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Media, Politics and the World Wide Web: A Qualitative Analysis of the 1996 Presidential Campaign

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**Media, Politics and the World Wide Web:
A Qualitative Analysis of the 1996 Presidential Campaign**

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in Communication

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Christine Sanders

November, 1996

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT

The presidential campaign of 1996 marked the first presidential election where the World Wide Web was widely used. The election provided media outlets with an opportunity to create, for the first time, news content suited to the Web's strengths: interactivity, immediacy and depth. Much of the research on politics and news examines how reality is constructed through news content. This study used news values and the biases these values create as a framework for studying how politics was presented to the American public via the World Wide Web. This study provided a detailed description of the political reality that was constructed on two media Web sites during the 1996 nominating conventions.

A qualitative analysis was chosen in order to present a rich descriptive illustration of what was available on the two Web sites. The results were presented by organizing the content according to categories such as: issue coverage, presentation of personal information, use of polls, availability of mobilizing information, availability of original documents, presentation of historical context and availability of interactive features.

The results indicated that because of the volume of information on the Web, no single reality existed. Unlike users of the traditional media, this study illustrated that users of the Internet can possibly create their own reality. The Internet provided opportunities for users to interact with the political process, obtain issue information, and possibly consume a news product that was less fragment than the traditional media. Future research will need to investigate what information Internet users are actually consuming.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Political Communication

Robert E. Denton, in the book Political Communication in America, defines political communication as the “public discussion about the allocation of public resources, official authority, and official sanctions” (1990, p. 14). While this definition at the most basic level is complete, it does not describe the research areas of political communication. Nimmo and Swanson (1990) in the article, “The field of political communication: Beyond the voter paradigm,” say that “the field is constituted by research that makes claims about the relationships between communication processes and political processes” (p. 9) and that “directly or indirectly, discovering something about the production, character, consumption, or consequences of the messages that constitute political communication is a goal of every instance of political communication research” (p. 16).

The field of political communication is a diverse and interdisciplinary field of study. It is a field where interdisciplinary perspectives are common and even encouraged (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990; Johnston, 1990). However, as Nimmo and Swanson (1990) explain, “seeking conceptual bases for an interdisciplinary field is not without peril” (p. 14). Nimmo and Swanson try to ward off this peril by clarifying the conceptual framework of political communication research. They explain that at the broadest level the field of political communication is dominated by two familiar, systematic conceptions. The two conceptions are that of “politics and social life and, within these, the role of

communication” (p. 14). Nimmo and Swanson (1990) explain that these large concepts then can be broken down and addressed in more specific areas of study.

Political Communication and News

One of the broad areas of political communication, as identified by Johnston (1990), is that of politics and news. The conceptual framework for much of this research has focused on how reality is constructed through various features of news content and presentation (Jamieson & Campbell, 1992; Bennett, 1996; Nimmo & Combs, 1990). The concept of social construction of reality grew out of a sociological view which asserts that “all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these lives” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 128).

A common approach to understanding how politics is constructed through the news media has focused on news depictions of political events as dramas. According to Nimmo and Combs (1990), “As a recurring, emotionally compelling, seasonal ritual, the presidential campaign possesses all the requirements of melodrama” (p. 55). In recent years, news has no longer been conceived as the opposite of entertainment, but rather as a presentation of a type of drama (Johnston, 1990).

The reason for the depiction of news as drama can be attributed largely in part to the definition of news and basic news values. Jamieson and Campbell (1992) define news according to the following five characteristics. First, news is personalized; it is about

individuals. Second, news is dramatic and conflictive. Third, news is found in action, an event, or an observable occurrence. Fourth, news is novel, deviant, or out of the ordinary. And fifth, news consists of reports pertaining to issues prevalent at the current time.

Derived in part from such basic news values, Bennett (1996) identifies four information biases in the news and discusses the social reality that they construct. The first information bias is what Bennett refers to as the personalization of news. Bennett argues that one of the biggest flaws in American news is the tendency to downplay the big social, economic or political picture in favor of the human trials that sit on the surface of the events. The consequence of this is that the public is not able to understand the greater social context in which the events are a part. Without context it is difficult for the public to understand how the political system really works; instead, the public witnesses the day to day struggle of political personalities (Bennett, 1996).

The second information bias is called dramatized news. An event that contains drama is more likely to become a major news story. Dramatized news compounds the effects of personalized news. "With actors at their center, news dramas emphasize crisis over continuity, the present over the past or future, and the impact of scandals on personal political careers rather than on institutions of government in which the scandals occurred" (Bennett, 1996, p. 40). An obvious consequence of dramatized news is that it trivializes news content. And because dramas are so easy to understand, people may think they understand an issue when, in reality, their understanding is based on fantasy and myth. Political events are already so far removed from the average person's experiences that

news dramas may have the effect of “pushing political consciousness permanently into the realm of fiction” (Bennett, 1996, p. 57).

The effects of personalized and dramatized news feed into the third information bias found in the news. The third information bias refers to the tendency to isolate stories so that the news becomes hard to assemble into the big picture. It is referred to as fragmented news. The narrative structure of news stories, having a beginning, middle and an end, turns events into self-contained happenings. The fragmentation is worsened by the severe space limits nearly all media impose. Because of these factors the news comes out as sketchy dramatic stories that make it difficult to see across issues. It also becomes difficult to trace issues over time and to place them in proper historical contexts. Thus, the consequence is that the world seems a chaotic place where events seem to appear and disappear (Bennett, 1996).

Finally, the last information bias that Bennett discusses is referred to as normalized news. This refers to the tendency in which “reassuring, authoritative voices of officials offer normalized interpretations of otherwise threatening and confusing events” (Bennett, 1996, p. 41). A common response to a crisis is for an official to quickly pronounce that “things will return to normal again.” Bennett believes that normalized news contributes to the cynicism the public has of the media and of politicians. For example, as the public sees politicians giving illusory solutions for problems, they become cynical. The media contribute to the problem by forcing politicians to offer magical solutions to complex

problems. Then later, the media criticize the politicians for their failures. Thus normalizing news creates a dysfunctional communication cycle (Bennett, 1996).

Bennett also points out that the news product is constantly evolving, and lists several factors that effect and change news over time. These factors include: popular tastes, the organizations of news gathering, the communication strategies of political actors, and the technologies of communication. Therefore, since the news is constantly changing, so is the construction of social reality (Bennett, 1996).

Problem Statement

Polls taken in the 1980s showed that not only was public confidence in leaders and government declining rapidly, but confidence in the press was declining as well. The president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors blamed these trends on television. Television executives quickly rebutted, arguing that given the choice between various sources for the same information, people consistently choose television over newspapers. (Bennett, 1996).

W. Lance Bennett (1996) argues that perhaps what both sides are missing is that none of the mainstream media provide people with the kind of information that makes a difference in how they think and act about politics. Patterson (1991) believes that the news is not an adequate guide to political choice, because its major themes are dictated by journalistic values, not political ones. He says that voters are more conversant about the candidates' campaign styles than about their platforms.

Bennett (1996) argues that American society is the most advanced society in the world in terms of its ability to place useful information at its citizens' fingertips and to help people use that information to guide direct democratic participation. However, the current news system addresses people as spectators and offers little motivation or outlet for direct citizen action. Robert Entman says that the news portrays a "democracy without citizens" (Entman, 1989).

Joseph Keefer conducted a content analysis of several media outlets to determine the extent to which the media facilitate citizen participation in the democratic process. He found that the news media serve to hinder, rather than facilitate, citizen participation (Keefer, 1993).

Lemert and his associates have conducted several studies investigating the amount of "mobilizing information" in the media. Mobilizing information refers to details about times and places of political events, addresses and names of contacts in political organizations, and other information that would facilitate citizen participation in the democratic process. What Lemert and his colleagues found is that this type of information is rarely found in the news media (Lemert, 1984; Lemert, Mitzman, Seither, Cook, & Hackett, 1977).

Several scholars and media critics have begun to focus attention on the problems of the current media system. For example, Matthew Kerbel (1995), in his book, Remote and Controlled, discusses the issue of widespread cynicism in an era of abundant information. The book looks at the issue of whether it is possible to consume a steady diet

of mainstream media and still understand and respect the political process. Davis Merritt (1995), in his book, Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is Not Enough, takes a harsh view of contemporary journalism, claiming that its failure to inform has been a major contributor to the resultant cynicism in public life.

However, new technologies have provided citizens with opportunities to seek political information from sources other than the mainstream media. Citizens are becoming increasingly equipped with home computers, making it possible for them to join electronic bulletin boards, as well as search huge databases on subjects that interest them. Lemert (1994), in an article titled, "Adapting to Clinton and the new media reality," discusses how Americans can now compare what they get from the mainstream media with more direct information from new alternatives such as the Internet.

The use of new communication technologies have become important forces in political campaigns, but scholarly research has yet to focus on the Internet in terms of political communication. Garramone, Harris and Anderson (1986) studied the motivations for using political computer bulletin board systems, but the content of political World Wide Web pages has not been studied by the scholarly community.

Six characteristics summarize what is new about this new medium. First is the great volume of information that is available. Second is the faster gathering, retrieving, and transmitting of information. Third is the greater control over the medium by consumers. Fourth is the greater ability of senders to target their messages to specific

audiences. Fifth is the greater decentralization of the media. And sixth is the greater interactive capacity (Abramson, Arterton & Orren, 1988).

These characteristics inherent in the Internet, and more specifically the World Wide Web, present politicians, the media, and citizens with potential improvements in how political information is transmitted and received. In fact, the phenomena has already begun; there are an estimated 1,400 sites on the World Wide Web related to politics (Houston, 1996).

Therefore, because of the proliferation of political coverage on the Internet, it is appropriate to begin scholarly research on this new medium. The present study investigates the social reality that was constructed on two World Wide Web media sites during the 1996 Republican and Democratic conventions. This study will contribute to the literature on how politics is constructed through the news media. It also lays the ground work for research on politics and the Internet. The study begins with a review of the research that has been done on the presentation of presidential campaigns in the news, it then examines the limited research on the development of the Internet and how it has been used in politics thus far.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Presentation of Political News

Content analyses have revealed that press coverage of presidential campaigns concentrates on the game played by the candidates, thus de-emphasizing questions of

national policy and leadership. Winning and losing are dominant themes of day-to-day coverage and the candidates' positions on policy issues account for a much smaller share of election coverage (Patterson, 1980).

This type of election news has been referred to as "horse race" coverage, and media critics have been criticizing its predominance in election news for decades. Thomas Johnson, in a 1993 examination of election news, identified seven elements of horse race coverage: public support, expectations, momentum, organizational and financial strength, endorsements, delegate count and campaign performance (Johnson, 1993).

In part, the media's emphasis on the election game reflects the tradition in journalism that news is to be found in activity, not in the underlying cause of activity. Political scientist, Matthew Kerbel, identifies five journalist orientations that combine to make horse race coverage a more likely topic of election coverage. Journalists generally share a sense that events constitute news; that news is dramatic; that news is conflictive; that news is predictable; and that news is best if it is easy to report. In the campaign setting these orientations combine to focus journalists away from issue-based reporting (Kerbel, 1994).

The winning and losing aspect of political coverage has been found to be quite evident in the reporting during presidential primaries. For example, in a state's presidential primary, there is nothing final about either a landslide or a narrow victory. The difference in the candidate who gets 51 percent and another who gets 49 percent is insignificant. However, the press does not operate under these same principles. The press

tend to project a single state's results to the nation as a whole, and sometimes the winner-take-all rule is applied (Patterson, 1980). For example, after George Bush finished behind Bob Dole and Pat Robertson in the Iowa caucuses in 1988, an NBC correspondent declared, "Bush is dead." A month later Bush had a lock on the Republican nomination (Patterson, 1991, p. 153).

Nimmo and Combs (1990) also explain that the candidates compete not only against one another but against a phantom candidate named "Expected." Expected is the percentage of the vote the news media anticipate the candidate will receive. The expected vote serves as a standard for measuring success or failure. If a candidate does better than expected, the mediated reality is of "exceeded expectations." If the candidate does worse than expected, the reality was "disappointing." Responding to this, the candidates try to manage the news media by down-playing their chances. "The goal is to mediate a reality of exceeding expectations in order to seize the 'momentum' in the unfolding campaign drama" (p. 59). The problem is that the press has no purpose other than news values for dividing the coverage between candidates. This creates a random partisanship into news coverage (Patterson, 1991).

Patterson (1991) and Sigelman and Bullock (1991) both found that although important changes have taken place in news coverage over the decades, the broad tendencies that marked political journalism in the past are the same ones that characterize it today; political news has always been more style than substance. But despite the fact that election coverage has long focused on the horse race aspect of a presidential

campaign, the dimensions of this coverage have changed with time. For example, during the 1970s, the networks developed their own opinion polls which elevated opinion poll results to a top position in election news (Patterson, 1991).

Much research has been dedicated to the use and development of polls in presidential campaign coverage (Lavrakas, Traugott & Miller, 1995; Lavrakas & Holley, 1991). Polls offer a quick, quantitative portrait of a campaign. They reveal who is ahead and sometimes why. And most conveniently for the reporters, the work is done by someone else. Content analyses reveal that opinion surveys are often relied upon as the principal basis for news stories (Seib, 1994).

In Patterson's (1991) study, he found that the number of poll stories increased sharply between 1972 and 1976 and rose again in 1980, to about one fourth of all election news, before declining slightly in 1984. The position of poll stories in a newscast also reveals the prominence that polls have achieved. In 1984, one half of all poll stories were broadcast as either the lead story or the next-to-lead story (Patterson, 1991).

Paul Lavrakas and Sandra Bauman (1995) examined all of the front page stories in 11 prominent dailies from July 1 through election day during the 1980, 1984, 1988 and 1992 presidential elections. They found that when they compared the 1980, 1984 and 1988 elections there was little difference in the number of front page poll stories; however, there was a large increase in 1992. Overall, they found that 1992 generated significantly more front page news stories than the previous three elections, but despite this they found

that the increase in the reporting of poll findings was seven times greater than the increase in the election news stories themselves.

After studying election coverage during the 1992 presidential election, Morin (1995) concluded that “the media remained overly fond of horse race polls, and remained too dependent on them to shape our coverage” (p. 124). Philip Seib summed up the horse race coverage aspect of using polls perfectly when he said, “Particularly as Election Day nears, poll stories develop a rhythm of their own - a drumbeat of increasingly dramatic intensity as the horses round the far turn and come into the home stretch” (Seib, 1994, p. 105).

Many studies over the years have focused on the “shrinking sound bite” (Hallin, 1992; Adatto, 1990; Patterson, 1993). Hallin (1992), in his content analysis of television network news coverage from 1968-1988, found that the connection between horse race coverage and sound bite journalism is very strong. Not only do the trends coincide historically, with horse race coverage increasing as sound bites shrink, but also over each year of the study, stories with high percentages of time devoted to horse race themes tended to have short sound bites, while more issue-oriented stories tended to have longer ones.

Patterson (1993) also found that presidential candidate quotes have been squeezed out of newspaper coverage. In 1960, the average continuous quote or paraphrase of a candidate’s words in a front page New York Times story was 14 lines. By 1992, the average had fallen to 6 lines.

One reason for the decrease in the time allotted to candidates is that the shorter campaigns of the past helped candidates maintain control of the agenda. Today, however, there is not enough fresh news during the 300-odd days of the election to meet the press' appetite for news. "When candidates say the same thing over and over," says television correspondent Judy Woodruff, "it is not news" (Patterson, 1991, p. 153).

Research has also focused on how the press reports on the candidates' image making strategies. Candidates have learned how to use television as a persuasive tool, and journalists have taken it upon themselves to tell the public about the images the candidates are trying to create. Kiku Adatto refers to this as stagecraft news, and based on a content analysis of television news coverage of the 1988 presidential campaign, states, "So attentive was television news to the way that campaigns constructed images for television that political reporters began to sound like theater critics, reporting more on the stagecraft than on the substance of politics" (Adatto, 1990, p. 5).

For example, Dan Rather, in live coverage following the first Bush-Dukakis debate, asked a series of pollsters and campaign aides questions like, "You're making a George Bush commercial and you're looking for a sound bite with George Bush...What's his best shot" (Boot, 1989, p. 27)?

Stagecraft news has also brought candidates' advertising campaigns into news programs. In 1968 there were only two clips of campaign ads, while in 1988 there were 125 clips (Adatto, 1990). However, according to Hallin, this should not be looked at as a completely negative occurrence. Media critics in the past had pressed networks to be less

passive and tell the public about the candidates' image making strategies. Journalists have done so, and this has been an advance because modern campaigning is based on refined, often manipulative techniques of image-making and news management, and the public needs to be made aware of how these techniques work (Hallin, 1992).

Finally, many scholars have sought to understand the press' tendency toward the personalization of the news. Issues are the intellectual heart of politics. Virtually every newsroom, in every campaign, proclaims that they will focus on the issues. "Ideally, it means producing comprehensive, thoughtful analyses of candidates' positions on economic growth, health care, education, defense, the environment, and so on" (Seib, 1994, p. 41). However, it does not work that way. One reason is that issue stories require a great deal of work which include researching in libraries, interviewing experts, and assembling data (Seib, 1994). Another reason is the public tends to regard such efforts as boring. The public tends to feel that people are more interesting than issues, and according to Rodger Streitmatter (1985) interesting presidents make more news. In a content analysis of three major newspapers, Streitmatter found that presidents with more robust personalities got more coverage.

Patterson (1980) often refers to something he calls "campaign issues." He says that these are issues that develop during the campaign, usually as a result of a candidate's error in judgment. They are relevant in the context of the campaign, but not important to the fate of the country. An example would be Jimmy Carter's reference to lust in an interview

with Playboy. Such issues fit the press' definition of good news. They are unusual, conflictual, and sensational.

Even innocent mistakes can become big news. In a 1988 speech, George Bush made reference to September 7 as the anniversary of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, but corrected the date to December 7, when he became aware of his misstatement. All three networks portrayed his mistake as a personal flaw rather than a misstatement that is inevitable when candidates make hundreds of speeches (Patterson, 1991).

Patterson (1980) found that when it comes to covering issues, print and television news are more alike than different. Both broadcast and print emphasize "campaign issues"; however, the tendency is more extreme on television. Larry Sabato says that television has not only personalized campaigns, but also conditioned its audience to think about the private lives of the rich and famous. The rules of television prominence now apply to all celebrities whether they preside in Hollywood or Washington (Sabato, 1991).

Roderick Hart, in his 1994 book, Seducing America, explains that television, with its focus on personality politics, distracts us from traditional political knowledge. It changes the criteria we use to make political decisions. The American people now know a great deal about politicians; however, at the same time they know very little .

The above research illustrates how scholars have studied the political reality constructed by news. These studies show that news portrays a political reality that emphasizes drama and personality, rather than policy and issues. The tendency to focus on

drama and personality demonstrates how political news relates to Bennett's information biases.

Internet Communication

Since the early 1990s the Internet has become impossible to ignore, even people who do not own a computer could not have missed the news stories, many of which focus on the Internet's novelty, its volume of information, how many people are using it, or prospects for future profits. However, while the popular media has been discussing the Internet since the early 1990s, communication researchers have largely ignored the Internet (Morris & Ogan, 1996). But, this seems to be changing. For example, the Winter 1996 issue of the Journal of Communication was dedicated entirely to the prospects and dimensions of Internet research. For example, Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) discuss why communication scholars should study the Internet and propose five defining qualities of the Internet to be focused on in research: multimedia, hypertextuality, packet switching, synchronicity and interactivity; and John December (1996) explains the importance of having distinct units of analysis when studying the Internet. But, before discussing the body of literature on the Internet thus far, it is crucial to explain the development of the Internet and the applications available on it.

Development of the Internet

The Internet originated in the United States in the 1960s when the Department of Defense funded research into reliable computer networks. The purpose of the new network was to enable scientists to do military-related research on secure computer systems many miles from their home institutions (Santaro, 1994).

This network was originally called ARPANET, and was renamed the Internet in 1983 when military related uses were split to form a sub-system called MILNET. As a result of the split, the information sharing capabilities of the network became available to computer users world wide. In the mid-1980s several agencies took over funding of the major links of the Internet. And during the 1980s and 1990s the Internet expanded exponentially as other computer networks were connected to it (Santaro, 1994).

Computer networks work like a telephone network. Every computer on a network has some kind of connection with other computers on the same network. The Internet is not the only computer network in use today. In the 1970s, when the early Internet was still military-related, many universities, businesses and other organizations developed their own computer networks; examples include Bitnet and Usenet. In the 1980s and 1990s commercial and community networks emerged to provide people with access to networks; examples include Prodigy, CompuServe, and the TELERAMA service in the Pittsburgh area (Santaro, 1994).

Overview of Internet Services

According to Santaro (1994), Internet services can be divided into two categories. The first is services that facilitate direct person to person contact, and falls under the heading of “computer-mediated communication.” Santaro (1994) discusses three types of computer-mediated communication on the Internet. First, is electronic mail (Email). Email is a computer function that allows one computer user to send an online message to another computer user. The second includes services that are similar to Email, but focus on group communication. These include computer conferencing services such as LISTSERVE and BBS (bulletin board systems). The third type is interactive messaging, sometimes called “chat,” where all parties to the communication must be online at the same time. This system operates much like a citizens-band radio (Santaro, 1994).

The second category involves services in which a user can access remote information for local use; Santaro (1994) refers to this as “informatics.” Examples include: directory services, where users can obtain Email addresses of other users; telnet, which connects users, through the Internet, to any other Internet-connected computer and allows them to use it as if it were in their own home; and ftp, which enables people to transfer computer files between their computer accounts on different Internet hosts (Santaro, 1994).

Three second generation Internet “informatics” applications have been developed. The second generation builds upon Internet functions such as telnet and ftp to create distributed information services. These include Gopher, Wide-Area Information Servers

(WAIS), and the World Wide Web (WWW). In the Gopher system, a network of servers contain data arranged in a set of interconnecting menus and computer files. The menu is the basic structure of the Gopher system. Menus can point to other menus, or to text, graphics, animation, or any other kind of computer file. As users select menu items, they are switched from one Gopher server to another. The Wide-Area Information Servers (WAIS) system serves as a search mechanism on the Internet (Santaro, 1994).

The World Wide Web is a widespread information service. It is all embracing in its capacity to interface to other information systems such as Gopher, WAIS, FTP, etc. The Web is based on a hypertext system. Hypertext is a system for linking documents to other related documents. Links are embedded within the text of a document in the form of highlighted words or images. Links are most commonly activated by pointing and clicking with a mouse. When the links are activated, the linked documents are instantly retrieved and displayed. The linked document itself can contain links to other documents, the process could go on infinitely. Gopher was the precursor to the Web; however, menu systems are less flexible than hypertext systems in that links can be set up from menus to information, but not from within the information. "Hypertext links mimic the way in which the human mind works by the association of ideas" (Ford, 1995, p. 5).

Is the Internet Mass or Interpersonal Communication?

While Santaro (1994) makes it appear that Internet applications can fit into a neat typology, others explain that the Internet's communication forms should be understood as

a continuum (Morris & Ogan, 1996; Ogan, 1993). A body of literature exists that seeks to explore the question of whether computer mediated communication is mass or interpersonal communication. These studies suggest the need to redefine the terms mass and interpersonal communication in the wake of the Internet's growth and development (Beniger, 1987; Reardon & Rogers, 1988; Rafaeli & LaRose, 1993).

Their arguments are based on the fact that the Internet plays with the source-message-receiver features of the traditional communication model, sometimes keeping them in traditional patterns, sometimes putting them into entirely new configurations. Each point in the traditional model of the communication process can vary on the Internet. Sources of the messages can range from one person in Email communication, to a social group in a LISTSERVE, to a large group on a World Wide Web page. The messages themselves can be traditional journalistic news stories created by a reporter, or simply conversations, such as in an Internet "Chat" group. The receivers of these messages can also number from one to potentially millions, and can possibly move back and forth between their role as audience members to producers of messages. Morris and Ogan state that a new communication technology such as the Internet provides scholars with the opportunity to rethink, not abandon traditional theories of mass and interpersonal communication (Morris & Ogan, 1996).

In particular, Morris and Ogan urge mass communication scholars to begin studying the Internet because the majority of research on computer mediated communication has been done by scholars of interpersonal communication and has been

virtually ignored by mass communication researchers. The reason for this is largely because early computer mediated communication most resembled interpersonal communication; however, this is changing (Morris & Ogan, 1996).

Much of the research to date on computer mediated communication has focused on earlier Internet applications such as Email. For example, some research has tried to distinguish it from interpersonal communication (Chesebro, 1985; Rafaeli, 1988). Other studies have explored the degree of social presence in computer mediated exchanges (Rice & Love, 1987; Walther, 1992). And most of the research has been conducted in the context of organizational communication (Allen & Hauptman, 1987; Fulk & Steinfield, 1990; Schmitz & Fulk, 1991; Kiesler & Sproull, 1992).

How Many People Use the Internet?

A great deal of time and money has been spent on trying to determine how many people use the Internet. “At the turn of the century, religious academics became greatly exercised over the question of how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Arguing about how many people are connected to the Internet is the modern equivalent” (Arthur, 1995, p. 29).

A seemingly straightforward question has produced answers anywhere from 3 million to 60 million. Most of the estimates are little more than guesses, some highly educated, some less so. Many studies have relied on counting the number of users per host, something that is difficult to measure considering an Internet host computer can be

anything from a single work station to a gateway computer serving an entire university. However, when Nielsen Media Research announced the results of its first Internet study, Time magazine called them the “first solid, scientific survey of the Internet” (Dibbell, 1995, p. 121).

The study took a random telephone sample of 4,200 households and businesses in the U.S. and Canada. According to Nielsen, there are approximately 24 million Internet users in the U.S. and Canada. Thirty-one percent of the users access the Internet at least once a day, and these users spend an average of five hours and 28 minutes online per week. Nearly two-thirds of Internet users are male; 53 percent of all users are between 16 and 34 years old; 64 percent have at least one college degree; and 25 percent of the World Wide Web users have incomes of more than \$80,000 (CommerceNet, 1995).

However, a few weeks after the results were released, Vanderbilt University Professor Donna L. Hoffman claimed that the Nielsen report, for which she was chief academic advisor, was flawed. Hoffman endorsed the report when it was issued, but retracted her support after examining the raw data. She said that the survey was skewed because the sample included people that were older, better educated, and more affluent than the U.S. population as a whole as represented by the 1990 US Census. Nielsen defended its findings, citing its reputation for reliability (Lewis, 1995).

Apparently, the debate goes on. But, despite the lack of precise numbers of Internet users, even the smallest estimates match the viewership of many cable networks, and research consistently finds that users of the Internet are younger, more educated and

more affluent than the general population, and that there is a greater proportion of men (Fineman, 1995). At the very least, the Nielsen survey will likely spark a boom in further research (Dibbell, 1996).

Communication Technology Use in Politics and Media

Use of the Internet for political campaign messages began during the 1992 presidential campaign. In 1992, technologies such as electronic databases and bulletin boards became primary rather than auxiliary channels for candidates' messages (Trent & Friedenber, 1995). For example, during the general election campaign, the texts of Bill Clinton's speeches along with his daily schedule, press releases, and position papers were made available through on-line computer services, such as CompuServe and Prodigy. Ordinary citizens had an easy way to obtain information that was previously only available to the press. Voters could read an entire speech instead of just hearing a soundbite on the news (Myers, 1993).

Computer-based communication allows fast, personalized, interactive communication, not just from candidate to voter, but also from voter to candidate and among voters. So far technology has worked on behalf of the political campaigns, but computer technology in the hands of citizens will alter the relationship between candidates and voters (Selnow, 1994). For example, while scanning the Internet, computer user Richard Hartman found a fellowship that shared his dislike for his congressman, then Speaker Tom Foley. Within weeks a campaign was launched to oust Congressman Foley.

Participants used commercial online services to find supporters and donors. Foley may have lost anyway, but the news of Hartman's effort helped spread the notion of the Speaker's vulnerability (Fineman, 1995).

The presidential campaign of 1996 marks the first presidential election where the World Wide Web is being widely used. In fact, Republican presidential candidates Lamar Alexander and Phil Gramm raced to announce that they were the first GOP candidates on the Web - both claim they were the first. And by the time the Republican primary was in full swing, all of the major candidates had a Web site (Mundy, 1995).

The 1996 presidential campaign is also providing media outlets with an opportunity to create, for the first time, original news content suited to the new medium's strengths: interactivity, immediacy, depth. "Competition - from The Microsoft Network to The Washington Post - will be fierce; all are angling to be credible and authoritative voices in the sprawling digital wilderness" (Houston, 1996, p. 26). According to Houston (1996), traditional news coverage in cyberspace will combine the immediacy of television with depth that surpasses even the thickest dailies. Many news organizations are already providing in-depth political information on the Web. For example, The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com>), promises political coverage that goes beyond what is in the newspaper; and the San Jose Mercury News (<http://www.sjmercury.com>) says it will offer a citizens' guide to the political system (Houston, 1996).

Communication scholar Gordon (1995) says that "It is a profound irony of our age: An explosion in the number and reach of communications media is coupled with

widespread consternation at the shallowness of our public discourse” (p. 173). Gordon argues that if journalists respond effectively to the potential of these new forms of communication, they will be able to regain their public respect and raise the level of public conversation on complex issues.

Reporters often express frustration at the limitations of their traditional formats when they want to provide information about complex issues. Gordon believes that the most relevant development on the Internet for reporters is the availability of point-and-click hypertext browsers. Use of the Internet can allow journalists to transcend the limitations of current technologies and guide the reader to more contextual information through the use of hypertext (Gordon, 1995).

Hypertext links could provide useful background information within a news story. For example, in an election season, journalists could supplement their stories with links to background information on the candidates’ positions written by the reporter. Another opportunity for journalists would be to direct people to appropriate Web cites of other organizations or political groups so that the reader can consult them after reading something in the news. The journalist could also warn the user of the potential biases in a particular Web page. So much information is available in so many places on the Internet, that the user is often lost in cyberspace. Journalists are experienced in dealing with massive amounts of information and organizing it into a manageable form. These skills are desperately needed on the Internet (Everette, 1995; Gordon, 1995).

However, at the present time it is not clear where this trend is going. “The primary contribution of the Internet to journalism at present is ideological...” (McChesney, 1996, p. 115). “Will this interactive potential be realized in a deeper sense of educating citizens and guiding journalists, or will it be a superficial public relations tool” (Bennett, 1996, p. 214)?

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The above literature illustrates the research on how political reality is constructed through news; it also summarizes the limited research on the Internet and how it has been used in politics thus far. The purpose of this study is to show how the 1996 presidential campaign was constructed on two World Wide Web media sites during the 1996 nominating conventions. This study posed the following research question:

How was the 1996 presidential election depicted on two World Wide Web media sites during the 1996 political conventions?

Based on the review of literature on politics and news, the following critical probes were used to guide the investigation:

- A. What was available to the users and how was the information accessed, i.e. through an interactive game, a video, a transcript or a news story?
- B. How was the information presented, i.e. color, layout, photographs?
- C. How was issue information presented?
- D. How was personal information about the candidates presented?

E. How were conflict and drama portrayed?

F. What was unique about the information, i.e. not readily available in other media?

In order to address these questions a qualitative analysis was chosen. Qualitative research involves the careful detailed description of that which is under study. The descriptions are then organized in a meaningful way according to the themes that emerge. Fundamentally, the goal of qualitative research is to preserve the form and content of that which is under study and to analyze its qualities, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal codification (Lindlof, 1995).

According to Lindlof (1995), a qualitative method is useful for a study that seeks to describe the social reality created by messages. This is because the context of what is presented can be preserved. Therefore, since the purpose of this study is to describe the political reality constructed by news content, a qualitative method is appropriate. According to Christians and Carey (1981), "A description is meaningful to the degree we can grasp the various arenas in which things stand. In this view, meaning is not determined by statistical indexes of external behavior but by context" (p. 350).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) state that when providing a rationale for qualitative methodology, "the most compelling argument is to stress the unique strengths of this paradigm for research that is exploratory or descriptive" (p. 39). The goal of this study is to systematically describe the content of two media Web sites during the 1996 nominating conventions; therefore, the nature of this research is well suited for qualitative research.

Not only is this study descriptive, but it is also exploratory. Little research exists on the content of the World Wide Web, therefore an initial exploratory study is needed to help explain this little-known phenomena.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) explain that qualitative methods are useful when studying new phenomena. This is because qualitative research on new phenomena often serves to identify important variables and generate hypotheses for future research. As demonstrated by the literature review, scholarly research on political news coverage of the Internet is quite limited. This study seeks to lay the ground work for research on political uses of the Internet and also spawn specific topics for future research. For example, by identifying specific variables and hypotheses, this study could provide research topics for quantitative analyses such as content analysis and survey research.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

The World Wide Web media sites that were examined in this study were PoliticsNow and AllPolitics. PoliticsNow is a political news site on the World Wide Web that is a combined effort of ABC News, Newsweek, The Washington Post, National Journal, and the Los Angeles Times. PoliticsNow began in June, 1996 and is the product of a merger of two earlier political Web sites, PoliticsUSA and ElectionLine. The editors of PoliticsNow claim that “In addition to all the news and information, there are enormous opportunities to make your voice heard, to talk with others about issues that concern you and to reach out and communicate directly with the decision makers in politics and government” (<http://www.politicsnow.com>). AllPolitics is a joint venture of Time magazine and CNN and was launched in January, 1996. The editors of AllPolitics say that they “plan to make AllPolitics the most trusted and comprehensive site for politics on the World Wide Web, a place where you can reconnect with the political process and our leaders” (<http://allpolitics.com>).

The analysis took place during the 1996 Presidential Election. The 1996 race pitted Democratic incumbent Bill Clinton against former Republican Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. The Clinton administration succeeded in reducing the federal budget by approximately \$700 billion and presided over a stable economy. Clinton’s vision in 1996 emphasized his deficit-reducing credentials and his record on downsizing government; however, he adhered to his belief that government is not bad and that it should create

opportunity. During his 1992 presidential campaign he was plagued by attacks on his character due to conflicting accounts of how he avoided military service during Vietnam and allegations of marital infidelity. Following the election suggestions of financial impropriety stemming from the Whitewater affair plagued his presidency and campaign (<http://allpolitics.com>).

Bob Dole was involved in three previous presidential campaigns, once as Gerald Ford's vice presidential nominee and twice in his own right. Bob Dole was a World War II war hero, a former GOP national chairman, five-term veteran of the Senate, Senate majority leader, both in the mid-1980s and again in the mid-1990s until he resigned in June of 1996. Dole was an experienced politician who also had a reputation for meanness. However, Dole went into the 1996 race insisting that he was more relaxed and at peace. Age was also an issue; Bob Dole would be 73 on Inauguration Day 1997. Dole's main vision was smaller government. He ran on a promise of returning power to the people through their state and local governments (<http://allpolitics.com>).

The specific time period under study was the three weeks surrounding the 1996 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. The Republican Convention was August 12 - 15 and Democratic Convention was August 26 - 29. The exact time frame for the analysis was August 11, 1996 through August 31, 1996. The nominating conventions offer an intense window of time in order to examine political journalism. According to William Adams, "Conventions offer the largest dose of political coverage the networks ever broadcast" (1985, p. 43). Today party conventions no longer serve the

practical function of nominating a candidate; they instead serve a more symbolic function. For example, the conventions provide an opportunity for a reaffirmation of the rightness of the American political process; they legitimize the selection of candidates; they provide the parties with a chance to show unity; and they also provide the public with an introduction to the candidates' rhetorical agenda for the campaign (Trent & Friedenberg, 1995).

Because of their mostly ritualistic nature, it has become increasingly fashionable to dismiss the national conventions as useless and seek a way to reform the process; however, that debate can be left to the political scientists because, regardless of their function the national party conventions are a prime element of media coverage, and thus prime fodder for communication research (Smith & Nimmo, 1991).

Procedures

The following information explains the steps that were taken while studying the Web sites each day. These procedures provided for the systematic gathering of the information needed to answer the above research question and critical probes.

First, although both Web sites were set up in a similar manner there were certain distinctions; therefore, throughout this discussion of procedures the differences are specified when necessary, otherwise the same procedures occurred on both sites.

The first step involved accessing the sites. The "front pages," which from here on out will be referred to as the *Home* pages, were the first thing that appeared on the screen

and the first thing analyzed. Each *Home* page was fully described every day by reporting what appeared on the page, as well as what hypertext links were there and what they lead to. For example, if a link lead to a news story, the story's headline, topic and original source was noted. A news story was defined as any text with a date, author and source listed at the top. If the *Home* page contained a link to a feature, the feature was briefly described. A feature was defined as any item that did not fall into the category of news story. For example, a quiz, a game, a biography or summary of the Republican party history. Each day the *Home* pages were printed. This initial analysis provided a brief description of the "front page news" on each Web site; however, both the news items and features were further described in the manner listed below.

In the top right corner of the AllPolitics *Home* page was a menu with eight boxes listed horizontally labeled: *News, Issues, Candidates, Analysis, Games, Polls, States* and *Home*. In the top center of the PoliticsNow *Home* page the menu items were listed vertically and were titled: *News, Views, Campaign 96, Issues, and Inter-Action*. After the description of the *Home* pages each of the succeeding boxes were clicked on in order. On both sites each menu item contained a front page that lead to the contents in that category. For example, the *Issues* page on both sites contained links to features that related to a description of the issues and the candidates' positions on the issues. The front pages of the menu items were also printed and described each day in the same manner as the *Home* page. And each item connected to the front pages was also described in full. If it was a

feature it was described according to the critical probes listed below. If it was a news item the analysis included noting the source, amount and type of news.

For example, on the PoliticsNow *News* page there were links to a list of all the political stories found in The Washington Post for the current day, as well as all the political stories for several weeks back. On PoliticsNow there were also editorial columns written by PoliticsNow journalists. Thus, the portion of the study that analyzed news stories focused on the source of the news (e.g., AP, CNN, AllPolitics, PoliticsNow), the amount of news available (e.g., three weeks worth of The Washington Post), and the type or category of news (e.g., editorial columns or lists of political news.). Also compiled in this portion were the news stories gathered from the summaries on the *Home* and *News* pages (as described above).

However, compilations of related news stories were treated as features. For example, an AllPolitics feature called Spin Patrol consisted of a compilation of Brooks Jackson's (CNN) stories on political advertising. And PoliticsNow had a feature called Between Bites which also compiled political advertising related stories, but from various sources. The distinction of news vs. feature was clear because, 1) these stories were joined together under a common topic, 2) the compilation was given a name by the editors of the Web site, i.e. Spin Patrol and Between Bites and 3) the stories were not as current as those that were classified as news.

In the analysis of features, only those that pertained to the presidential campaign were analyzed. For some features it was obvious that they did not relate to the presidential

election. For example, the *State* page on AllPolitics only contained links to information about Congressional and state politics, therefore it was not described. But if a feature even loosely related to the presidential election it was described. For example, a political trivia game, a news quiz, a list of political Web sites, a link to past platforms or the history of the political parties were described even though they often only indirectly related to the 1996 presidential election.

The features were studied according to the following critical probes:

1. What is the name of the feature? For example, some names of features were: The War Room, Chatter, Take A Stand and Inaugural Bowl. The names often functioned as links to the features.
2. What is the function of the feature? For example, the function of the AllPolitics feature Rate-O-Matic was to match users with their ideal candidate based on an issue questionnaire.
3. What type of information does the user get from the feature? For example, from the PoliticsNow feature Poll Track the user got the latest poll data.
4. Is interactivity involved? For example, do users get to do more than just read information off the pages; can they interact with other users or with the Web sites? For example, an interactive feature on AllPolitics called Chatter allowed users to participate in interviews with politicians and other opinion leaders.
5. Was the feature created for the Web site or was the information pulled from another medium? If it was pulled from another medium, which one? For example, on

PoliticsNow, there was a feature called Between Bites that consisted of a compilation of advertising related news stories from other media. This is an example of a feature being pulled from another medium. An example of a feature created for the Web site was AllPolitics' President '96, a game where users could become strategists in a fictitious presidential campaign.

6. What does it look like, set up color, graphics, photographs, etc.? Is there audio or video available? For example, AllPolitics' Sight and Sounds feature contained links to audio and video clips of the convention speeches.

This process was carried out through all of the menu items. This process was carried out every day; however, while the news changed daily, many of the features remained the same each day. Each day it was noted whether there were any new features and whether any had been removed. The existence of features not involving the presidential election were noted but not analyzed.

For each day of the study all of the printed material and all of the notes taken for each Web site were filed by date in two separate binders, so that at the end of the time period there were 21 entries for each Web site.

Once the material was collected a detailed description of the entire two Web sites was written. After all of the information was transcribed, the content was organized into categories based on the research questions. From these categories tables were created in order to summarize key information about the news and features. Illustrative examples were then presented in order to explain the items from each category in more detail.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Given the large amount of information gathered from the two Web sites, the results were broken down into several categories based on the framework of the research questions. The first section describes the *Home* pages of both Web sites, these pages alone deserve specific attention since they were the first pages users were exposed to when accessing the sites. The other categories are as follows: news coverage; issue presentation; presentation of personal information about the candidates; presentation of polls, advertising and finances; availability of interactive features; availability of unmediated information; availability of mobilizing information; and presentation of historical context.

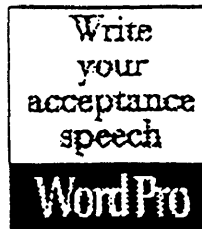
Home Pages

Figures 1 and 2 are examples of *Home* pages for PoliticsNow and AllPolitics. The *Home* pages are the front pages of the entire Web sites and are the first things revealed when the user accesses the sites. Although both the Web sites' *Home* pages changed daily, they always followed the same format.

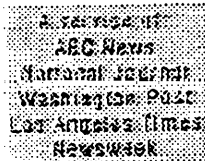
The *Home* page for Aug. 30 on PoliticsNow can be seen in Figure 1. The top portion of the page, which contained the PoliticsNow logo in red, white and blue on the left; a square graphical advertisement on the right; and the menu listed down the middle, was the same on all the front pages of the main menu items. The menu items, in blue print with red triangular bullet points, were as follows: *News*, *Views*, *Campaign 96*, *Issues*, and



- News
- Views
- Campaign '96
- Issues
- Inter-Action

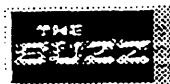


← Main Search Help Index →

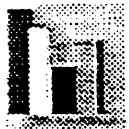


Friday
August 30, 1996

Bridge Over Troubled Water



Leaving Town
In A Fetish
Frenzy



Poll Track:
Tracking Up
For Clinton



Rating the
Electorate



Voter Booth:
Clinton Re-elect



Interactive
Biographies
of Clinton and
Dole



Associated Press

A confident Bill Clinton claimed the Democratic presidential nomination for the second time, looking to the future with a lengthy list of proposals for a second term. Clinton seized on Bob Dole's nostalgic vow to "Be the bridge to a time of

tranquility, faith, and confidence in action " contrasting it with his own plans "To build a bridge to the 21st Century." Taking credit for a broad range of American progress in the past three years, Clinton returned to the metaphor of his train trip to Chicago: "We are on the right track, but our work is not finished."

Leading in the latest polls, Clinton declared his differences with Bob Dole, but promised that he would not attack the Republican nominee personally. "This must be a campaign of ideas, not insults." Even as he promised a clean campaign, a messy sex scandal cost Clinton his top political strategist. Dick Morris left the campaign after a tabloid detailed his relationship with a prostitute.

- From the Podium: Full text of speeches from every night in Chicago.
- Multimedia: The next best thing to being



Oh, how we'll miss those Democratic Macarena breaks!

What did it all mean? Talk about it in Caucus.

Read the transcript of our virtual press conference with ABC's Hal Bruno.

Think Clinton deserves to be re-elected? Vote your choice in our virtual ballot box.

Compare the platforms: Republican and Democrat.

It's serious now. Follow the campaigns using our calendar.

Clinton has a sustained bounce from the convention.

Best Bytes

- ★ [Take The "Bob & Jack" Quiz](#)
- ★ [Multimedia Bob](#)
- ★ [Multimedia Jack](#)
- ★ [Convention History](#)
- ★ [Editor's Picks](#)
- ★ [Voter's Voice](#)
- ★ [1996 GOP Platform](#)
- ★ [Bob Dole Bio](#)
- ★ [RealAudio Moments](#)
- ★ [Full GOP Texts](#)

REFORM PARTY CONVENTION**Perot Wins Reform Party Nomination**

Reform Party founder Ross Perot has won his party's nomination for president, beating challenger Dick Lamm by a two-to-one margin, a party official announced Saturday.

[Full Story...](#)[More News...](#)**SAN DIEGO 96**

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Inter-action. Beneath them, in smaller red print, were additional menu items: *Main* (brings the user back to the *Home* page), *Search* (old news stories can be accessed through a search mechanism), *Help*, and *Index* (table of contents). And on the top right side of the page, the day and date was displayed.

From Aug. 11 - Aug. 18 and from Aug. 25 - Aug. 30 there was a red, white and blue Convention Special icon at the top of the *Home* page (as seen in Figure 1). The icon linked the user to PoliticsNow's convention feature. This was a feature that contained convention information that related to the current conventions and the history of the conventions. The feature was available during the entire study period; however, the banner link was only displayed during the above dates. There were also additional links to the feature throughout all of the pages on the Web site during the three week time period. The components of the feature will be described below.

The center of the *Home* page contained several headlines along with summaries of the day's top news stories. Within the summary there were links that could be clicked on to reveal an entire news story. Most of the text was in black lettering, with the words that contained the hypertext links underlined and in color (this applied to the text and links throughout the Web site). Throughout the summary of events there would also be links to such items as full texts of speeches, audio and video clips of speeches, the full texts of the party platforms, and other features that related to the current news.

The *Home* page shown in figure 1 contained some of these links. For example, the headline "Bridge Over Troubled Water" was a link to a Washington Post news story about

Clinton's nomination speech and the "Democratic presidential nomination" link connected the user to a Los Angeles Times story about Clinton's speech. The next two links in the summary "nostalgic vow" and "his own plans" connected the user to full texts of Clinton's and Dole's speeches. If the users missed hearing the speeches they did not have to rely on the news stories alone. They could read full texts of the speeches or they could connect to audio or video clips. The "Multimedia" link at the bottom of the page contained audio and video clips of all the major convention speeches.

Figure 1 shows that down the left column of the *Home* page were links to several features and news items. The same news columns and features were displayed every day; however, the items were updated regularly. They included: The Buzz, Poll Track, Money Talk, Voter Booth, Parallel Lives, and the Source. These items will be explained below. The information down the right column was titled "Hot List." This column also contained links to news stories and features; however, the content here changed almost daily and was in text form only.

The *Home* page for Aug. 18 on AllPolitics can be seen in Figure 2. Like PoliticsNow, the top portion of the page was the same on all of the main menu front pages. The top left corner of the page contained the AllPolitics logo and the top center of the page contained a menu with eight boxes listed horizontally labeled: *News*, *Issues*, *Candidates*, *Analysis*, *Games*, *Polls*, *States* and *Home*. Directly below this menu were five additional items: *Dialogue* (a bulletin board for AllPolitics users), *Search*, *Contents* (index of everything on the site), *Help* (for technical difficulties), and *Feedback* (send

messages to the editors of AllPolitics). On Aug. 23, an additional item was added to this lower portion of the menu, *Resources*. *Resources* will be described in more detail below.

Down the left column of the page were links to features (and occasionally news stories). The column was labeled “Best Bytes” and changed almost daily based on newsworthy items. For example, the “Best Bytes” column on the *Home* page shown in figure 2 contained: a “Multimedia Bob” link which connected the user to audio and video recordings of Dole’s speeches, a link to the “1996 GOP Platform,” a “Bob Dole Bio” link and a “Full GOP Texts” link.

Down the center of the page was one or two of the day’s headlines. Beneath the headline was a brief summary of the story and a link to the full story. Next to the full story link was a link to “more news,” which brought the user to the *News* page.

Much like PoliticsNow, in the days surrounding the Republican and Democrat Conventions, there was either a “San Diego 96” feature (as shown in Figure 2) or a “Chicago 96” feature linked to the *Home* page. For a brief period there was also a link to a “Reform Party Convention” feature (also shown in Figure 2). The contents of these features will be discussed below.

After the analysis of the *Home* pages, an analysis of the news available on the sites took place each day.

News Coverage

Much of the content on the Web sites consisted of traditional news stories that were written specifically for the sites or that were pulled from other media. Both sites had entire menu items dedicated to news. The news available consisted of stories that were directly featured on the front pages of the Web sites and links to lists and databases filled with news. The sites presented both hard news stories and editorial columns.

PoliticsNow

On PoliticsNow news was found throughout the Web site. However, almost all of the daily news was located on the *Home* and *News* pages. The *Campaign 96* page also contained news; however, it was generally a repeat of news stories found on the *Home* or *News* pages. The *News* page looked just like the *Home* page with the exception of the information down the left column.

Figure 3 illustrates the news stories available on one day during the study period. Figure 3 includes all of the stories that were linked directly from the summaries on the *Home* and *News* pages on Aug. 15.

It can be seen that while some stories were written specifically for PoliticsNow, most were pulled from other media. Of the twenty-five stories presented that day only six were written specifically for PoliticsNow. Figure 3 also illustrates how much of the news was new that day and how much was kept from previous days. Fourteen news stories first appeared on that date, while eleven were still available from previous days. The *News* and

Home pages were updated every day during the study period; however, sometimes news stories were kept available from previous days and reworked into the summaries.

Fig. 3 - News Featured Aug. 15 on PoliticsNow's *News* and *Home* Pages

Headline	Source
The Anatomy of a Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech	The Washington Post
Dole Still Ready to Mince Words	Los Angeles Times
Lamm Finally Gets to Vote for Himself	The Washington Post
Ohio Congresswoman Refuses Perot V.P. Offer	Associated Press
Dole Nominated with Lavish Praise	The Washington Post
Clinton Ex-Partner is Cooperating with Whitewater Counsel, Sources Say	The Washington Post
President Tunes Out GOP	The Washington Post
Clinton Sets Forth His Vision in New Campaign Book	Los Angeles Times
Speaking About the Man I Love	The Washington Post
Gender Gap	ABC News
Clinton Holds Lead Over Dole	PoliticsNow
PoliticsNow Poll Shows Convention Impact	PoliticsNow
Diplomatic Corps Observe Conventions	PoliticsNow
Microsoft Goes to the Convention	PoliticsNow
The GOP's Unconventional Coordinator *	The Washington Post
GOP's Top Soft Money Contributors *	The Washington Post
In the Loop: Snail of Approval *	The Washington Post
Nickels Whips His Whip Office Into Shape *	National Journal
President Clinton Becoming Candidate Clinton *	Associated Press
DNC Crashes *	Convention Daily
Media Lets Democrats Into Republican Conventions *	Los Angeles Times
Lamm Asks Perot to Step Aside *	Associated Press
Political Journal with Hal Bruno - Analysis of Campaign *	ABC News
A Brief Polling Primer *	PoliticsNow
Squawk of the Town *	PoliticsNow

* indicates that the item was available before Aug. 15

As mentioned earlier, the one difference between the *Home* and *News* pages was the information down the left column of the pages. On the *News* page there were links to

additional news stories from other media. Figure 4 shows the type of information available from these sources.

Fig. 4 - Summary of News From other Media Available on PoliticsNow's *News* Page

PoliticsNow	Description
ABC News	Select transcripts from Nightline and This Week with David Brinkley; weekly column by Hal Bruno; transcripts from World News Tonight's "Listening to America" series
The Washington Post	The current day's political stories plus the stories from the last five weeks
National Journal	Select items from several National Journal publications
Newsweek	The current week's political stories plus the stories from the last four issues
Los Angeles Times	The current day's political stories plus the stories from the last five weeks
Associated Press	Stories for the current day - updated constantly
Hotline	Political news service available during the conventions only
Convention Daily	Approximately 30 convention related stories per day from National Journal

For example, by clicking on a Los Angeles Times icon the user could access all of the political stories found in that day's edition. This list included, but was not limited to, the stories that were directly featured in the summaries on the *Home* and *News* pages. So in addition to the stories that were featured in the news summaries, the user also had access to all the political stories in several other media sites.

News items could also be found on the PoliticsNow *Views* page. This page had a slightly different format than the *Home* and *News* pages and contained a different type of news. This page contained several columns written by PoliticsNow journalists. Each column dealt with a specific topic. Figure 5 summarizes the type of news presented in each of these columns. Each day three or four of the columns were featured down the center of

the page along with a brief summary of the story. The rest were listed by name down the left side of the page.

Fig. 5 - Summary of News Items Found on the PoliticsNow's *Views* Page

PoliticsNow	Description
Living in Spin	Behind the scenes information on current topics in the news
The Buzz	Behind the scenes information on current topics in the news
Money Talks	Focuses on financial issues in politics
Medium Cool	Focuses on media issues
Net Watch	Focuses on Internet related issues
On the Fringe	Tongue and cheek column regarding trivial political occurrences
Health Watch	Focuses on health care issues
Convention Dispatch	Trivial news sent by Email from the convention floor

Most of these news columns did not pertain directly to the presidential election, and three of the columns, Net Watch, On The Fringe and Health Watch, were never updated during the entire study period. However, The Buzz, Living in Spin and Medium Cool were updated everyday or every two days; and Money Talks was updated about once a week. All of the columns in Figure 6 were written by PoliticsNow journalists.

Fig. 6 - News found on the PoliticsNow *Views* Page on Aug. 28

Name of item	Headline
Living in Spin	Clinton's Nixon Connection
The Buzz	The Wet Eyes Have It
Money Talks	Why They Don't Vote *
Medium Cool	And The Winners Are....
Net Watch	The Cookie Monster *
On the Fringe	Politicians Posing as Reporters *
Health Watch	Clinton and Health Care *

* indicates that the item was available before Aug. 28

Figure 6 illustrates the titles of what was available on Aug. 28. For example, James Pinkerton's Living in Spin column, contained two pages of observational reporting and commentary from the Democratic convention, and a two-page comparison of President Clinton and Richard Nixon. Regarding the convention he wrote, "Evidently the Democrats haven't mastered the Deaverian art of making every moment pulse along, with canned pseudo-disco music, if nothing else. There was no band, no nothing, just everyone milling around in the buzzy monotone of a big crowd." Regarding Clinton and Nixon, he wrote,

Nixon's character, historians agree, was his fatal flaw. Character is destiny for Clinton, too. Like Nixon before him, Clinton is an expert at the lawyerly use of slippery language. Nixon was always accepting responsibility, but not blame. Clinton has taken such cleverness to new extremes, as with his pot-smoking half truth: "I did not violate the laws of my country."

Bob Balkin's column, "The Wet Eyes Have It," was also a commentary on the Democratic convention. It began discussing the tear-jerk speeches of the first night and then went into more personal details about attending the convention, for example, the bus ride to the United Center.

Supervising the bus was Officer Mike Sullivan a uniformed, 23-year veteran of the Chicago Police Dept. In a non-stop monologue, which must have been perfected before countless classes of school children, Sullivan welcomed us to Chicago, told us to enjoy the town, the food and the art. His agenda, however, was not to flack the city, but rather to promote his profession. He repeatedly described how "rough" his job is. He said he wasn't in town during the '68 convention; he was, rather, in Vietnam. He had little good to say about the media. He hated the fact that the pre-convention Chicago coverage was dominated by what he called "Al Capone and 1969."

These segments of the columns illustrate the nature of the items found on the *Views* page. The *Views* page was to some extent PoliticsNow's editorial page.

AllPolitics

The AllPolitics *News* page was set up differently than PoliticsNow. News stories were displayed by presenting a series of headlines directly at the top of the *News* page with links to the full stories. At the bottom of the list of headlines was a link to “more stories.” When this area was accessed there were additional stories from the current day or stories from the previous day. At the bottom of the “more stories” page was an archive of all the stories for 1996. Figure 7 shows what was available in the news headlines on Aug. 26.

Fig. 7 - Aug. 26 Headlines on AllPolitics’ *News* Page

Headline	Source
Reeve: American Family Must Support Those Hurting	AllPolitics
A Democratic Paean To Average Folks	AllPolitics
Hillary Clinton Says Welfare Bill Fixable	AllPolitics
After 28 Years, Democrats Return	AllPolitics
News Briefs: Bradley in 2000	AllPolitics
Look for the Union Label	CNN
An Explosion of Political Commentary	CNN
Dole Launches First Attack Ad	AllPolitics
Clinton: Deny Guns to Domestic Abusers	AllPolitics
Looking for Portents Amid the Fluff	CNN
Carter Would Rather Fish than Schmooze	AllPolitics

Figure 7 shows that, unlike PoliticsNow, most of the featured news was written for the Web site. However, there were also fewer news stories that were featured on a daily basis. The concept of keeping old stories available was also different on AllPolitics, because below the current news was a link to an archive of all old stories. Therefore, in a sense no old stories were “featured,” but all old stories were readily available. Another

interesting aspect about the news stories on AllPolitics was that at the bottom of every news story were links to related news and a search mechanism to look for additional related articles.

AllPolitics also had links to lists of news stories from other media. These links were located at the bottom of the *News* page below the headlines. Links to news from other media could also be found on the *Analysis* page. Figure 8 summarizes what was available from other media during the study period. Links to Time Daily, AP, Lexis-Nexis and Kids Eye View were found on the *News* page and links to CNN and Time were found on the *Analysis* page.

Fig. 8 - Summary of News Available on AllPolitics From Other Media

AllPolitics	Description
Time Daily	Approximately 3 or 4 convention related stories per day
AP (Newstream)	The most current 80 political stories
Lexis-Nexis	News from papers around the country
Kids Eye View	Stories from a group of young journalists who covered the conventions
CNN	Select transcripts from CNN political programs
Time	The current week's stories plus an archive of all stories for 1996

There were also additional news items that were created specifically for the AllPolitics Web site. Links to these columns were also found at the bottom portion of the *News* page. Figure 9 summarizes the news items created for AllPolitics. These news items provided behind the scenes information about the conventions.

Fig. 9 - News Items Created For AllPolitics

AllPolitics	Description
Email from the Floor	Daily Email memos from AllPolitics journalists on the convention floor
The Insider	Short columns about what politicians were saying about the conventions

Figure 10 shows the headlines for the news items created for AllPolitics available on Aug. 13. For example, “Thanks, But No Thanks” included Massachusetts Governor William Weld’s take on Powell, Buchanan and Kemp.

On Powell’s speech: “I heard General Powell last night. He was great. I hear he wrote the thing himself. I think there should be six pro-choice speakers at this convention. Not one.”

On Pat Buchanan: “He’s fun to be around, have a beer with. I disagree with him about EVERYthing.”

On Jack Kemp: “Kemp is a real three-Martini lunch for that ticket! A real mood-changer. Did you ever have a bad three-martini lunch?”

Email from the Floor was written in memo form. Often the journalists were from media organizations such as Time or CNN, but the item was created for AllPolitics. For example, the top of “A Brooding Silence on Abortion” looked like a memo and read, To AllPolitics, Fm: Cathy Booth/Time Daily, In: San Diego, Posted: Aug. 13. This Email was about the absence of a floor fight on abortion at the Republican Convention and quotes many of the protesters’ angry reactions.

Fig.10 - News Items Created for AllPolitics Available Aug. 13 (not from headlines)

Headline	Name of Item
Subject: Life in the Anchor Booth Day 2	Email from the Floor
Subject: A Brooding Silence on Abortion	Email from the Floor
Kasich vs. The Party	The Insider
Thanks, But No Thanks	The Insider
Tell Forbes to Shut Up!	The Insider

Issue Presentation

Both the Web sites had *Issues* pages and both sites had two ways of presenting the issues. One way was to give the history and background on the issues and the other was to give the candidates' positions on the issues.

Fig. 11 - Issue Coverage

PoliticsNow	Description
At A Glance	Brief summaries of current facts about the issue
Time Line	History of the issue
Legislation	Explanation of legislation pertaining to the issue
Presidential Candidates	Clinton's and Dole's positions on the issues
In the News	List and links to related news stories
AllPolitics	Description
Quick Take	Brief definition and summary of the issue
Related Stories	List and links to related news stories
Public Opinion	If available, a recent opinion poll related to the issue
On the Issues	Clinton's and Dole's positions on the issues
Counterpoint	A debate type item featuring two side-by-side opinions on an issue
Take a Stand	Users can answers a set of issue-related questions and see the responses of other users
Rate-O-Matic II	An interactive feature that matches voters with their ideal candidate by having them answer a series of questions
It's the Issue Stupid	Dole's and Clinton's answers to the questions from Rate-O-Matic

Figure 11 summarizes the issue features available on both Web sites. Both sites had in-depth information about the issues; however, only AllPolitics had additional issue related features such as an interactive questionnaire. Both sites housed this information on the *Issues* page. However, on PoliticsNow specific issues would sometimes be linked to the *Home* or *News* pages to supplement a news story. For example, on August 23, the day

Clinton signed the welfare bill, there was link to the welfare information page along side the news stories.

Figure 12 is the front page of PoliticsNow's *Issues* page. Users could click on the underlined items down the center of the page for issue information or they could select an issue from the left column.

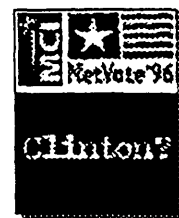
For example, if the user selected "Abortion" a two-page summary was revealed that contained a brief introduction of the issue. It contained information regarding President Clinton's actions, the actions of the 104th Congress, the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, and the appointment of Rep. Henry Hyde as chairman of the GOP platform committee. Down the left column of this summary page were the following links: At a Glance, Time Line, Legislation, Presidential Candidates and the Latest News.

The At a Glance page contained brief bullet-pointed summaries of abortion statistics. For example, "Approximately 29 percent of all U.S. pregnancies not ending in miscarriage are aborted" and "Less than 10 percent of abortions are performed after the first trimester; less than one percent are performed after the twenty-fourth week."

The Time Line page contained a summary of key abortion related events from Jan. 22, 1973, the day the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe vs. Wade*, to June 17, 1996, the day the Supreme Court overturned a decision by the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to throw out a ban on abortions in the 20th week of pregnancy. There were eleven additional key dates and summaries between the two.



- ▶ News
- ▶ Views
- ▶ Campaign '96
- ▶ Issues
- ▶ Inter-Action



← Main — Search — Help — Index →

Pocketbook Issues Define the Parties

While both the Democrats and Republicans may look increasingly alike in a variety of areas, issues that affect the pocketbook still divide them.

Taxes and spending, interest rates, the minimum wage, the state of the economy are all issues that will have a bigger impact on the November elections than say, abortion -- at least if history is any guide.

In this section, *PoliticsNow* aims to provide comprehensive information on the most important issues of today: Your suggestions are welcome.

In the mean time, we hope you find this section of our web site helpful in making up your mind about news and events that concern you. Start by clicking on an issue on the left. — Steve Mitra, Features Editor, *PoliticsNow*



So you know where
you stand on the
issues. Got a clue
'bout your rep?
Check the Record.



Letters
to the
Editor

Tell us what you
think

- Your Money
- Abortion
- Campaign Reform
- Crime
- Environment
- Foreign Policy
- Gun Control
- Health Care
- Immigration Policy
- The Internet
- Jobs and the Economy
- Legal Rights
- Taxes and Spending

The Legislation page contained information regarding the partial-birth abortion ban, health insurance coverage for abortions, federal funding for human embryo research and Sen. Boxer's Res. 67 which urges the Justice Department to "protect persons seeking to provide or obtain reproductive health services."

The Presidential Candidates page had Clinton's and Dole's positions summarized by PoliticsNow (Both sites only had positions available for Clinton and Dole). It also contained quotations from the two candidates regarding abortion. Clinton's quote came from an MTV interview on Aug. 11, 1995.

"I think there are too many abortions in America. I have always believed that abortion should be rare, but that they should be safe and legal until the third trimester when the child can live outside the mother's womb...But I think that leaving the decision to the woman and her doctor, and whoever else she wishes to consult, I think on balance is still the right decision in our country."

Dole's PoliticsNow summary was as follows:

Dole's record in support of human life has been constant and unwavering. He has supported a constitutional amendment to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Throughout his career in the Senate, he has voted against measures that would promote and encourage abortions in any way. He opposes the Freedom of Choice Act, supports parental notification for minors seeking abortions and has backed the Republican platform in 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1992. He favors a ban on late-term, "partial-birth" abortions. Dole also opposes the use of taxpayer money for abortions.

Finally, The Latest News page contained links to 23 abortion related stories from March 1996 to June 1996. The other issues shown in figure 12 followed the same format and contained similar information. The extensiveness of the information varied from issue to issue.

Figure 13 shows the AllPolitics *Issues* page. The issues contained in the matrix on the left side of the page could be accessed to retrieve information similar to that found on PoliticsNow. The categories that were revealed when an issue was accessed included: Quick Take, Related Stories and Public Opinion. While the information was similar, it was a bit less extensive.

AllPolitics had an interesting feature located on the *Issues* page called the Rate-O-Matic II. This feature helped users match their issue positions with that of Clinton and Dole (Rate-O-Matic I helped match users with their perfect Republican candidate during the primary). The interactive feature contained 23 questions for users to answer. Once the questionnaire was completed, it could be submitted for scoring. A score would return immediately and tell the user which candidate was the closest match.

Some of the questions included: “Do you favor eliminating the U.S. Department of Education?” “Do you support a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion?” “Do you support a universal federal health-care program to guarantee coverage to all Americans regardless of income?” “Should there be more restrictions on purchase and possession of firearms?” “Do you favor restrictions to further limit the number of legal immigrants entering the United States?” and “Do you support a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution?” The user could select yes, no or undecided.

All of the features shown in Figure 13 have been explained except for the Flat Tax Evaluator. That is because this item was an out-dated feature that connected the user to a site outside of AllPolitics.

Campaign '96 Briefings

Abortion	Affirmative Action
Budget	Crime
Education	Environment
Foreign Affairs	Health Care
Immigration	Taxes
Values	Welfare Reform
Medicare	

Counterpoint

[The Fight Against Drugs | Archive](#)

Take A Stand

[Tell us what you think](#)

FLAT TAX

[A simpler, fairer tax system? Check it out.](#)

Rate @ Matic II

[Clinton or Dole? Your choice.](#)

The Issues Study

[Confused about where they stand on the issues? Take a gander at our two-minute guide.](#)



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Presentation of Personal Information About the Candidates

Both Web sites had pages dedicated to each candidate. Clinton's and Dole's pages were quite extensive, while Ross Perot's contained much less information. There was also limited information on Dick Lamm, Harry Browne, Ralph Nader and John Hagelin. The candidate pages on PoliticsNow were located on the *Campaign 96* page in a link called the "White House." On AllPolitics these pages were found on the *Candidates* page. The pages were also found in the convention special features on both sites.

Fig. 14 - Candidate Information

PoliticsNow	AllPolitics
Parallel Lives - multimedia biographies	Vital stats
Biography	Early life
Positions	War & Injury
Profiles	Family
Staff	Political Beginnings
How to Help	Campaign Finance
News search	Skeletons
Texts, audio and video of speeches	Road to 96
	Announcement Speech
	The race so far
	On the issues
	Timeline
	Time Coverage

Figure 14 displays the features and categories of information about the candidates available on both Web sites. All of these items were not available for each candidate, but most were available for Clinton and Dole.

The candidate pages on PoliticsNow looked similar to the *News* page. Down the center of the page was a summary of current news pertaining to that candidate (most were

repeats of those found on the *Home* and *News* pages). In the top corner of the page was a picture of the candidate and at the bottom of the page was the candidate's campaign headquarters' address, phone number and Web site address. On Clinton's and Dole's page there were additional links to items such as: headlines from Lexis-Nexis, a Newsweek profile, and select full text speeches from the candidate. On Ross Perot's page the only additional information was a link to headlines from Lexis-Nexis.

Down the left column of Clinton's and Dole's page were links to the following: biography, positions, PoliticsNow profile, Hotline search, staff, how to help and a link to the party page (DNC or RNC). On Perot's page there were links to a PoliticsNow profile, a Hotline search and the Reform Party page. The party pages gave brief summaries of the parties as well as information regarding how to contact party officials.

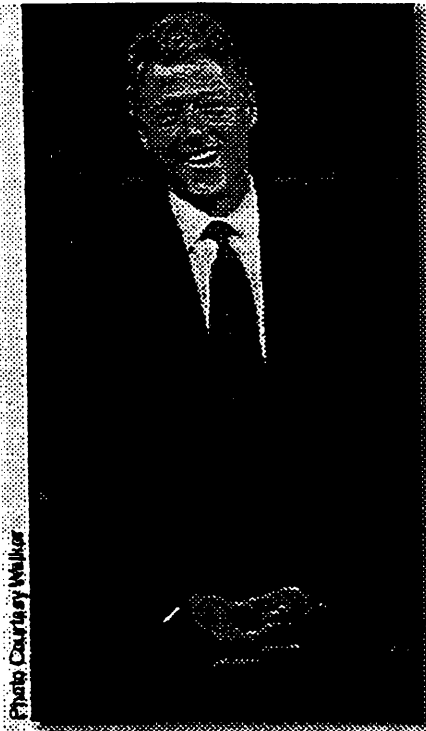
Figure 15 shows Clinton's candidate page on AllPolitics. This front page contained what AllPolitics referred to as a "Quick Take." It was a brief summary of Bill Clinton's life and career. It ran down the center of the page with links to additional information down the right side. Dole's page looked the same with slightly different categories. For example, Dole had a link to a page called "War & Injury"; Clinton did not.

Many of the links were self explanatory as to the type of information they contained. For example, "On the Issues" contained information similar to that on the *Issues* page. However, "Tidbits" may not be as straight forward. It contained brief bullet-pointed trivial facts about Clinton such as: "In 1972, Bill and Hillary went to Texas to work for George McGovern's presidential campaign," "Clinton made \$35,000 a year as

Bill Clinton

Quick Take

Bill Clinton was only 46 when he was elected the 42nd president of the U.S. Fourteen years earlier, he had been the nation's youngest governor when his fellow Arkansans elected him in 1978. Though bright (a Rhodes Scholar and Yale Law graduate) and ambitious, Clinton has also been vulnerable to attacks on his character.



Conflicting accounts of how he avoided military service during Vietnam, allegations of marital infidelity, and, following his 1992 election, suggestions of impropriety stemming from the Whitewater and so-called Travelgate affairs have plagued his campaign and his presidency.

Charitably put, Clinton's first two years saw mixed results. He drew fire early on for pushing for gays in the military. He fumbled on judicial appointments. Republicans opposed his committing U.S. troops in Haiti. Most spectacular was the highly visible failure of the Clinton health care reform effort, led by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. The president triumphed with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, but it came only over loud

LIFE

[VITAL STATS](#)
[EARLY LIFE](#)
[FAMILY](#)
[HOBBITS](#)

CAREER

[POLITICAL CAREER](#)
[CAMPAIGN '92](#)
[CAMPAIGN FINANCE](#)
[SKELETONS](#)

CAMPAIGN '96

[THE RACE SO FAR](#)
[ON THE ISSUES](#)

Governor of Arkansas, the lowest salary of any U.S. governor,” and “Clinton is the second person in Arkansas history to serve five terms as governor.”

One of the more sensational pages was the “Skeletons” page. It provided links to summaries of Clinton’s scandals. When the page was accessed the title “Bill Clinton Skeletons” appeared in large print across the page. Beneath it read, “Oh, where to begin? Bill Clinton has been dogged by questions of character, marital infidelity and financial transgressions throughout his political career. AllPolitics has compiled information on several of the more notable.” Beneath this introduction were links to summaries of the following: the Gennifer Flowers story, the draft deferment, Whitewater, the FBI File Flap/Travelgate and the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit.

Dole also had a “Skeletons” page. However, he did not always. At the beginning of the study period only Clinton had the “Skeletons” page, but by the end both did. Perhaps there was a complaint. When Dole’s “Skeletons” page was accessed it said “Controversy/Ethics” in large print across the top. Beneath it read, “Some of the more salacious allegations against Bob Dole appear in ‘Senator For Sale,’ by former Dole aide Stanley Hilton, who worked for the senator during 1979 and 1980. The book takes one of the most critical views of Dole’s relationship to corporations and his position changes on issues.” AllPolitics then continued by summarizing the allegations made in the book.

There was a unique item on PoliticsNow that provided candidate background; however, it was not located on the candidate pages. It was called Parallel Lives. This feature was a multimedia presentation of the biographies of Clinton and Dole. Through

this feature the user could view the candidates' biographies in four ways. These four ways were listed down the center of the feature's front page.

First, the user could, "Trace the candidates through the decades in a photo-packed digital timeline." When the user selected this option the first page of the timeline appeared. At the very top were the following decades listed in small print: 1920s-30s, 1940s, 1940s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s. The user could select any of these decades to find out what was happening to Clinton, Dole and the world at that time. In the years before Clinton was born, his family's history was shown.

Figure 16 shows the timeline for the first half of the 1970s. The left column contains information about Clinton, the middle about Dole and the third about world events. The underlined words under Clinton and Dole could be clicked on to reveal more detailed information about the events. There was no additional information for the world events. As shown in Figure 16, in 1971 Clinton met Hillary, Dole headed the RNC and it was the year of the Attica prison revolt.

The next way the user could get biographical information about the candidates was to "Experience archival photographs, video, sound and documents linked from each year in the timeline." When the user selected a link for either Clinton or Dole a multimedia page appeared. From this page the user could access information about Bill Clinton such as: a video clip of his inauguration in 1993, an audio clip of him playing the saxophone in 1992, or video from when he won his first election as governor in 1978. For Bob Dole the user could: see a video of Dole's farewell address to the Senate in 1996, hear him speak at

Fig. 16 - PoliticsNow's Parallel Lives Feature

1920s-30s | 1940s | 1950s | 1960s | 1970s | 1980s | 1990s



Meets
Hillary Rodham



1971

Heads RNC



1971

Attica
prison revolt

McGovern
campaign in
Texas

1972

Votes for ERA
Gets divorced

1972

"Ms." magazine



Graduates from Yale



1973

Pushed from
GOP leadership

Avoids
Watergate
scandal

1973

Wounded Knee



Teaches law at
University of
Arkansas

Loses close race for
Congress



1974

Wins close
Senate race



1974

Nixon resigns

Patty Hearst
kidnapped.

Nixon's funeral in 1994, see a video of him and Ford eating a hot dog in Russell, KS in 1976, or see a video of him in a parade during his 1974 Senate campaign.

The next way to view history was called "Generation Gap." When this page was selected a list of the following events appeared: birth, the teen years, high school graduation, military, and law school. Users could click one of the events in order to compare the cultures for each of the candidates at that time. For example, when Dole was 14 years-old it was 1937 and the country was in the Depression. Nylon was invented that year and Spam hit the market. When Clinton was 14 years-old it was 1960 and the family gathered around the television to watch the Nixon-Kennedy debates. The birth control pill hit the market and the Twist was a hit song.

The last way to view history was through "Time Capsule." When this page was accessed the user could compare what Clinton and Dole were doing during the following events: the Kennedy assassination, Civil Rights, Roe v. Wade, Vietnam, and Watergate. For example, in 1973 during Watergate Clinton was teaching law at Fayetteville. He frequently discussed Watergate in his classroom; however, he turned down an opportunity to be much more involved. "John Doar, who headed the impeachment inquiry for the House Judiciary Committee, had recruited heavily from Yale Law School, offered both Clinton and Hillary Rodham positions. Clinton, unsure of the political implications, declined -- but Hillary accepted."

By January 1973, “Dole was rather unceremoniously eased out of his position as RNC Chair. As the Watergate scandal unfolded, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise. In June 1974, a Senate report on Watergate cleared Dole of any involvement.”

Parallel lives was a creative feature that presented detailed biographical information about Clinton and Dole. Both sites provided detailed background information on Clinton and Dole; however, the information available for Perot and other third party candidates was minimal.

Presentation of Polls, Advertising and Finances

Fig. 17 - Polls, Advertising and Finances

PoliticsNow	Description
Between Bites	Compilation of ad related news stories and texts of political ads
Money Talks	News column dedicated to financial issues in politics
Campaign Finance	Feature that provided financial data for Members of Congress
Poll Track	Feature that is updated daily with summaries of the latest national polls
AllPolitics	Description
Polls Page	Compilation of the latest polls, charts, exit polls and poll related Web sites
Follow the Money	Feature that provides financial data for the presidential candidates
Campaign 96 Ads	Brief summaries and links to full videos of political ads
Spin Patrol	A list of Brooks Jackson stories where he analyzes political ads

Both webs sites had extensive poll coverage. However, the information on political advertising was not as extensive at convention time, nor was the information on presidential finances. In fact, PoliticsNow did not have a specific area for presidential

finances, just an area for congressional finances. Figure 17 summarizes the poll, advertising and financial information available on both Web sites.

Coverage of Polls

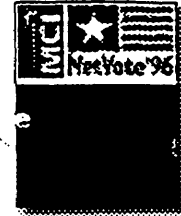
During the conventions PoliticsNow had numerous links to poll coverage. For example, a link to a feature called Poll Track was present on the *Home* page everyday, sometimes there was more than one link. Poll Track was a feature that was updated regularly (almost daily) with summaries of all the latest national polls. They were predominantly drawn from NBC/Wall Street Journal, CBS/New York Times and CNN/USA Today. The compilation was created by a PoliticsNow staffer, David Winston, who tracked public surveys for the Republican National Committee during the 1992 Presidential race.

Figure 18 shows the main Poll Track page for Aug. 26. On the main page the polls were dated and listed down the page in text form. Generally there were no graphics on the page, occasionally there would be a bar graph. The polls were summarized, but the user could often click on a specific poll to get more complete information. For example, on the page shown in figure 18, the user could click on the words “ABC tracking poll” to get the complete information about that individual poll.

Down the left column of the main page were items titled: Charts and Graphs, Analysis, Caucus and About Poll Track. The Charts and Graphs icon lead the user to a page where graphical data were compiled regarding topics such as Clinton’s job approval



Poll Track



Back to
Resources

Charts
& Maps

Analysis

Caucus

About
Poll Track

Clinton's Nine Point Advantage

National Polls

August 26, 1996 -- An ABC tracking poll (Aug 23-25, 1008 registered voters) shows Clinton leading Dole by 9 points 47%-38%, with Perot at 9%. (This is exactly the same result as yesterday's tracking poll.) Among likely voters, the margin closes to a 5 point advantage for Clinton, 47%-42%, with Perot at 8%. The margin is, again, the same as the previous day's tracking.

In a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll (Aug 23-25, 1003 registered voters) shows Clinton leading Dole by 12 points, 50%-38%, with Perot at 7%.

Newsweek (Aug 22-23, 751 registered voters) shows Clinton leading Dole by 7 points, 47%-40%, with Perot at 7%.

Fox News/Opinion Dynamics (Aug 22-23, 900 likely voters) shows Clinton leading by 7 points, 45%-38%, with Perot at 7%.

In the CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll Clinton's job approval was 53%-39%, while in the Newsweek poll it was 53%-36%.

Senate Watch:

In **Michigan** an EPIC/MRA poll (Aug 20-22, 600 registered voters) shows Levin (D) leading Romney (R) by 26 points, 57%-31%.

In **Oregon** an Oregon Monitor Poll (Aug 5-19, 602 registered voters) shows Smith (R) leading Bruggere (D) by 4 points, 43%-39%.

In **Virginia** a Richmond Times-Dispatch poll (Aug 12-17, 618 adults) shows John Warner (R) leading Mark Warner (D) by 27 points, 50%-23%.

and favorability ratings. Other charts included: direction of the country, state-by-state ballot tests, polls taken during the Republican Primary and congressional polls. When the user selected any of these items a graph appeared along with a link to an explanation of the graph. Some of the data in the Charts and Graphs section was not very current, much dating back to 1993. However, there were current polls at the bottom of the page. These charted the popularity of Clinton, Dole and Perot, and the dates ranged from Aug. 28, 1996 through July 25, 1996. The Analysis icon linked the user to a news story written by David Winston analyzing the current polls. On average this page was updated weekly and often linked directly to the *Home* or *News* page on the day it was new. Otherwise, the user could find the most current analysis by going through the main Poll Track page. And finally, About Poll Track described the background information on the polls and on Dave Winston.

AllPolitics had an entire menu item dedicated to poll information. When the user accessed the *Polls* page a list of poll related links appeared. They were called: The Latest Polls, National Polls, Charts, FAQs and Related Links. During the first two weeks of the study period the only place this information was located was on the *Polls* page; however, on Aug. 23 the Latest Polls portion was also connected to the *News* page. This link functioned similarly to PoliticsNow's Poll Track; however, it contained fewer polls and was only updated twice during the study period.

The National Polls link contained poll data from CNN/Time Election Monitor, CNN/USA Today/Gallup and CNN/Time. The dates for these polls were not very current,

they ranged from October 1995 through May 1996. The Charts page connected the user to several full color graphs that tracked several different polls over time. The Exit Polls section contained exit poll results for the primary. The FAQs area explained the CNN/Time Election Monitor. And Related Links provided the user with connections to other poll related Web sites such as: Gallup, Project Vote Smart, Survey Net, and Rutgers University - Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Coverage of Political Advertising

An example of the how political advertising information was presented was through a PoliticsNow feature called Between Bites. This feature was a news page dedicated to campaign ads. When the user accessed this link a brief description of the feature was presented, "Bookmark this page if you're a political ad junkie, as PoliticsNow keeps track of the ads, and the news the ads make this election season." However, during the study period PoliticsNow did little more than compile a few news stories from other sources. What followed the description were links to eight items. Two were full texts of ads, one from Clinton and one from Dole, and the rest were ad-related news stories from The Washington Post, the Hotline and AP. The most current news story was dated July 30.

Coverage of Presidential Finance

There was only one area among the two Web sites that contained presidential campaign finance information. The feature was on AllPolitics and was called Follow the Money. This feature was compilation of data from several different sources, and its front page contained direct links to this information. The first item on the page was a set of links to finance-related news stories. The next item was a link to a CNN/Boston Globe Study on who contributes to presidential campaigns. The third item connected the user to the Center for Public Integrity's Campaign Finance Profiles for Clinton, Dole and Perot. The fourth was a search mechanism that allowed the user to call up Brooks Jackson's (CNN) stories on campaign finance. Below that was a link to a news story written for AllPolitics about the country's most generous zip codes. And finally, the last items on the page were links to related Web sites (e.g., the Federal Election Commission's Web site).

Availability of Interactive Features

Both Web sites had numerous interactive features. On PoliticsNow these features were located on the *Inter-Action* page and on AllPolitics they were located predominately in the convention feature. Figure 19 summarizes the interactive features available on both Web sites.

The type of interactive features varied a great deal and included such items as surveys for the users to take, such as PoliticsNow's Voter Booth and Hit List and AllPolitics' Take a Stand and Virtual Election. There were also several interactive trivia

quizzes for users to take such as PoliticsNow's Inaugural Bowl and AllPolitics' The Quiz and Political Aptitude Test.

Fig. 19 - Interactive Features

PoliticsNow	Presentation
Petition	Allows users to sign petitions that will be sent to Clinton and Dole
Caucus	Bulletin Board feature for the users
Voter Booth	Question of the day for users to answer and view results
Hit List	Users can vote on a list of funny campaign slogans
Inaugural Bowl	Trivia game where users have a chance to win a trip to the Inauguration
Check the Record	House of Representatives feature
Direct Access	Live interviews are conducted where users can join in and ask questions
AllPolitics	Presentation
War Room	Game that allows users to navigate the entire Web site
Take a Stand	Users can answer a set of questions and see the responses of other users
Rate-O-Matic	Users answer 23 questions in search of their ideal candidate
The Quiz	A political quiz of the day that users can take and submit for answers
President '96	Game where the user is a strategist on a fictitious presidential campaign
Virtual Election	Users vote for president
Voter's Voice	Users Email AllPolitics and the editors post some of the comments
Political Aptitude Test	Daily question from CNN's Bill Schneider
Chatter	Live chat area with a guest every evening during the conventions
Dialogue	Bulletin board feature for the users
Q & A	Users Email questions to be answered on CNN political programs

Some of the interactive features allowed the users to actually communicate with others online. For example, PoliticsNow's Caucus was a bulletin board feature that allowed users to discuss current issues. Once the Caucus page was accessed a list of topics appeared where users could post messages and participate in discussions with fellow users. Some of the topics included: GOP: The Candidate, Kemp on the GOP ticket, the latest polls, the Reform Party, media issues, local politics and the party platforms. Also,

during the days of the convention a state map was featured at the top of the page. Users could click on their state and discuss issues with their “virtual delegation.”

On Aug. 17 one of the discussions under the topic GOP: The Candidate focused on Dole’s criticism of the NEA. A dialogue between Steve and Gayle contained some of the following comments:

From Steve to Gayle: Dole “bashed” the NEA not teachers, he specifically said that his criticism was of the union, not the teachers. Efficiency is the true friend of education, not waste, inefficiency, and “feather bedding.” An analogy would be the shake up that occurred in the auto industry. During the 60s and 70s the American auto industry became so union ruled that it could not produce a decent car at a fair price. ... The immediate losers were the consumers. ... The teachers are in a similar position today. In too many of our districts the money being spent is not matched by quality education. ... Now the consumers are being cheated by paying for a first class education and getting a second, or worse, class education.

From Gayle to Steve: The school system is stuck dealing with the problems created by today’s society. Those problems did not originate in the school system. It has to do with the break-down of the family, and other family-supporting institutions. As a teacher today, I find myself dealing with children who have basic social needs that are not being met at home. ... They (the NEA) are in the forefront of innovative teaching trends. We are trying to improve education. With the help of the NEA, we teachers strive to improve education every day in the classroom with every kid. I wish the critics would learn what we deal with. Walk a day in our shoes.

Direct Access was another PoliticsNow feature where users could communicate online. Direct Access was an interactive site where live interviews were conducted. Users could join in and pose their own questions to political and other opinion leaders. Some of the interviews conducted online during the study period were with: Henry Hyde, Barbara Boxer, Barney Frank, Dick Lamm, Brit Hume and Cokie Roberts.

An example of the communication between users and politicians can be demonstrated by quoting from an online interview with Dick Lamm, a Reform Party candidate at the time. A PoliticsNow user from Milwaukee asked, "If you are elected President, you propose to balance the federal budget. Do you feel that there are programs, departments, etc. that should be protected from cuts in the budget, and if so, what are they?" Dick Lamm promptly replied, "I would not protect anything in the federal budget. I would lay everything on the table and put everything at risk."

AllPolitics had features comparable to Caucus and Direct Access, they were called Dialogue and Chatter, respectively.

AllPolitics had an elaborate interactive game going on during the study period called President '96. President '96 was a game that featured a fictitious presidential campaign where users got to run a campaign. The object of the game, as explained by AllPolitics, was as follows:

In President '96, you take the role of campaign manager, advising your candidates on breaking events, campaign strategy, what stands to take on the issues, and a host of other topics. You, along with the other campaign managers, call the shots in the candidate's campaign -- and you try your best to have your candidate gain his or her party's nomination, and to win the presidency in the general election.

At the start of the game there were several Republican, Democrat, and Independent Party candidates. Each candidate had a complete biography and a detailed Web page. The user was urged to look this material over carefully and select a campaign to work on. Users were required to register with their candidate via a brief AllPolitics

registration form. This registration process provided the user with a password that would allow access to that particular candidate's headquarters. Then the game began.

The game featured daily news, events and crises. While the candidates were fake, the issues were real. When an issue arose, the campaign managers would consult with fellow users/managers. Strategy sessions occurred via bulletin board discussions, and only those registered with a particular candidate had access to that candidate's bulletin board.

During the real conventions, President '96 held its own conventions. In the game, this is when the nominees would be elected for each party. Campaign managers were notified via Email of the dates that ballots would be cast for each party. If the user could not vote on the given dates, absentee ballots were provided. This elaborate set up allowed for a fun and educational experience. Users got a feel for what is like to work on a campaign and make strategy decisions.

On Aug. 28, AllPolitics added another imaginative interactive feature to its Web site. It was called the War Room. On the day it was introduced it was linked to the *Home* page in the "Best Bytes" column. During the rest of the study period it was available on the *News* page. The War Room provided a creative way for users to navigate their way around the Web site.

When the user accessed the War Room a large presidential seal appeared and the user got brief introduction to the game. A portion of it read, "AllPolitics has created its own 3-dimensional War Room so you can peek behind the podium of the 1996 presidential campaign. The icons in the room are clickable, and through dynamic

navigation, you will be introduced to both characters and AllPolitics content.” At the bottom of the page was an icon that the user clicked on to begin the game. This feature resembled some of the computer games on the market such as *Myst*. Users navigated their way through the game by either clicking on items in the room or typing commands at the bottom of the page. The graphics were dark and mysterious.

However, no new information was gained, it was just a slow way of navigating through the AllPolitics Web site. For example, one of the suggested commands was “see journalist.” When this was typed a brief quote from David Broder appeared at the top of the page, and at the bottom of the page were links to several AllPolitics features that could be accessed through the main menu. The feature was clever, but very basic. For example, it did not recognize many commands. If something was typed that it did not understand a picture of a funny looking woman with a beehive hairdo with the big word “Whoops!” appeared on the page. This woman was Marge, the War Room administrative assistant. She was there to tell users that their command was not understood. The game could be frustrating, and there was no real reason to stick it out.

Availability of Unmediated Information

On Aug. 23, a new menu item called *Resources* was added to AllPolitics. The *Resources* page was touted as a place for original documents. At the top of the page was a short paragraph that explained its purpose. Part of it read, “One of the strengths of the Web is its ability to go far beyond the limits of traditional media by providing original

documents, making intelligent links within and among subjects, and going beyond the constraints of space and time.”

Fig. 20 - Raw Data and Original Documents

PoliticsNow and AllPolitics
Full texts of political ads
Videos of political ads (AllPolitics)
Complete poll data
Full texts of candidate speeches
Complete party platforms
Full texts of convention speeches
Videos of convention speeches
Audio tapes of convention speeches
Whitewater Report
Republican Whitewater Report
Democratic Whitewater Report

Both Web sites apparently tried to utilize this strength by providing original documents and linking these items within related news stories. Both Web sites contained virtually the same documents. Figure 20 lists the raw data and original documents contained on both Web sites.

For example, on the AllPolitics *Resources* page there were links to the Whitewater Special Report, the Republican Whitewater Report, and the Democratic Whitewater Report. PoliticsNow also provided these documents.

Both sites also contained similar data in their convention features. For example, they both provided full texts of candidate and other convention speeches, the complete party platforms for 1996, as well as past party platforms, and audio and video files of convention speeches.

While all of these items were “housed” in a certain place on the Web sites, for example, in the convention features, they were also linked throughout the Web site when they related to something in the news. This occurred more often on PoliticsNow because of the way the Web site was set up; however, these items were also linked to the AllPolitics *Home* page when appropriate.

The only item that one of the sites had that the other did not, were links to full videos of campaign ads. These were only found in an AllPolitics feature called Campaign 96 Ads. When this page was accessed a brief description of the feature appeared. A portion of it read, “See how a candidate’s messages changes throughout the campaign, and compare the candidates’ attack and counter-attack ads. You be the pundit.”

The user really did get to be the pundit, because there was no commentary here. Down the page were links to the actual ads in video form and beneath each link was the title of the ad and a very brief description.

Availability of Mobilizing Information

Both sites provided users with details about times and places of political events, addresses and names of contacts in political organizations, and other information that facilitated citizen participation in the political process. This information is referred to as mobilizing information. Figure 21 lists the mobilizing information available on both Web sites.

Fig. 21 - Mobilizing Information

PoliticsNow	Presentation
Inside Sources	Names and addresses of more than 7,000 government officials and Washington corporations
Web Guide	Organizes and summarizes links to political Web sites
Supporting Federal Candidates	Provides legal information regarding political contributions
Contacts	Addresses and phone numbers for convention related information
How to Help	Addresses, phone numbers and Web sites of candidates and political parties
Calendar	Calendar of political events around the country
AllPolitics	Presentation
Complete List of Candidates	All of the candidates' addresses, phone numbers and Web sites
Web Watch	Organizes and summarizes links to political Web sites
Talk Back	List of government Email addresses
Calendar	Calendar of political events around the country

Both Web sites provided similar mobilizing information. For example, both provided lists of the candidates' addresses, phone numbers and Web addresses and a calendar of events around the country. Both also provided information on how to contact other government agencies.

Another item that was provided on both Web sites were organized lists of other Web sites. PoliticsNow and AllPolitics journalists compiled summaries of Web sites and also directed users to specific Web sites when they pertained to something in the news. For example, Web Watch, on AllPolitics, featured a Web site of the day in addition to its list of Web sites. The day after Dole gave his acceptance speech in which he criticized the NEA, the site of the day was the NEA's. The caption below the link said, "In his acceptance speech last night, Republican Bob Dole declared war on the National Teachers Unions. Here's another view from the National Education Association."

Both Web sites organized their lists of Web sites by category and summarized them briefly. Some of the categories included: political parties, congressional links, other media, advocacy groups, think takes and student organizations. During the conventions there were also convention related links, both political and business related. For example, there were links to the San Diego and Chicago Chambers of Congress.

Presentation of Historical Context

Both sites also provided the users with historical information. Most of it pertained to the conventions and was found in their convention features. Figure 22 lists the historical information available on the Web sites.

Fig. 22 - Historical Information

PoliticsNow and AllPolitics
Video Ad Archive (AllPolitics only)
Historic Documents Online (PoliticsNow only)
Back in Time (AllPolitics only)
Convention history
Full texts of previous keynotes
Past Platforms
History of political parties

The historical information found in the convention features included: both parties' convention history, texts of previous key note speeches, past platforms and the histories of the political parties. For example, AllPolitics had complete party platforms for 1984, 1988, and 1992; and highlights from the platforms from 1976-1992. AllPolitics also had full texts

of some past Democrats' keynote speeches, such as: Jesse Jackson, 1984; Mario Cuomo, 1984; Walter Mondale, 1984; Gealdine Ferraro, 1984; Ann Richards, 1988; and Michael Dukakis, 1988. PoliticsNow also has past platforms as well as texts of some past keynote speeches.

There was also historical information provided other than what pertained to the conventions. For example, PoliticsNow was the only site that provided full texts of such historic documents as: the U.S. Constitution, the Articles of Confederation, Thomas Paine's Common Sense and the Magna Carta. And AllPolitics was the only site that provided videos of previous campaign ads. There were ads from such former presidents as Kennedy, Johnson and Bush. And finally, AllPolitics had a feature called Back in Time, where users could read articles that appeared in Time magazine decades ago. The dates of the articles ranged from 1924 to 1992. When the article was accessed the user could also see what the cover looked like that week. Some examples included: a June 23, 1924, story with the headline "Ku Klux Klan: Kleveland Konvention"; an article from April 23, 1945, titled "Roosevelt's Death: 'A Soldier Died Today'"; and one from June 28, 1971, with the headline "Pentagon Papers: The Secret War."

The above results describe the information available on PoliticsNow and AllPolitics during the 1996 nominating conventions. These results illustrate the type of presidential campaign coverage presented on two media World Wide Web sites. The media sites combined news and unique features in order to provide users with a new type of political coverage.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The present research investigated the social constructions in the news coverage of the 1996 presidential campaign by two media World Wide Web sites. The findings provided a broad background for understanding how reality was constructed on the Internet during the 1996 nominating conventions. From the investigation three main discussion points emerged. The three themes to be discussed are based on a synthesis of the findings. These points can be illustrated by using the criticism of news by Bennett and others as an organizational framework. The discussion points are as follows: the portrayal of conflict and drama versus the portrayal of issues, implications for a less fragmented news product and the possibility of a new two-way form of communication in the media that encourages citizen participation.

The Portrayal of Conflict and Drama

The research on how political campaigns are presented in the news indicates that the media portray a political reality that emphasizes conflict and drama, rather than policy and issues. Conflict and drama are portrayed in the media in many ways, one way is by using numerous polls as a daily indicator of who is ahead and who is behind. For example, Patterson (1991) found that during the 1980 presidential election poll stories made up about one fourth of all television election news, and Lavrakas and Baumann (1995) found that the use of polls in newspaper coverage during the 1992 presidential election was

seven times greater than during the previous three presidential elections. Conflict and drama are also portrayed by focusing on personal information about the “characters” in politics. For example, Sabato (1991) argues that the personalization of political news is so prevalent that the audience has been conditioned to think about politicians in terms of the private lives of the rich and famous, and Hart (1994) argues that the American people know a great deal about politicians, yet at the same time they know very little about politics.

This type of coverage relates to Bennett’s first two information biases, personalized news and dramatized news. Bennett argues that these biases draw attention away from the candidates’ positions on issues and the larger questions of policy. However, his claims were based on traditional media. The focus here is on how conflict and drama were portrayed on the Internet and how this relates to Bennett’s criticisms.

As seen in the results, dramatized news in the form of what has been called horse race coverage was prevalent on the Internet. Each day users could find out immediately upon accessing the Web sites who was ahead and who was behind by viewing daily tracking polls. The results show that the use of polls was extensive on both sites. Figure 17 illustrates the poll information available. For example, on PoliticsNow, the Poll Track feature was linked to the left column of the *Home* page every day (see figure 1). In addition, there were often several more links to Poll Track found in the daily news summaries on the *Home* and *News* pages. AllPolitics relied a bit less on polls, but it did have an entire menu item dedicated to polls (see figure 2), and provided an additional link

to it on the *News* page during the study period. This reliance on polls demonstrates that the type of game mentality that has been shown to be prevalent in the traditional media was also prevalent on the Internet. This should be expected because, in large part, the same journalists that are creating Internet coverage are also preparing the information that is presented in the traditional media.

However, although polls still made up a large portion of the coverage on the Web sites, they were presented differently than in the traditional media. For example, the user could get detailed poll data, including the complete poll questionnaire. Users could also get results from several different tracking polls in one place. Figure 18 shows PoliticsNow's Poll Track on Aug. 26 which presented results from five different presidential polls and three senate polls. In this example, users could access detailed information about the ABC Tracking Poll. On PoliticsNow, users could also get a weekly analysis written by polling expert David Winston. There was even a bulletin board area set up for users to ask questions of Winston, as well as a listing of his Email address so users could write him directly. Therefore unlike in the traditional media, the Web presents users with the opportunity to view detailed daily poll information from several sources.

The results show that personalized news was also prevalent on the Web sites. For example, a great deal of personal information was found on the sites through news and features. Figures 14 and 15 show the categories of personal information available. Although background information about the candidates is necessary, this significant dedication to their lives illustrates the personalization of news that Bennett identified.

Bennett argues that by focusing on political personalities the public is unable to understand the greater social context in which the events are a part. For example, the PoliticsNow feature Parallel Lives presented detailed biographies of Clinton and Dole. It traced their lives through history. Figure 16 shows how users could obtain information about the candidates through an historical timeline. This feature presented history through the personal lives of the candidates. Instead of discussing the ramifications of the Vietnam War, Parallel Lives presented the struggles of the candidates during that time in history. Once again, the reliance on the personalization of news was found on the Internet much like in the traditional media.

However, the presentation of personal information on the Web was different than in the traditional media because of the daily availability of detailed information. Such detail, as was presented in Parallel Lives, would not be feasible in the traditional media. The multimedia capabilities of the Web also provided journalists with an opportunity to present users with personal information in a unique way. On both Web sites users could obtain information about the candidates via traditional news stories, audio and video clips, full texts of speeches and detailed textual information created for the Web sites.

Does the large presence of dramatized and personalized news mean that the journalists presented the information on the Web in exactly the same way as research said they did in newspapers and on television? The answer is no, because the great deal of information pertaining to drama and personality does not tell the whole story. This is because the volume of information on the Internet is so immense that even if there is a

great deal of information on a certain type of news, a significant amount of information can still be dedicated to other areas such as issue coverage. In order to illustrate this point it is useful to repeat a quotation that was mentioned earlier, ““When candidates say the same thing over and over,’ says television correspondent Judy Woodruff, ‘it is not news’”(Patterson, 1991, p. 153). The candidates’ positions on issues are generally the same every day, therefore they are not often considered news.

News by definition is “new” and candidates’ issue positions are not often new, nor is the background and history of these issues. Therefore because of the limited time and space available in the traditional media, only new information can be presented. It would not make sense to have the same information in the newspaper or on the evening news every day. In fact, the concept seems absurd. However, on the Internet “old” information can be kept available for continual reference by the user. Journalists took advantage of this opportunity and created original information suited to this strength of the Web.

For example, during this study it was found that the *Home* and *News* pages on both sites changed every day. However, the *Issues* pages (figures 12 and 13) did not change at all during the time period. Figures 11 - 13 show the issue information available on the Web sites. The *Issues* pages not only presented the candidates’ positions on the issue, but also presented detailed information about the history, legislation and past news regarding each issue. By having the opportunity to trace the history and development of an issue over time, users could understand an issue in a larger context than just the current

election. This information was present every day. This is not possible in the traditional media.

Therefore, the reality that was created included both the day to day drama of the election and the more ongoing concepts such as issue positions and history. Users had access to both types of information and could choose to consume as little or as much of it as they wanted. Because of the volume of information available on the Internet, no single reality was presented. Users could use the Internet like they do the traditional media and simply see what is on the *Home* pages each day or they could obtain detailed information about issue positions and history. Some users for example, may be more interested in the tracking polls and some may have a greater appreciation for items such as the Rate-O-Matic, a feature that allowed users to match their issue positions with that of the candidates. Over the course of an election, some users may consume it all.

Implications For a Less Fragmented News Product

The opportunity that users had to gather detailed background information is evidence that the news product on the Internet is possibly creating a reality that is less fragmented. Fragmented news is Bennett's third information bias and refers to the tendency to isolate stories so that news becomes hard to assemble into the big picture. The narrative structure of traditional news stories, having a beginning, middle and an end, turns events into self-contained happenings. This fragmentation is worsened by the severe space limits that all traditional media impose. Fragmentation also makes it difficult to trace issues

over time and to place them in proper historical context. This problem is not eliminated on the Web, but because of the lack of space constraints, journalists can try to provide links among topics and provide some historical context.

For example, in the daily summary of the news each day, PoliticsNow provided links to traditional news stories as well as links to full texts of speeches, historical documents, complete party platforms and background on issues. The *Home* page shown in figure 1 included news stories, full texts of speeches, and audio and video clips of speeches. The AllPolitics *Home* page also contained links to full texts of speeches, as well as other background information such as the complete party platforms (see figure 2). Each day the “front page” news on these sites consisted of more than just traditional news stories. Figure 20 shows the raw data and original documents found on the Web sites and figure 22 shows the historical information available. These items were often linked in several places throughout the sites.

The volume of information that can be presented on the Web allows journalists to create a news product that is virtually continuous and linked together, instead of short narrative stories that are isolated from each other. Also, the results show that items on the Web do not always follow the traditional news story format. It is natural for journalists on the Web to present texts of speeches without having to work them into a narrative news story, or to present timelines, bullet pointed summaries of information or lists of places to get further information. The traditional media consists of mostly narrative news stories;

however, on the Web there is more of an opportunity to provide a continuous flow of information.

Gordon (1995) wrote that use of the Internet could allow journalists to transcend the limitation of current technologies and guide the reader to more contextual information through the use of hypertext. AllPolitics and PoliticsNow journalists utilized this technology. They also utilized Gordon's (1995) other suggestion that journalists should direct people to appropriate Web sites of other organizations or political groups so that the reader can consult them after reading something in the news. This was evidenced in the example of AllPolitics journalists guiding the users to the NEA's Web site after Bob Dole criticized the organization in his acceptance speech.

Gordon (1995) also said that journalists are needed to manage the massive amounts of information available on the Web. AllPolitics and PoliticsNow journalists did this by explaining and organizing many of the political sites found on the Web. For example, both sites provides lists of Web sites grouped by topic area. Some of the topics included: political parties, congressional links, other media, advocacy groups, think tanks, political humor and student organizations. Both sites gave a brief summary of the site and told who the sponsor of the site was. Knowing the sponsor is important because this helps alert users to the potential biases found in the information. For example, often the sponsor of a Web site is not immediately made obvious, therefore the user may actually be obtaining information on Dole from a spoof page created by an opposing organization. Journalists, who are experienced in organizing large amounts of data, presented Web sites

in a useful and effective way. This role is new to journalists, and according to Gordon (1995), they are well suited for the task.

Therefore, the results indicate that the news on the Internet creates a reality that is possibly less fragmented than in the traditional media. The Internet provided journalists with the opportunity to present a continuous flow of information that is not bound by the traditional narrative structure of the news story or by space constraints. In addition to providing background information created by journalists, the media sites also presented an organized method for viewing other political Web sites. In doing this, users could navigate the Internet in an informed manner. Through the use of hypertext, journalists are transcending the limits of traditional media and guiding the reader through linked information, creating a less fragmented news product.

The Possibility of a New Two-Way Form of Communication in the Media

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of the Web is its interactivity. This characteristic creates the possibility that the Internet could provide a new two-way form of communication in the media that encourages citizen action. Previous research has found that the media do not encourage citizen involvement in politics. For example, Bennett argues that the news addresses people as spectators and offers little motivation or outlet for direct citizen participation. Entman (1989) says that the news portrays a “democracy without citizens” and Keefer (1993) found that the news media serve to hinder, rather than facilitate, citizen participation. The results in this study indicated that there were several

interactive features on both Web sites. Figure 19 provides the name and a brief description of each interactive feature available. But, does the presence of interactive features provide evidence that this medium creates a political reality that is more conducive to facilitating citizen participation in political affairs?

For example, the bulletin board features on both Web sites allowed citizens to discuss political topics of mutual interest. The example given in the results section depicted an intelligent conversation that occurred between two computer users regarding Bob Dole and teachers. While this may seem unique, it should not be forgotten that people have been able to discuss topics of mutual interest since the beginning of time. When discussing the Internet in terms of news coverage it is necessary to be cautious and not let the “neat” factor make it seem like some new phenomena is occurring. What is happening in many instances is the same thing but on a computer.

Addressing the “neat” factor is not meant to discredit the uniqueness of interactivity on the Internet, because there is evidence that a new type of news is emerging in this medium. A large amount of information on both of the media Web sites was not written by journalists, but was written by ordinary citizens. The concept of the Internet having many and various sources of messages was brought up by Morris and Ogan (1996) when they said that messages on the Internet could be traditional journalistic news stories created by a reporter or simply conversations of users. For example, the bulletin board conversation about the teachers was available for all of the users to read. Computer users could obtain political information from average citizens whether they actively participated

in the discussion or not. Other than letters to the editor and brief man on the street television interviews, traditional media, for the most part, do not provide the citizen's take on politics. However on the media Web sites, users are encouraged to voice their opinions. These opinions are voiced in forms such as Email messages to the editors, user surveys and bulletin board messages.

Morris and Ogan (1996) also pointed out that the receivers of the messages can move back and forth between their role as audience members and producers of messages. This occurred on both media sites. For example, an AllPolitics feature called Voter's Voice (listed in figure 19) encouraged users to Email their opinions on a given topic to the editors. The editors then presented a compilation of the Email messages from the users. Voter's Voice was often linked to the *Home* page (see figure 2), thus making users' opinions accessible immediately upon accessing the site. Therefore, the users were functioning as both producers and receivers of political messages.

Both Web sites provided opportunities for users to interact with politicians and other opinion leaders. This feature is probably more unique than users being able to talk to each other. Every night during the conventions users could log in and join a joint conversation with a public figure. This was an opportunity that many citizens probably would not have had otherwise. However, how likely it was that a user could get a question answered was not determined. Future researchers should log on and participate in these interviews in order to see how hard it is for users to get their own questions answered.

There was a category of information found on the Internet that, while not classified as interactive, could lead to a more active electorate. This type of information was mobilizing information. Mobilizing information refers to the details about times and places of political events, addresses and names of contacts in political organizations and other information that would facilitate citizen participation in the democratic process. Research by Lemert and associates (1984, 1977) has shown that it is rarely found in traditional media. However, it was found in large quantities on the Internet. Figure 21 shows the type of mobilizing information found on both Web sites. Users could easily access information on how to get more involved on issues of importance to them. For example, PoliticsNow had a feature titled “How to Help” which contained names, addresses and phone numbers for all of the candidates and AllPolitics had a feature called “Talk Back” which provided the Email addresses of government officials.

Therefore the results in this study indicate that news on the Internet did create a reality that was more conducive than the traditional media to citizen participation in the political process. For example, by participating in online interviews and by obtaining and acting on mobilizing information, users could become more involved in politics. However, as with the discussion on the first two points, the emphasis is on the “availability” of information. Users could choose how much and what type of information they wanted. Simply providing the opportunities to become involved in politics does not mean that the electorate will become more active.

The three concepts identified in this study, the portrayal of conflict and drama vs. the portrayal of issues; implications for a less fragmented news product and the possibility of a new two-way form of communication in the media, provide a broad overview for discovering the political reality that was constructed on two media sites during the 1996 presidential election. These results contribute to the ongoing research on how reality is constructed through news content and more specifically, how news on the World Wide Web constructs political reality. Because of the volume of information on the Internet, no single reality was presented, instead users could create their own reality by consuming their choice of information. Future research will need to address what users are actually utilizing.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Since the early 1990s the Internet has been the focus of numerous articles in the popular press. However, other than a few systematic attempts at finding out how many people use the Internet and who they are, the popular press has presented a rather cursory discussion of this new technology. And to date, much of the scholarly research on the Internet has focused on applications such as Email and fall under the umbrella of interpersonal communication. Therefore, the present study was one of the first to systematically explore the content of the World Wide Web. More specifically it was one of the first to examine the political content of two mass media Web sites. Throughout the 1996 election season media organizations encouraged people to visit their Web sites. This research was needed in order to begin scholarly examination of this widely discussed phenomena. Its strengths lie in the contributions it has made to the study of politics and news, as well as the contributions it has made to Internet research.

First, the results of this research provided a starting point for understanding how news on the World Wide Web constructs political reality. This study of two media Web sites indicated that no single reality existed on this new medium. Unlike users of the traditional media, this study illustrated an important possibility that users of the Internet can create their own reality. Of course, no two people consume information from the traditional media in the same way, but because of the volume of information available on the Internet, users have a greater opportunity to focus on whatever is important and of

interest to them. The Internet provided opportunities for users to interact with the political process, obtain issue information, and possibly consume a news product that was less fragmented than the traditional media.

Another strength of this study was that it presented a detailed description of exactly what was available on two media Web sites during the first presidential election where the Web was widely used. Information on the Web, even on one site, is vast and often so unwieldy that its difficult to systematically study - one thing is linked to another, which is linked to another, and so on. This study organized this vast information into useful categories for political communication research. As mentioned earlier, qualitative studies that seek to describe and explore little-known phenomena often serve to generate variables and hypotheses for future quantitative study. Categories that were identified in this study such as drama, issues, interactivity, and mobilizing information are useful concepts for future communication studies. This detailed description of the Web is also valuable because the actual content of the Web cannot be easily preserved, thus this initial study may be used as a record by future researchers who examine politics and news on the Internet.

The second area where this study made a contribution was to the growing body of literature that seeks to explore the question of whether Internet communication is mass or interpersonal communication. As the results of this study indicated, one of the unique characteristics of news on the Web is that it allows for interactivity. The news found on the two Web sites studied contained both traditional news stories created by journalists

and information created by users. This concept not only affects the content of news, but the results of this study also demonstrated the need to address how interaction with the news media affects the definition of mass communication.

Large media Web sites that present traditional news stories created by journalists resemble mass communication. However, this study also illustrated that a large number of messages on the two media sites were created by audience members and some features such as bulletin boards resemble interpersonal communication. This study showed that both types of communication existed on the media Web sites, thus supporting previous research that suggests that the concept of mass communication needs to be redefined in the wake of the Internet's growth and development.

The results also raise some other important questions that need to be addressed in the future. For example, one way to further understand the findings of this study would be to survey the actual Internet users. Since this study showed that no single reality existed on the Web sites, future researchers should conduct a uses and gratification study that assesses how users are utilizing the information on the Web. For example, are they reading just the poll information and playing games or are they combing the facts about the issues? Are they actually reading the histories of the political parties, reading the full texts of candidate speeches or using the mobilizing information? The answers to these questions would help researchers understand what type of news product is being consumed, thus further understanding how news content on the Web constructs political reality.

In terms of the reality that was constructed on the two Web sites, one of the items that this study did not systematically examine was the news stories presented on the Web sites. This study focused on the source, type and quantity of the news stories. The content of the features was fully described, but the content of the traditional news stories was not studied. Therefore, the precise amount of information that dealt with topics such as conflict and drama could not be assessed. A future study could conduct a content analysis of these news stories. Such a study would be possible because during this research all of the news stories pertaining to the presidential election were printed. However, in most instances such a suggestion could not be acted upon, because a limitation of any Internet research is that the content constantly changes without an easy way to capture what was previously available.

Another important result of this study was that news on the Web was possibly less fragmented than in the traditional media. But the results also indicated that the possibility exists that the extent to which news is less fragmented has to do with how an individual site utilizes the strengths of the Internet. For example, the extent to which a Web site effectively uses hypertext to make links between subjects and to provide background information has an effect on the fragmentation of the news. For the most part, the findings revealed that both sites contained much of the same information; however, there were some differences in how each site presented that information.

PoliticsNow was more text oriented. For example, the *News* page consisted of a summary of all the days political news. Within the summary were links to more detailed

information such as complete news stories on specific topics, as well as links to full texts of speeches and other background information. Users could just read the summary in order to obtain the main news of the day or they could proceed to access more detailed information. AllPolitics was not as heavy in text. For example, the news on the *News* page was not summarized, it was presented as a series of headlines and users had to access each individual story in order to find out what was going on that day. Detailed background information was also presented, but it was generally not worked directly into news content. This could be evidence that the news on PoliticsNow was less fragmented than on AllPolitics. However, this study did not conduct a systematic comparison of these sites. Future research could conduct a content analysis on two or more Web sites in order to see if certain sites present news that is less fragmented than the others.

The goal of this study was to provide a detailed description of the political reality that was constructed on PoliticsNow and AllPolitics during the 1996 presidential election. While the goal of the research was met, this study, as with all research, had its limitations. First, one thing that could have been done differently would have been to become more involved in the interactive features on the Web sites. For example, participating in online interviews with politicians would have made it possible to make an assessment of how likely it was for a user to get a question answered. Playing some of the elaborate games such as President '96 where the user got to be a strategist on a fictitious campaign would have allowed for a more detailed description of the feature.

Another limitation was that this study provided a description of only a brief window of time during the campaign. While the convention time period offers an intense time of campaign coverage by the media, it is only a small portion of the entire campaign cycle. In addition, this study only looked at two media sites. As mentioned early in the literature review, there are numerous media organizations providing political information on the Web. Each individual study of the Internet such as this one provides a small glimpse into this new phenomena. Because of the Internet's growth and the proliferation of political Web sites, political communication researchers will undoubtedly continue to add to the small glimpse provided by the present study.

This early exploratory study of the Web provided a starting point for future study of news on the Internet. While this study did not set out to explore the effects of this new type of coverage on the political system, such studies in the future are inevitable. How many people use the Internet as a source of political news and a profile of who they are will be keys to understanding the effects of this new communication technology. Today the number of users is relatively small, but that number is likely to grow. Continued systematic research by scholars is needed on the Web in order to avoid characterizing the Internet by the same hype as has been done in the popular press. Scholars know that it is necessary not to be swayed by the "neat" factor when seeking to understand this new phenomena and its place in politics.

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