the source of the mediation, write “1” for

“Opponent or Opponent’s Supporters.” See above for how to determine who a source supports. In addition, an opponent can be a candidate other than Obama or Romney, and an opponent’s supporters can be supporters of candidates other than Obama or Romney.

- 0 or 1-Expert, if a political expert, digital communication expert, legal expert, or anyone else who is labeled in the story to be an expert gives an expert statement about the mention, write “1” for “Expert.” An expert statement is a statement given by an expert involving the field of his expertise.
- 0 or 1-Public, if the source was identified, but did not belong to one of the categories above, write “1” for “Public.” In addition, the public includes Facebook or Twitter followers, those identified as the public, and undecided voters. Members of the public do not include supporters of a particular candidate.

L. Tone of mention, choose whether the mention was in favor or disfavor of the digital communication or digital communication type. If no favor or no disfavor was given in the mention, choose “0-No Tone.” If “1-Unmediated” was chosen in section “J,” choose “0-No Tone” for section “L.” If the mention was mostly or entirely critical of the mentioned digital communication, choose “1-Mostly to all Critical/Negative.” If the reporter is balanced between critical or negative and positive tone concerning the mentioned digital communication, choose “2-Balanced between Critical/Negative and Positive.” If the reporter is mostly or entirely positive in tone concerning the mentioned digital communication, choose “3-Mostly to all Positive.”

Examples of negative or critical and positive tone were given in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article, “Campaigns seek edge with edgy Twitter blitz,” by John Timpane, the

journalist described how Obama and Romney were using Twitter differently in their campaigns. Obama's campaign used his Twitter feed to organize a grassroots movement and maintain a positive and personal appeal, while Romney's campaign used his Twitter feed to reiterate talking points (Timpane, par 5, 8, 2012). The journalist used numbers of Facebook likes and Twitter followers to show that Obama was in the lead on social networking sites (Timpane, par 9, 2012). In this article, Obama received positive tone when his Twitter feed was found to produce more content and have more followers than Romney. While negative or critical tone about Obama's Twitter feed was used to mention that he uses Twitter to attack his opponents and the Republican party wants @BarackObama to lose the election, positive tone was used more often when discussing Obama's Twitter (Timpane, par 8, 13, 2012). Romney received negative tone when his Twitter feed was found to produce less content and have fewer followers. While positive tone was used to mention that Romney is trying to damage Obama's reputation, this was only one positive against several negative statements (Timpane, par 25, 2012).

An example of no tone was given in the *Daily News* article, "Mitt Bam slam No one's ever asked to see my birth certificate: Romney," by Kirsten A. Lee. The journalist who wrote the article did not give a critical response to Obama's tweeting of a link to Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" (Lee, par 7, 2012). Instead, Lee discussed how Obama has been ridiculed by those who falsely believed Obama was not an American citizen for years (Lee, par 8, 2012). She also explains how Obama let the public see his Hawaiian birth certificate in 2008 and a long form certificate in 2011 (Lee, par 9, 2012). Because this information is historical context and does not favor or disfavor Obama, it has no tone.

An example of balanced tone was given in the *The Washington Post* article, “Pass the pizza, Kumar.” This article explains how the star actors from “Harold & Kumar” were in an advertisement made by the Obama campaign (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). The journalist commented, “Party on!” (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). However, an expert from the campaign to legalize marijuana disapproved of the president’s ad, which encourages marijuana usage while, to the contrary, the president has arrested marijuana users (Pass the pizza, par 1-2, 2012). The positive comment from the journalist and the negative comment from the expert balance the tone.

M. Aspects mentioned, write “1” on the blank line for each of the following aspects if they were present in the mention. If an aspect was not present in the mention, write “0.” Write “1” or “0” for all sections in “M.” It is possible for mentions to have as many as eight aspects, or as few as no aspects.

- 0 or 1-Content, includes candidate’s biographies, calendars, policies, words, statements, messages, or any other information from the candidate’s digital communication mentioned. If the candidate’s digital communication type is mentioned, but the candidate’s digital communication message is not mentioned, write “0.”
- 0 or 1-Technology, includes data collection techniques, the creation of a digital communication tool, how the digital communication site or app functions, and digital tools.
- 0 or 1-Look, includes graphics, photos, video, fonts, type face, and layouts found on the mentioned digital communication type’s site or app.

- 0 or 1-Traffic, includes visitors to the candidate's mentioned digital communication site or app. With social media, traffic also includes the following or sharing of the candidate's digital communication messages by visitors.
- 0 or 1-Politics, includes the candidate's digital communication strategy and effectiveness and fundraising through the candidate's digital communication site or app. Any mention of a candidate using his digital communication site or app as a political tool is also included.
- 0 or 1-Truth, includes the truthfulness or completeness of information in the candidate's digital communication message. This can appear in news articles as journalists fact-checking the candidate's message. It can also appear as any other form of correction to the candidate's mentioned digital communication message.
- 0 or 1-Attack, includes attack campaigning from one candidate to another using the mentioned digital communication message. This aspect can only be present in the form of a message as opposed to the mention of a candidate's digital communication type.
- 0 or 1-Other (write other attribute here if it has not been mentioned above)

## Appendix C

### SAMPLE INFORMATION

<b>*Rank</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>*Daily Circulation</b>	<b>Articles in Search</b>	<b>Articles Included in Sample (%)</b>	<b>Mentions (%)</b>
2	USA Today	Gannett Co.	1,817,446	162	24 (8.2%)	41 (11.0%)
3	The New York Times	The New York Times Co.	1,586,757	399	55 (18.8%)	67 (18.0%)
4	Los Angeles Times	Tribune Co.	605,243	124	11 (3.8%)	14 (3.8%)
5	San Jose Mercury News	MediaNews Group	575,786	133	16 (5.5%)	27 (7.3%)
6	Washington Post	Washington Post Co.	507,615	448	55 (18.8%)	67 (18.0%)
7	Daily News	Daily News, L.P.	530,924	100	12 (4.1%)	15 (4.0%)
8	New York Post	News Corp.	555,327	93	13 (4.5%)	14 (3.8%)
13	Philadelphia Inquirer	Philadelphia Media Network	325,291	295	15 (5.1%)	17 (4.6%)
16	Newsday	Cablevision	298,759	34	3 (1.0%)	4 (1.1%)
17	Star Tribune	Star Tribune Co.	296,605	44	3 (1.0%)	3 (0.8%)
n.a.	Associated Press	Associated Press Inc.	n.a.	1,119	85 (29.1%)	103 (27.7%)
	<b>Total</b>		<b>7,099,753</b>	<b>2,951</b>	<b>292 (100%)</b>	<b>372 (100%)</b>

\*Numbers are shown for the six month period ending March 31, 2012, and were compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (“List of newspapers,” 2012).