

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Sanja Bajramović

**Primerjava predsedniških volitev 2008 in 2012 v Združenih državah
Amerike – Vloga novih družbenih medijev in pristop Baracka Obame**

Magistrsko delo

Comparison of the Presidential Elections 2008 and 2012 in the United States of
America – The Role of New Social Media and the Approach of Barack Obama

Ljubljana, 2013

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Acknowledgements

~ Inspiration comes in different shapes and shows itself in many ways.

My inspiration is all of you. ~

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Izjava o avtorstvu

Comparison of the Presidential Elections 2008 and 2012 in the United States of America – The Role of New Social Media and the Approach of Barack Obama

Being President of the United States of America is considered to be one of the most difficult occupations and only the road ahead of the candidates to reach the goal of becoming President is known to be more challenging. That is why pre-election campaigns in the USA are subject to many scholarly discussions and researches. Throughout this Master thesis we have dealt with the comparison of two pre-election campaigns of Barack Obama, studied other candidates' strategies in comparison to our main object of research and have tried to analyze as well as connect the impact of growingly popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. with Obama's historical success from 2008 and re-election in 2012. We have also tried to establish how, if at all, latter mentioned social media influence the political engagement and voter turnout of young people between 18 and 29 years old. Our research has shown that various internet activities within Obama's campaign have had great impact on his election success, popularity and recognition - especially among young voters, and have also helped with greater participation in political activities and youth voter turnout. For us to claim with more certainty that the connection between internet political participation, offline participation and higher turnout rates is indirect, we would need to carry out more researches with statistically significant data.

Key words: United States of America, Barack Obama, pre-election campaign, social networks and media, youth voter turnout

Primerjava predsedniških volitev 2008 in 2012 v Združenih državah Amerike – Vloga novih družbenih medijev in pristop Baracka Obame

Biti predsednik Združenih držav Amerike velja za enega najbolj zahtevnih poklicev, samo pot, ki jo mora kandidat prehoditi, da doseže ta cilj, naj bi bila še bolj zahtevna. Prav to je razlog, da so predvolilne kampanje v ZDA predmet številnih raziskav in razprav. V magistrskem delu smo se ukvarjali s primerjavo dveh predvolilnih kampanj Baracka Obame, ju primerjali s predvolilnimi kampanjami njegovih nasprotnikov in poskušali analizirati in povezati vpliv vse bolj priljubljenih družbenih omrežij, kot so Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, itd. z Obamovim zgodovinskim uspehom iz leta 2008 ter ponovno izvolitvijo leta 2012 in poskušali ugotoviti, kako, če sploh, omenjena družbena omrežja vplivajo na politično angažiranost in volilno udeležbo mladih volivcev med 18 in 29 let. Naša raziskava je pokazala, da so številne internetne aktivnosti Obamove kampanje močno pripomogle k uspehu na volitvah, prepoznavnosti in priljubljenosti, posebej med mladimi volivci ter delno tudi k večji participaciji mladih v političnih aktivnostih in višji volilni udeležbi. Da bi lahko z gotovostjo govorili o neposredni povezanosti med internetno politično participacijo, tisto v realnem svetu in večjo volilno udeležbo, pa so potrebne nadaljnje, poglobljene raziskave.

Ključne besede: Združene države Amerike, Barack Obama, predvolilna kampanja, družbena omrežja, volilna udeležba mladih.

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1 PREFACE

Being president of The United States of America is thought to be one of the most challenging jobs in the world. One thing that is even more difficult than making decisions inside the Oval Office is the road one must cross to get to it. The presidential battle requires excellence and greatness in all aspects: public appearance, collecting campaign funds, making allies, charming the masses and having a persuasive program (Briški 2009). Thomas Foley once said: “I know many people that I think would make good presidents, even great presidents, but are afraid of competing for the position because of the torture the candidates must go through” (Foley in Edwards et. al.2006, 268).

The main objective of the two biggest American political parties (the Democrats and the Republicans) is to win the presidential election which also represents the possibility for members of the victorious party to get numerous political appointments (Grant 2004). The presidential campaign that happens every four years is unique and cannot be compared to any other presidential campaign in the world. Because of the size and scope of the United States, it is of historical significance every time and has global implications. The presidential candidate is not found but rather created for a targeted goal and as such is presented to the public in detail. Strategies used by the candidate to convince the public he is the right person for becoming the head of state, are of key importance for every presidential campaign (Denton and Woodward 1998).

To win an American presidential election, one must collect the majority of votes of the Electoral College, which is built on the constitutional principal of federalism (Briški 2009). Barack Obama has succeeded twice; in 2008 he defeated his opponent John McCain with 365 electoral votes and in 2012 he gathered 332 electoral votes over Mitt Romney’s 206 (Bycoffe et. al. 2012). The guiding common principle of all public communication campaigns is reform which is an activity aimed at improving lives of individuals or society where improvement is tied to specific social values in a given historical period (Paisley 2001). Ferfila (2002a) defines the campaign as a sequence of operations which should have a specific result and include planning, strategy, competition, winners and losers.

In this Master thesis we will, among other things, try to answer questions about the reasons behind the double Obama presidential victory. The 2008 campaign and election circumstances were unique for many reasons. The American people were ready for “Change” – which was

also the main message of his campaign. Political analysts also point to the turnout of young people (under 30 years old) as one of the most interesting aspects of the 2008 elections (Alexandrova 2010). Obama and his team were known for starting the political mobilization of young people with a new, digital approach that was familiar to the young voters and instantly, the elections became interesting to a vast majority of the electoral body no one was able to get through to until then (Dugan 2012). We will try to establish to what extent Obama and his team really succeeded in addressing the young population of voters, what that meant for voter turnout in 2008 as well as in 2012, and how Obama's opponents relate with young voters (Briški 2009).

Like the party organization at the national level, state parties have increasingly been turning to the Internet for campaigning purposes throughout the years. From the creation of different social media channels and networks such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, to interactive calendars and personalized log-in features, state parties have adopted the new digital technology very well (Bekafigo and Cohen 2011).

With the integration of the Internet into American politics, voter mobilization has spread into the virtual world. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was lauded for its embrace of digital tools as it accomplished unprecedented levels of community engagement from a national politician. The Obama team was on Twitter, Facebook and MySpace, plus it had its own social network, MyBarackObama.com, to boot. The campaign rallied early adopters generally not engaged in the political process behind the slogan "Change", which we mentioned earlier and, at that time, drove historic fundraising success. Following Sarah Palin's speech at the Republican National Convention in 2008, the Obama campaign racked up the most donations in a single 24-hour period ever — \$10 million from some 130,000 donors. "Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee," *Huffington Post* founder Ariana Huffington said, at the Web 2.0 Summit following the 2008 election (Fox 2012).

Media pundits dubbed 2008's cycle "The Facebook Election"; however, that was before anyone understood just how explosive social media would become. By 2012's election season, the president's digital team — still mostly comprised of the same people — consisted of seasoned veterans of the president's community-first message, operating in a climate that embraced digital at a whole new level (The Huffington Post 2012). "While Facebook was still

very much important in 2008, Obama had 2 million Facebook friends, and now it's 35 million," Sam Graham-Felsen, Obama's head blogger in 2008, stated. "Social media has grown exponentially, and as a result, a lot of what the campaign's done is to try to come up with the content that will fly on social media" (Fox 2012).

In this thesis we will try to argue that Barack Obama's digital operation was of key importance to his re-election effort and discuss what made it so effective.

Looking at a list of Obama's "best online political moves" a common trend emerges: Obama hired technologists, not politicians, to work on the digital and technology teams and ultimately, they created something like a startup company within the larger campaign. There were 1.2 million active Facebook app users, 35 million Facebook fans and 98% of American Facebook users that were friends with an Obama fan, helping his content go viral. He also had 24 million Twitter followers and was featured in the most tweeted photo ever recorded. This all suggests that behind all these big actions there was a mammoth social media team, but that wasn't the case. Obama's social media squad was four people. His digital team also helped revolutionize voter targeting via Facebook. Half of the campaign's target voters in the 18-29 demographic were completely unreachable by phone, but 85% were friends with an Obama Facebook application user. The campaign turned Facebook into a targeting platform, asking supporters to reach out to target voters. Six hundred thousand people reached 5 million voters, and 20% of them took some political action. Obama raised \$690 million online in 2012, almost \$200 million more than he did four years before that. More individuals donated online and the average donation was up from \$126 to \$156 (Fitzpatrick 2012).

One of the main goals of this Master thesis is also a comparison of the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, thus we will also gather and compare data about Obama's opponents in both presidential races as well as discuss the main reasons for his double victory and where his opponents lacked the needed advantage. In his book *Invisible Primary (1976)*, Arthur Hadley defined six criteria for assessing the performance of candidates (psychological test, co-workers, strategy, financial plan, media, voters) (Cook 2004, 83), which we will also use for analyzing Obama's success and for a comparative yardstick with his opponents.

2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The descriptive method of research will be mainly used for this study. To define the descriptive type of research, Creswell (1994) stated that the descriptive method of research is to gather information about the present existing condition. The emphasis is on describing rather than on judging or interpreting. The aim of descriptive research is to verify formulated hypotheses or research questions that refer to the present situation in order to elucidate it. The descriptive approach is quick and practical in terms of the economical aspect. Moreover, this method allows a flexible approach, thus, when important new issues and questions arise during the duration of the study, further investigation may be conducted.

We will also use the descriptive analysis of scientific literature sources, especially for the overview of theories and authors used while doing research. Because of the specifics in the topic that is being discussed we will also use discursive analysis of popular literature sources and journalistic articles.

In particular, descriptive research is a type of research that is mainly concerned with describing the nature or condition and the degree in detail of the present situation. This method is used to describe the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and to explore the cause/s of a particular phenomenon. The aim of descriptive research is to obtain an accurate profile of the people, events or situations. With this research type, it is essential that we already have a clear view or picture of the phenomena being investigated before the data collection procedure is carried out. We are using this kind of research to obtain first hand data from the respondents so as to formulate rational and sound conclusions and recommendations for the study.

In this thesis, the descriptive research method will be employed so as to identify the role and significance of using the Internet as a tool for engaging voters in greater political participation – especially in the Obama campaign, which resulted in a high turnout rate in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. We opted to use this research method considering the objective to obtain second hand data in the form of analysis done by researchers beforehand. The descriptive method is advantageous for us due to its flexibility; this method can use either qualitative or quantitative data or both, giving us greater options in selecting the instrument for data-gathering. The aim of the research is to determine the role of the Internet in the

before mentioned campaigns as well as determining whether or not social media fosters political engagement, especially among young voters. The descriptive method is therefore appropriate for this research since this method is used for gathering prevailing conditions.

2.1 Research questions

The research questions we will try to answer in this thesis and that will serve as a common thread of the paper are the following:

1. *Is it plausible to claim that Barack Obama won both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections based in large part on his extraordinary activities and communication with the electoral body through digital media and new age social channels and did his extensive internet campaigning increase the voting turnout of young people?*
2. *Also we will try to establish to what degree social networks foster political engagement and in what way?*

3 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Authors of the American constitution have implemented the system of »checks and balances« with the separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and court branches, and gave each branch the power to influence the other (Briški 2009). One of the writers of the constitution James Madison believed, driven by Montesquieu and his work, that the separation of powers will prevent the accumulation of political power and tyranny (Madison in Leloup and Shull 2003). On the other hand, Richard Neustadt, a renowned American political scientist, defined the idea of power separation as a »separation of institutions, which share governance« (Neustadt in Leloup and Shull 2003, 5).

Federalism was also well praised in the United States of America by the American Founding Fathers; A. Hamilton, J. Madison and J. Jay, which have emphasized several reasons pro federalism and contra confederation. Sayre and Parris (1970) claim, that the meaning of American federalism is a compromise between the power of the central government and individual states. James Madison wrote, that the political system of the United States of America is: *“neither national nor federal, but a composition of both”* (Madison in King 1990, 231).

The United States of America are a democracy with the presidential form of government, in which the president is chosen by the people. The executive branch of power is under the control of the president, whose mandate, together with the vice-president, lasts four years (The American Constitution).

3.1 The American Presidential System

The candidate for the president of the United States of America as well as the candidate for the vice-president¹ must fulfill the following conditions, as set by the Constitution:

- born in the united States of America,
- at least 35 years old,
- Citizen of the United States of America for at least 14 years.

¹ In accordance with the 12th amendment of the American Constitution (1804), the vice-president must not come from the same Federal state as the presidential candidate. Retrieved from: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.amendmentxii.html> (28. 8. 2013).

Beside the formal conditions the candidate must also fulfill the informal ones, which are personal charisma, political experience, ability to adapt to the audience and being able to collect funding (Ferfila 2002b).

The 22nd amendment of the Constitution, ratified in 1951, bans the presidential candidate to be elected more than twice.² Looking back at the American history, candidates and winners of the presidential elections have been governors, senators, vice-presidents, military officials; all presidents, with the exception of Barack Obama, have been male, Caucasian and Christian (Schantz 1996) and (Briški 2009).

3.1.1 The Election of the President

The American people have, since the adoption of the Constitution in 1789, elected their president 57 times. For the most part in history, the candidates for the president have been selected by influential party members; in the modern era, their influence has been rather small. The 21st century being the era of mass media, the decision about their president is given to the voters. “The power and use of the mass media when addressing the voters, especially television, are of key meaning in the pre-election race since the media debate about the candidates for the strongest political position in the country months before the actual election takes place”, says the political scientist Diana Owen (Owen in Sabato 2010, 167).

Authors Fiorina and Peterson claim that one of the characteristics of the American democracy is “the permanent campaign, which means that as soon as the last campaign ends, another one starts and the border between collecting votes and ruling is rather vague” (Fiorina and Peterson 2001).

The President of the United States of America is elected through a two-level process, which includes a nomination of a bigger political party and general election. The American constitution only determines the general election and doesn't speak to the party nominations, although all American presidents with the exception of George Washington were nominated by a larger political party. Since 1872 all presidential nominations were given to candidates that have been successful in the party pre-election (Schantz 1996).

² The American Constitution, article ii, paragraph i. Retrieved from: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.articleii.html#section1> (28. 8. 2013).

3.1.2 The Electoral College

In accordance with the system of the Electoral³ College, technically speaking, the American people do not directly vote for their presidential and vice-presidential candidate. Instead they vote for electors, which are a sum of the senators and representatives of the Congress in each of the fifty states. To win the American presidential election, one must collect the absolute majority of the 538 electoral votes. The candidate that collects the majority of votes in each state also collects all the electoral votes by the principle “the winner takes it all”. There are two exceptions, Maine and Nebraska, where the candidate that collected most of the voters’ votes gets two electoral votes and the winner in each congressional county gets one electoral vote. The Electoral College system leaves open the opportunity that a candidate collects the majority of electoral votes but not the majority of the voters’ votes, which has happened four times until now. The first important legal change concerning electors was made in 1845, when Congress ordered that electors in all 50 states must be chosen all on the same day (Briški 2009).

The size of the electorate has grown throughout history with several constitutional amendments. Racial obstacles were eliminated with the 15th amendment in 1870, but it was only an illusion. Women were given the right to vote with the 19th amendment in 1920 and the 24th amendment states that everyone is entitled to vote, even if they hadn’t paid their voter or any other tax. With the 26th amendment in 1971 the voting threshold was lowered to 18 years (Briški 2009).

3.2 Turnout Studies Focusing on Age, Membership and other Factors

“I’ve got a lot more fight left in me,” Barack Obama assured his supporters at the final campaign rally of his career, in the swing state⁴ of Iowa. So it turned out, they had to, which they had proven by rushing to the polls and gave him a second term as president. At the end, he won the Electoral College by 332 votes to Mitt Romney’s 206 - almost as convincing a

³ Through the electoral system, the government according to the Constitution and applicable laws transforms votes into seats in the public administration. The United States go by the »single member, simple plurality« system in which a state is divided into geographical units and the candidate that gets the majority of votes in a unit, wins the election. Most of the world's democracies on the other hand go by the system of proportional representation (Fiorina and others 2007).

⁴ A State in the USA where the two major political parties have similar levels of support among voters, viewed as important in determining the overall result of a presidential election (Valelly 2009).

victory as in 2008, since the popular vote was smaller by 2.4 points which meant the House of Representatives were back in the hands of Republicans. As in 2000 and 2004, America seemed split (The Economist 2012).

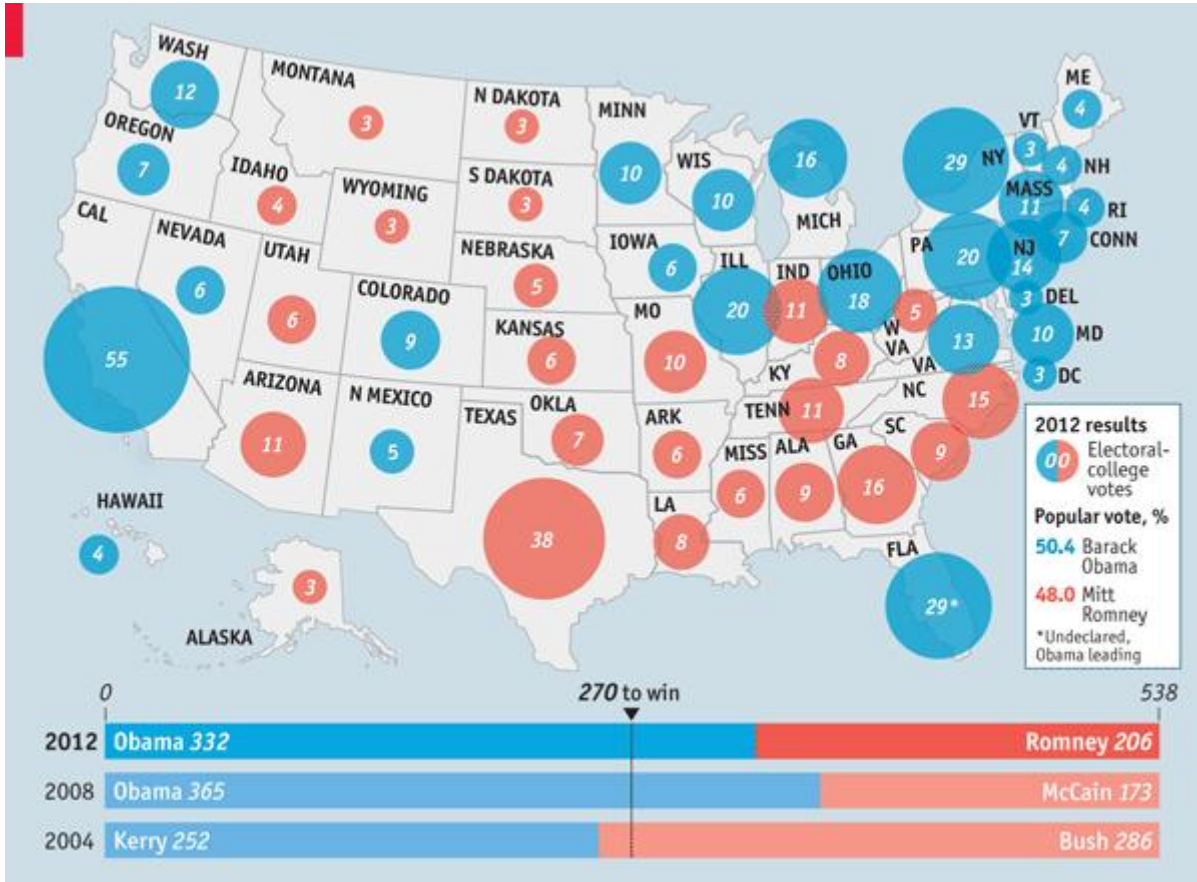
Although Obama's opponent, Mitt Romney, had still held his optimism high, since polls showed a lesser advantage of Obama since his lead was under a point and supporters that came to his penultimate rally were more held back than the ones of Romney, he still had to admit defeat at the end of the race to the new/old president of the USA, Barack Obama. Romney's campaign leaders decided for a negative-campaign attack and issued some last-minute press releases pointing out that Obama's advantage in early voting was much lower than the one from 2008. But in the end, the result was clear and showed President Obama's loss in only two states that he had won during his 2008 presidential battle: Indiana and North Carolina.

The voting demographics story in 2012 was very similar to the one in 2008, since most of Obama's votes came from young women, minorities, the educated and the young.

Exit polls suggest female voters broke his way by a margin of 11 points—more than enough to offset Romney's advantage of seven points among men, especially as women made up 53% of the electorate. Voters below the age of 30 preferred Obama by 23 points, and defied all expectations by turning out in greater numbers than they had in 2008, apparently not disappointed in him, as the Republicans had hoped they would be. Obama also enjoyed a lead of 13% among those with postgraduate degrees, said one of the head analysts for the Economist (The Economist 2012).

Looking over the numerous analyses made during and after the campaign, the results show that Obama's success was strongly led-by minorities. "He prevailed among both Asians and Hispanics by almost three-to-one—both big improvements on his already strong showing in 2008. Black voters supported for him by almost the same dizzying margin as they did last time: 93% to 6%. And minorities constituted a bigger share of the electorate: 28% compared to 26% in 2008. Romney won the white vote by 59% to 39%—an improvement over John McCain's showing in 2008" (The Economist 2012).

Image 3.1: 2012 voting results in the USA presidential elections with comparative numbers of 2008 and 2004.



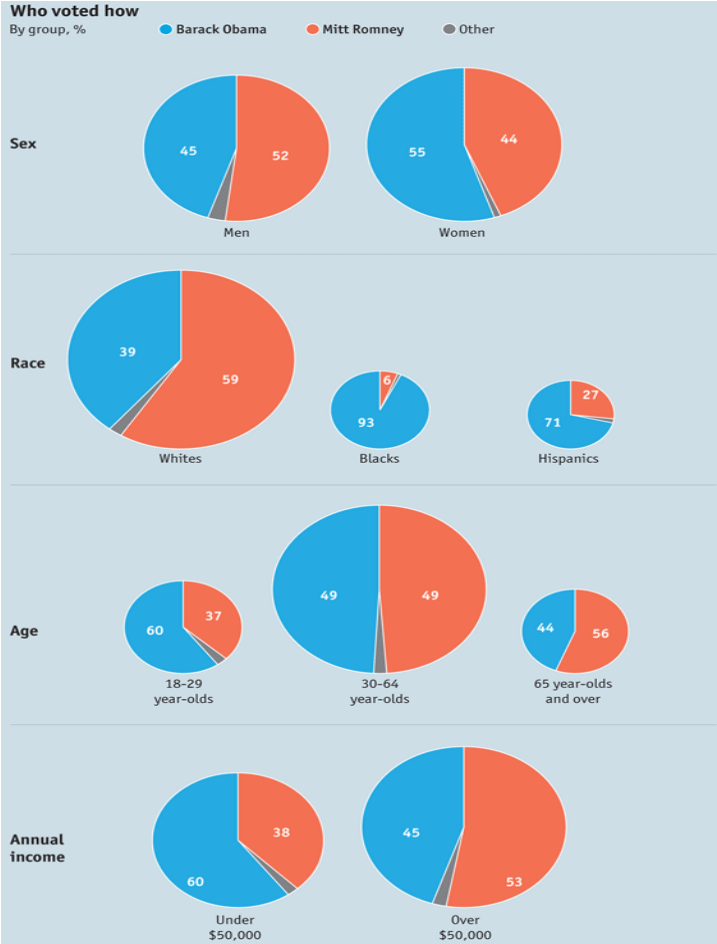
Source: The Economist (2012).

All this is evidence that Obama’s campaign strategy was effective again. Throughout his presidency, he has purposely disclosed policies designed to appeal to each of the latter mentioned groups. He wooed the young generation by battling for more student loans, women were advertised his first bill being signed into a law, which makes their wage discrimination battles easier and also boasted the clause in his health reforms, providing a no-extra cost contraception. To entice the Latin community, he approved amnesty from deportation to those illegal immigrants who had arrived as children. To stem his losses among the white working class, he highlighted his help for sustainment of the car industry that had backup of the government.

Obama’s niche campaigning was probably best detected through his wooing of the gay voting population, since he put an end to the long-standing policy of expelling openly gay soldiers from the armed forces, expressed personal support for gay marriage, etc. Romney on the other hand was against all Obama’s gay-population related suggestions and in the end, the 5% of

voters who identified themselves as gay in exit polls voted for Obama by 76% to 22%. Interesting enough, Obama’s victory can be seen as a refusal of the much current Republican dogma, on all above mentioned issues. That should worry Republicans, of course. But on the other hand Romney actually won on a quite narrow margin among those voters, whose biggest concern in the election was precisely the question of economic stability, as could be concluded with exit polls. And that should of course be a concern to Obama (The Economist 2012).

Image 3.2: 2012 voting turnout analyses



Source: CNN exit poll (2012).

The image from the previous page shows us that there were actually three main demographical groups of voters that made Obama's second term possible. The first pie chart reads that 55% of women, almost all black registered voters and 60 % of young people gave their vote to Obama. In both terms we can see reoccurring numbers of the stated demographic groups and the one that brought most attention to different scholars was the group of young adults. Since they are known to be fairly apathetic and their interest in politics is plummeting each year, it is interesting to analyze what Obama and his team did to encourage them to go out and vote. This will also be one of the discussions we will continue in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

4 THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Once the field of candidates has been narrowed through the nomination process, the scene of the party battle is shifted to the general election. Nominations are intraparty struggles, whereas the general election is an interparty struggle that operates in a different type of political environment. In the general election competition, there is normally a higher level of citizen interest, an expanded electorate, larger campaign expenditures, and greater media exposure. The nomination is an interim stage in the process of selection of government officials. In the general election, all decisions are final (Bibby and Schaffner 2008, 256).

Because of its complexity, an election campaign must be backed by a well-designed infrastructure and an ad hoc staff called upon to fulfill any number of tasks. In political communication, even the most obviously trivial decision multiplies the categories of people and types of tasks to accomplish. The latter involves all the activities of political marketing: designing and supervising every stage of the campaign; planning and organizing a politician's campaign trail; initiating and overseeing the fundraising process and coordinating the activities from top to bottom. In other words, the politician and his or her closest advisors on one hand, the team of field activists and volunteers on the other; following the campaigns of other politicians in the running and countering their moves, assuming all real activities inherent in the media chosen to convey the message, from designing the poster graphics to the actual distribution of leaflets in mailboxes; keeping blogs and social networks running by leading discussion forums and increasing linkage to friendly web sites (Maarek 2011, 179).

4.1 Definition of the Election Campaign

The election campaign is a connected series of operations, designed for reaching a certain goal. It is a structured battle, with great amounts of invested work, strategies and planning. The final outcome is always a winner and a loser, which can be already seen from the origin of the name "campaign" – the army vocabulary. Throughout time, campaigns were subject to numerous changes and development (Denton and Woodward 1998).

In the past, all election campaigns were dependent on availability, indirect communication and common identification with voters. The success of campaigns was interdependent with personal contact between the candidate and his voting body, whereas the campaign messages had no greater impact on the election of the presidential candidate so the outcomes were hard to measure and predict. Without the party supporting him/her, the candidate had no chance of winning the election; the campaigns were led by party activists and volunteers. Looking back

in history, the campaigns were full of traditional strategies and messages, which made the identification of the electorate possible (Denton and Woodward 1998).

Today the dynamic of campaigns has changed drastically, and the campaign process is influenced by numerous indicators and new technologies. Strong influence also comes from the media; without it the candidate wouldn't have any chance of reaching his voting base and potential supporters. One other important aspect of changed dynamics in the course of campaigns is the diminished impact of political parties, which have had an important role in the course of campaigns in the past. The presidential candidature is left to the individual who steps into the election race with the best prepared and financed campaign and tries to win the position of the leader of one of the strongest countries in the world. Experience that used to be crucial for success of a candidate doesn't have such an important role any more, whereas campaign running became an industry for itself, which gives candidates the opportunity for building important political careers and create large earnings (Denton and Woodward 1998).

Newfound election strategies and tactics have become more defined and structured and are a result of much scientific research. Campaign messages are made with the purpose of targeting a specific group of voters, which has become possible with newly developed technologies. Campaign messages have become a source of entertainment and information for the public (Denton and Woodward 1998).

The American presidential campaign, which happens every four years is unique and cannot be compared to any other presidential campaign in the world. It has historical meaning every time as well as global consequences. The presidential candidate is not found by chance, he is rather made with a single goal to be well presented and welcomed by the American public (Denton and Woodward in Šubic 2011).

4.2 Funding of Election Campaigns

Without substantial funds, it is rarely possible to run a credible campaign. Money is not the only critical campaign resource; as mentioned before, so are name identification, charisma, incumbency, volunteers, party organizational support, interest group backing, and a favorable balance within the constituency of party voters. But without money, the basics of a campaign are impossible to obtain. Money purchases a headquarters, consultants and staff, polls, media advertising, and travel. As the technology of campaigning has become more advanced and the electronic media has become an indispensable part of major campaigns, campaign costs have

escalated dramatically. Retaining professional campaign consultants to give advice on the use of modern campaign technology has become a standard feature of most campaigns (Bibby and Schaffner 2008).

The high cost of modern political marketing; presidential campaigning can easily be imagined in light of what we have mentioned above. To take only two examples among thousands of others: organizing a 5.000 person meeting can cost up to US\$200,000, and a direct mail campaign can amount to US\$1 million or more, depending on the number of recipients. It is no surprise, then, to discover that the total cost of the 2008 American Democratic Convention was reportedly above US\$100 million, more than three times what it was for Bill Clinton's nomination in 1992 (about US\$30 million). Altogether, according to the US Federal Election Commission (FEC), Barack Obama spent US\$730 million for the 2008 presidential campaign compared with the US\$333 million spent by John McCain, a much less effective fundraiser (Maarek 2011, 190). And the numbers only escalated in the 2012 presidential campaign, which we will discuss more about in following chapters.

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) requires that all contributions of US\$200 or more must be identified and all expenditures of US\$200 or more must be reported. Candidate committees and parties must also file periodic pre-election reports and a final postelection report with the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Using these reports, the FEC maintains an online searchable database of candidates, parties, political action committees (PACs) and donors. Visitors to the site can search for contributions made by particular individuals or by all individuals in any zip code. The site also allows users to browse a particular candidate's record of contributors in order to increase the transparency of the sources of candidates' financial support (Bibby and Schaffner 2008).

4.3 The Role of the Internet and New Media in Campaigning

We know that political communication has not only used traditional media, but also invented new ways of using them, due to technical progress, following the example set by commercial marketing. In the same way, politicians have brought the Internet into their service. Today, the Internet has become a huge rumor mill, in two ways:

- Traditional media, and particularly journalists, have started to surf the Internet in order to update the information they convey in their newscasts or newspapers. While the Internet is theoretically a rather "slow" medium – you have to wait until people get to

your website or blog in hope that your message will reach them – this allows a possible acceleration of their diffusion when they are picked up by the more traditional media.

- The evolution of the Internet with its growing interactivity (The so-called “Web 2.0”, with its blogs and social networks) has somehow changed its nature: from a “pull” medium, meaning that the recipient must go out and reach the information, it is becoming a “push” medium, where the information arrives to the recipient without any effort on his part – which strongly enhances the speed of message penetration among potential recipients/voters.

Both phenomena, which occur simultaneously, have built up the Internet as a new and indispensable tool for political communication and marketing. Everyone is now aware of the Internet’s role in both Barack Obama’s successful presidential campaigns, not counting many other examples in other countries. For instance, Socialist leader Ségolène Royal probably won the “primaries” within the Socialist Party thanks to a clever use of Internet blogging, and then made constant use of the Internet and its new modes during the ensuing 2007 presidential campaign, even though this same tool sometimes seriously worked to her detriment when some of her private statements or communication missteps were exaggerated here (Marek 2011, 158-160).

Some important conclusions about the use of Internet for political communication and campaigning have also been made by Negrine (2008):

- Mainstream news media is still one of the most important news sources.
- Even though elites produce and control their own media space it is not of great use when it is not read by the voters.
- Web sites compete and connect with other web sites and make unique information nets.
- Many internet sites offer different interactive tools and by using them, users can create their own webs of information and not only comment on existing ones.
- Information webs can open discussions outside the margins created by elites and traditional media.

Haynes and Pitts wrote in their 2008 pre-election analysis, that “as television and radio made a radical change in the process of presidential campaigns many years ago, the same is happening with the new media today, with their global impact on differentiation of campaign running, news anchoring and voter evaluation. While the main goals of campaigns stayed the same, different means of getting to those goals have expanded and changed” (Haynes and Pitts 2009, 53).

The Internet is still a rather new platform for political campaign fundraising, but it is rapidly becoming very important. It offers the opportunity, as Wilcox (2008) states, for new technologies to access smaller donors. It is more affordable, allows a broader chain of ideologies and a wider support net, than the already known techniques as for example, direct mail. Collecting substantial funds for campaigns is usually a sign of a candidate’s genuine viability and interest in the campaign and his candidacy (Wilcox 2008). The budget of a candidate for his campaign is usually a fairly accurate forecast of his or her success in the actual election. That is also a reason that candidates for the president of the United States of America, which are part of very expensive campaigns, search for different ways to connect with as many voters and potential funders as possible (Briški 2009).

5 THE ROLE OF NEW SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

With the evolution of digital communication and information technologies came numerous changes in modern political marketing and communication strategies. With the growth of the “digitalized nation”, it is of key importance for presidential candidates to take into consideration vast possibilities of online communication with potential voters. That gives politicians the opportunity to talk about campaign matters through various different channels, where the printed media are updated or new information is being produced, and at the same time gives an interactive means of communication to the voters (Negrine 2008). A new wave of technological innovations is sweeping through political campaigns. With the rise of the internet; social network sites such as YouTube, blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other social media tools, presidential candidates must communicate via internet (Karpf 2010). The latter was also one of the main reasons, the different above-mentioned web pages and social networks became important digital communication and mobilization channels, which made interaction and up to date messaging key to political marketing and the candidate’s success possible, and at the same time gave the candidate and his team the opportunity to get to know the voters and their preferences (Jankowski and Van Selm 2008).

New media and social networks make all types of interactivity possible, which differentiates it from traditional media, like radio, television and printed media. The key advantage of new media is, as mentioned above, interactivity, where the user is an active co-designer and distributor of information (Jensen in Oblak and Petrič 2005). And there is another important point to be made; young voters are taking the presidential elections to the social media. Rapidly increasing political engagement on these social network sites (SNS’s) could change the face of future elections, as will be shown in further analysis of the topic.

5.1 Social Media and Social Networks

“Social media integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation to collaboratively connect online information” (Herman 2012). The main dialogue features of social media are primarily the natural, genuine conversations between groups of people, about a common interest, a conversation built on thought and various experiences of involved individuals. It is sharing and producing a collective statement, usually for enabling a choice based on well informed sources of information.

Social networks represent the democratization of information, which transforms people from readers of content to creators of content. They use the “wisdom of masses” to connect

information in an inclusive way and by doing that, social networks make the most out of the interactive potential of new media and importantly differ from traditional media.

Different interactive forms are enabled by specific web technologies, like blogs, picture sharing, video blogs, wall-posting, emails, sending messages, music sharing, etc. These technologies are part of different social networks, like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, Google, Wikipedia, Flickr, Instagram, web applications, personalized web pages and others (Evans 2008).

To understand social network sites (SNS's) and new social media, we must also know about the life cycle of their use. Content administrators of different social networks whose goal is promotional activation, must be aware that there are numerous different groups of users, who are in different phases and they must also find numerous ways to motivate them. The above stated means that they must be attentive to the existing and potential audience while communicating and to take into account their general demographic specifics, interests and other more complex criteria (Žaler 2011).

Both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections continued a recent trend in political campaigning as candidates adapted their message to new communication tools. The popularity of social media, discussed in this chapter, especially among young voters, provided a highly visible environment for candidates to promote themselves, articulate their platforms, and interact with voters in fundamentally different ways than in previous elections. Likewise, these sites enabled users to interact with their peers about political issues and to share and discuss their opinions through a variety of formats. Data, retrieved from Pew Internet (Smith 2009) reveal that 65% of SNS users aged 18-29 years engaged in at least one of five political activities on SNS during one of the observed campaigns of 2008, such as joining a political group on the site or obtaining information about a candidate.

The normative implications of online advertising and communication control are profound. Although the internet is generally heralded as a democratic force (Trippi 2008)⁵, more and more evidence suggest that the same actors who influence the news media and election

⁵ Joe Trippi is also known to be one of the pioneers of online campaigning. He was the campaign manager of Howard Dean in the 2004 election. Trippi was the first to incorporate an »online team« into a traditionally structured election campaign and his team was the first to create and successfully use their own blog online, to start organizing rallies of campaign supporters, that came together online as well as successfully using internet for fundraising (Haynes and Pitts 2009).

campaigns offline are doing so online as well (Hindman 2009). The same author also finds that top bloggers in the USA are even more elite in terms of their educational background than are the leading writers who appear on the nation's editorial pages. Moreover, he finds that most of the top-viewed websites are owned by media giants that predated the internet era. And here an important question arises once more, with which I have dealt to some extent already in my undergraduate thesis. I discussed the actual impact of media on American politics, and if I would continue my research, the following could be one of the research areas for PhD work as well: rather than turning power over to the people, is online political communication and advertising just another venue for traditional political elites to attempt to influence election outcomes?

For now, we will stay within our master thesis focus, where we will mainly analyze five different types of SNS's: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Youtube and personalized web pages/applications because of their importance in the topic being discussed. Obama's digital approach in both pre-election campaigns gave the above mentioned networks most emphasis, so let us further discuss their characteristics.

5.1.1 Facebook

This is a rather new social network that became instantly popular and nowadays there is hardly a person without a Facebook profile. It gives users a chance to make their own personalized profiles, uploading pictures, videos and other online contents, connecting with other people's profiles (Facebook friends) all over the world. Owners of profiles express their online personality through pictures, words and the composition of their page, as well as other information about their career, hobbies, statuses, favorite books and movies. These characteristics are common to most online social networks.

One of the few authors that went into depth with analyzing Facebook is Zizi Papacharissi (2009) and for the purpose of this thesis writing, here are two of the main extractions from her analytical work.

Connecting public and personal spheres, according to Papacharissi, includes three different areas; an index of registering or joining, an information transparency index, and the criteria for user autonomy. Looking at the first index, Facebook is an open network where anyone can join and make their own profile if they have internet access and it is free of charge. The

second index also makes Facebook an open system, since profiles are to some extent accessible to anyone; even on Google browser. The third criterion defines Facebook users as autonomous, since they can form their own online environment and control the information they share with other users.

The second important Facebook sphere for our analysis is *self-promotion and personal-public versus public-personal spaces* and it gives users many options. They can adapt their internet appearance in numerous ways; they can introduce themselves through their description, competencies, interests, shared video and photo materials, links and status updates. At the same time, they introduce themselves with their friends, who can be placed in different groups, so they can decide what materials to share with them. Other important possible activities are sending messages, pushing the “like button” and commenting on contents that have been shared by others.

A special Facebook characteristic and an important marketing niche are different groups and favorite pages, which can be used for promotional purposes, or bringing similar-thinking people all to one place. They can be administrated by companies, different small businesses, organizations etc. Of course all of them give the users (fans) a possibility of high interactivity (Papacharissi 2009).

5.1.2 MySpace

This next social network is to some extent fairly similar to Facebook. If we look at the above mentioned criteria of public and personal, we can put it in the same group as an open social network, where anyone can register for free and become an active user. The profiles are accessible to users as well as the ones who are not registered to MySpace via Google or the network itself, but the user can still control which information will be shared publicly and what other only with specific users/friends.

It is also very similar to Facebook in terms of conversation and interaction possibilities, presented to the user. It has options of changing statuses, moods, photos, links, videos, music, sending messages, blog writing, and changing profile templates. Also there is the possibility of the “like button”. The main difference between the two popular networks is that profiles of companies, organizations, celebrities and others are linked to the profiles of individuals that create them directly.

5.1.3 Twitter

The newest of all social networks, which also got global popularity instantly and is used frequently by celebrities, politicians, bloggers and other new age opinion makers is considered a micro-blog. It has the characteristics of such a social network. If we look at the two criteria Papacharissi (2009) formed and were mentioned in previous writings, again Twitter is also fully accessible to anyone with internet access and can be used freely. Looking at information transparency, this network is also an open system and user profiles can be found and visited through different browsers. Twitter users are, like Facebook and MySpace users, autonomous to some extent, as they can control the accessibility of their tweets.

With self-presentation and personal-public versus public-personal spheres, Twitter gives users the possibility of presenting themselves with a photograph, biography of maximum 160 symbols and gives them options for designing their profile. A key user characteristic of Twitter is, as previously mentioned, micro-blogging, a hybrid of blogging and social networking to some extent, where users post tweets with 140 symbols or less and in that way react to the orientation question “What are you doing” (Shepherd 2009). Twitter users communicate with their friends, in that they follow their tweets and they can also send messages. Similar to MySpace, Twitter also has the feature of celebrity, organization and company profiles linked to personal accounts of individual users. Twitter is a user-friendly social network and thus a very popular one; we can also tweet through short messages from our mobile phones (Shepherd 2009).

Twitter has been of all SNS’s lauded the most for its potential political value by academics, journalists and politicians. Some analysis show that strong partisans and those exhibiting high levels of traditional political participation activity tweet about politics most often which supports those who argue that we can expect to find the same political activists online and offline (Bekafigo and McBride 2011).

5.1.4 YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing social network. It is a useful platform for online video exchange, where users upload different video contents, which makes attracting new users and audiences possible all the time (Burgess and Green in Žaler 2011).

Again, if looking at the criteria of connecting public and personal, YouTube is an entirely open system and can be used by anyone; videos posted online are usually also freely accessible, with some exceptions of age and country limitations. The second criteria allows users to create their own channels for video content exchange, where they can also create different looking profiles with nicknames, profile pictures, as well as post updates and choose favorite videos. Users can also comment on other users video contents and embed them in websites, post through other social networks; blogs etc. and also click the “like button”. YouTube provides users with a special feature, where they can subscribe to preferred channels. Here, channels of individual users are connected to organization, company, musician, celebrity and other channels.

5.1.5 Personalized Websites (MyBarackObama.com)

In general, personalized websites are also social networks to some extent; built for the sole purpose of commercializing an individual – in our case, presidential candidates and their message. They also give numerous possibilities for interaction with other users online and also offline. Any well-constructed and strategized presidential campaign will also include an active personalized website of its candidate. Since we are mostly analyzing Obama’s digital approach throughout both presidential campaigns, this subchapter will look more closely at his website which has been active since the first campaign in 2008 and is still high in visitor-rate numbers.

MyBarackObama.com (MyBO) has many features, including different interest and organizational areas a visitor can choose from: Community, Events, Fundraising, Messages, Blog and Resources. If we compare it to other SNS’s, we can say that it is to some extent similar to MySpace, but with a strong emphasis on mobilization. It was used for encouraging event organization, volunteering and subscription to short messages or emails from Barack Obama. It also gave page visitors the possibility to contact and connect with people that are known to be hardly reachable (other politicians that supported Obama, celebrities, government officials from the Democratic Party etc.) (van Venedaal and Beuker 2009) and (Engage Research 2012).

6 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2008 AND 2012

6.1 Candidates and Campaigns 2008 – Brief Overview

As noted, the 2008 election was in the historical sense of electing the president of the USA, an important milestone. Not only was it the longest and most expensive until then, it recorded the highest turnout rate, and contrary to conventional wisdom and politics, it had an African-American winner, Barack Obama.

Officially, the 2008 election had several candidates running for the presidency, but the highest possibility to win was already given to candidates of the Republican and Democratic Parties: John McCain and Barack Obama. Other candidates came from smaller political parties and there was also Ralph Nader, an already well-known independent candidate, who had been a part of the elections for the past several years.

Voters’ participation in the 2008 elections was “good but not great”, stated political analyst Cook (Cook in Briški 2009, 236). Several political analysts expected the turnout to be even higher, as the projections showed just before the voting took place. 61, 6 % of registered voters over 18 years old turned in their ballots. In the USA, one must be over 18 and registered to vote to be able to give their vote at the elections. FEC data showed a number of 131.257.328 regular voting ballots while there were around 213 million people with voting rights, which could choose among 24 candidates. Obama got 52, 92 % of the popular vote while McCain was the first choice of 45, 66 % of the voters.

Table 6.1: 2008 Election Outcomes by Number of Votes:

| Candidate (Political Party) | Number of votes (in %) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Barack Obama (Democrat) | 52, 92 % |
| John MCCain (Republican) | 45, 66 % |
| Ralph Nader (Independent candidate) | 0,56 % |
| Bob Barr (Libertarian) | 0,15 % |

Source: Federal Election Commission (2008).

Analyzing voter profiles in the 2008 election data reveals that women represented 53% of the electorate and 56% of them voted for Obama, McCain got 43% of the women’s votes, 2/3 of the Latin American community and most Americans of Asian origin. Most of the Caucasian voters; 55%, gave their vote to McCain (Todd and Gawiser 2009).

Part of the 2008 election that is also very important for our further comparison and analysis is the turnout of young voters. In Obama’s campaign process there has been an emphasis on the mobilization of young people, who supported his politics on the Iraqi war, economy, social politics and environment. The Democratic candidate ran a dialogue with the young voters through different channels, and his modern approach, embracing “young people’s language” proved efficient since he gathered 66% of their votes, while McCain got only 32%. We will look closer at how these new methods worked and how efficient they actually were for his double victory, in the upcoming chapter (The Green Papers 2008).

We mentioned earlier in our discussion the importance of campaign funding for the success of candidates in the election so let us briefly go through the main financial aspects of the 2008 campaign. “Obama’s team raised more money from private donors than all Democrat and Republican candidates combined together, which was a precedent that will never happen again”, as speculated by Toner (Toner in Sabato 2010).

Obama’s followers raised an astounding 400 million dollars in the pre-election alone and then another 336 million dollars of donations followed. That meant a stronger presence for Obama’s slogans and ads in the last weeks of the campaign; he bought up to three times more television air than his rival McCain (Briški 2009).

The decision made by Obama and his team to renounce the possibility of public funding was hazardous, but by dispersing funds received by their donors, it gave the campaign strategists a competitive advantage and they avoided the numerous limitations that come together with accepting public funding, as did candidate McCain.

Table 6.2: Obama and McCain 2008 Fundraising Overview:

| TYPE OF DONATION | BARACK OBAMA (%) | JOHN MCCAIN (%) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Private donations | 88 % | 54 % |
| Funding of PAC’s ⁶ | 0 % | 0 % |
| Candidate’s personal resources | 0 % | 0 % |
| Federal funding | 0 % | 23 % |
| Other | 12 % | 23 % |

Source: Center for Responsive Politics (2008).

⁶ Political Action Committees are committees formed by business, labor, or other special-interest groups to raise money and make contributions to those campaigns of political candidates whom they support (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013).

6.2 Candidates and Campaigns 2012 – Brief Overview

Table 6.3: 2012 Election Outcomes by Number of Votes:

| Candidate (Political Party) | Number of votes (in %) |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Barack Obama (Democrat) | 51,06 % |
| Mitt Romney (Republican) | 47,20 % |
| Gary Johnson (Libertarian) | 0,99 % |
| Jill Stein (Green) | 0,36 % |

Source: Federal Election Commission (2012).

Table 6.4: Obama and Romney 2012 Fundraising Overview:

| TYPE OF DONATION | BARACK OBAMA (%) | MITT ROMNEY (%) |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Private donations | 68 % | 45 % |
| Funding of PAC's | 0 % | 0 % (\$1,076,496) |
| Candidate's personal resources | 0 % (\$5,000) | 0 % (\$52,000) |
| Federal funding | 0 % | 0 % |
| Other | \$522,529 | \$1,643,991 |

Source: Center for Responsive Politics (2012).

The re-election campaign of Barack Obama for 2012 was formally announced on April 4, 2011, with Vice President Joe Biden by his side with opposed candidates from the Republicans and candidates from other parties. His strongest opponent was the candidate of the Republican Party, Mitt Romney.

Obama stationed his campaign headquarters in Chicago and had important members of his previous campaign, Jim Messina and David Axelrod, on board again. On the day of the announcement, the campaign released a promotional video on the official website of the campaign titled "It Begins with Us", showing supporters of Obama organizing for the re-election effort. As Richard Adams of *The Guardian* (2012) newspaper noted, this was the first U.S. presidential re-election campaign to use Twitter and Facebook for promotion. They titled the whole campaign strategy "Obama for America" (OFA).

Between 2011 and end of June 2012, the Obama campaign and supporters spent approximately \$400 million, according to the FEC, and were successful in getting out the vote. This was the first time since 1944, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt won re-

election, that a Democratic president had twice won by a majority of the popular votes and over 51% of the popular vote both times (Roosevelt won 4 elections).

President Obama did not have any troubles in winning the Democratic primaries, since he was the only candidate in almost all states and got even more than the required 2778 delegates to secure the nomination. On April 30, 2012 Obama's campaign team announced the official campaign slogan "Forward".

The campaign of Barack Obama was not based in Washington, as were other re-election candidates' headquarters up until then, instead, they moved their operations to Chicago. The decision to base the campaign outside of Washington was said to reflect grassroots support for the re-election.

The day Obama announced his candidacy was the same day they started accepting online donations and gathered over 23,000 online donations of \$200 or less. Amongst many other fundraisers that have been organized by Obama and his staff, campaign Chairman Jim Messina asked a group of 450 top donors to raise \$350,000. During the second fundraising quarter of 2011, which was also the first of the campaign, they raised a record amount of \$86,000,000 and as of May 3, 2012, Obama and his team had held 130 fundraisers.

More than 550,000 individuals donated towards the campaign in the second quarter of 2011, which is a much larger number than the 180,000 individuals who donated to Obama's 2008 campaign during the first half of 2007. From the beginning of the campaign to December 31, 2011, more than 1.3 million individuals donated to the campaign. The LGBT community has donated a record amount so far to the campaign. As of March 31, 2012, the campaign has raised \$191.7 million, Messina explained for Barackobama.com (2013).

Among many celebrity endorsements Obama got throughout his campaign, there was one significant fundraiser held by the actor George Clooney, where over \$15 million were raised "The fundraiser was initially estimated to raise about \$10 million, but after Obama's historic announcement of his support for same-sex marriage, the amount went up significantly. Many believed that the LGBT community and activists would donate historic amounts after the announcement" (Wikipedia 2012).

Obama's campaign was also supported by Priorities USA Action, an independent expenditure PAC that several former Obama campaign officials formed but was legally prohibited from coordinating with the candidate or his campaign.

The OFA campaign was rated as overall highly effective in getting out the vote, in large part because of technology used to identify voters, and in capitalizing on growing segments of the voting population. Many analysts claim that Obama won the re-election race, not by going after independent voters, but by primarily going after emerging groups in the American population. By race, age gender and many more factors, voters made clear that the electorate is made up of many parts, and Obama together with his team was able to identify many of the different parts and brought them to the polls for securing another term in the White House.

When discussing events that led to Obama's victory we mustn't neglect Hurricane Sandy that hit one week before election. Although there were many speculations on how the natural catastrophe could have a negative impact on voter turnout and Obama's results at the time of the elections, the effect was just the opposite. Obama's reaction to the hurricane was quick and gave people some feeling of stability. He signed emergency declarations for several states expected to be impacted by the hurricane, allowing them to request federal aid and make additional preparations in advance of the storm. The hurricane and all of its aftermath were believed to have helped Obama in the end, since it drew attention away from the campaigns and Obama was able to take *a bipartisan position and be "presidential"*. "The event sparked debates and discussions on climate change, which had been ignored by both parties prior to the event" (Wikipedia 2012).

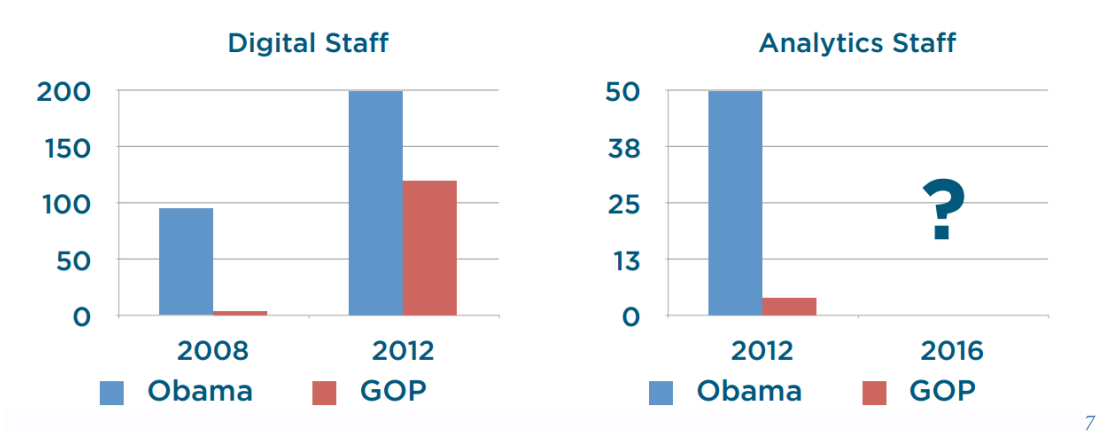
On November 6, 2012, Obama was re-elected for his second term as President of the United States. He won 65,899,660 popular votes and 332 electoral votes, two states short of his 2008 victory and had broken a fundraising record with raising over a billion dollars for the purposes of campaigning.

6.3 The Barack Obama Approach 2008 versus 2012

"The core of the campaign was not flashy or even particularly innovative except in the willingness of senior staff to listen to numbers people rather than consultants acting on old-fashioned political intuition" said Barack Obama after the 2012 election campaign (Engage Research 2012).

Obama 2012 didn't have the magic of hope and change. What it did have was a relentless focus on operational excellence and massive scale, which we will analyze more precisely in the last chapter of the master thesis. Despite being evenly matched financially, Obama for America conceived of and built an operation four times the size of its competition. Future national campaigns will have to grapple with how they build this massive an organization.

Graph 6.5: Digital 2008 versus Analytics 2012



Source: Engage Research (2012).

As we can see from the graphs above, one of the main differences in the 2008 and 2012 campaign approaches of Barack Obama and his team was that OFA (Organizing for America; a community organizing project of the Democratic National Committee) didn't hire typical political staffers. Instead of what they did in 2008, this time they went directly to Silicon Valley and to data analysts in the Fortune 500 and academia. One of them used to work at Pixar; another was a high-energy particle physicist.

Since some of the leading professional strategists from the 2008 campaign team led the 2012 team as well, they also kept a part of Obama's Technology Machine from 2008:

- Blue State Digital was the lead digital agency for Obama in 2008 and 2012 and was co-founded by Joe Rospars, New Media Director in '08 and Chief Digital Strategist in 2012.
- In 2008, they led most software development, and in 2012, they focused mostly on online fundraising and e-mail when most development was moved in-house (Engaged Research 2012).

⁷ The Republican Party is also commonly called the GOP or the »Grand Old Party« (Retrieved from <http://www.internetslang.com>). (August 2013).

One of the most important and efficient features of the 2012 campaign, which only had grassroots beginnings in 2008 was the Analytics part of the strategy and campaign. It saw a fivefold increase in staffing and resources over 2008.

Paul Blumenthal from the Huffington Post (2012) wrote the following in one of his in-depth analysis of the 2012 campaign:

The call centers that completed different analytics surveys typically specialize in voter identification, the process of contacting most or all individual voters in a state to identify supporters who can then be targeted in subsequent "get out the vote" efforts. This was also mainly a strategy in the 2008 campaign. But the Obama campaign's 2012 approach to voter targeting was different. It called very large random samples of voters to develop statistical models that generated scores applied to all voters, which were then used for get-out-the-vote and persuasion targeting.

We must agree with Blumenthal’s statement as well as with researchers of Engage Research; authors of *Inside the Cave*, where they have discussed and shown many indicators to traditional forms of voter contact becoming obsolete. Obama’s campaign team understood this trend as a challenge. Since their organization's completion rates on phones dropped from 23% to 16% from 2008 to 2012 and continually buying ad space in different media environments didn’t work anymore, they took their activities away from landlines and postal services – to different new approaches you can see in the image below.

Table 6.6: How did Obama for America Innovate in 2012

| | Old | New |
|-------------------------|------------|---|
| TV | Broadcast | Optimizer (behaviorally targeted TV buys) |
| GOTV | Phones | Facebook |
| Opinion Research | Polling | Analytics |

Source: Engage Research (2012).

The table shows us that they moved from the 2008 typical television broadcasting to optimizing their bought air time with targeting different audience groups. They moved numerous polling activities from phones to Facebook, where they gathered voters’ opinions, supporters and got direct feedback on the effectiveness of their campaigning. One of the most lauded and successful tactics was developing a massive analytical database, which gave standard polling and campaign strategies a whole new dimension.

When we talk about optimizing the efficiency of buying television air time, we have to also mention the technology that Obama and his team have developed for the 2012 election, known as Optimizer. This technology made buying television adds possible in the same way that online ads were bought; that is by focusing on audiences rather than channels. The Obama campaign collected data about their supporters’ viewing habits and then projected the number of targeted voters watching specific shows at specific times for each channel in each state. Then they chose the shows they felt were most cost-effective and it is estimated this made their total television strategy 10-20% more efficient. If we convey this statement into numbers, we get an equivalent of \$40 million and \$80 million in added media. “This meant that they bought micro-audiences that no one else would think to buy, spending less per advertisement. At one point, the Obama campaign was up on 60 different channels compared with the Romney campaign's 18 during the same time period” (Engage Research 2012).

Table 6.7: Fundraising Results 2008 versus 2012

| | 2008 | 2012 |
|----------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Total Raised Online | \$500M | \$690M |
| Donors | 3.95M | 4.4M |
| Average Per Donor | \$126 | \$156 |

Source: Engage Research (2012).

Data in this table tell us that comparing the fundraising success of both Obama’s campaigns, their strategy worked once again. If they didn't beat their 2008 numbers, OFA would never come close to the billion-dollar goal they had. Again, like in 2008 they rejected all public funding and again – they “outraised” their opponent. Here are some main turning points, how OFA turned around initially weak fundraising and raised \$1 billion:

1. Send many more emails than 2008 (At least 404 national fundraising e-mails in 2012)
2. Test everything.
3. Make people think they were going to lose (Engage Research 2012).

The team behind Obama’s success in 2008 relied heavily on BSD tools (Software tools, which held up different operational systems for their web pages, applications etc.) in 2008, the first campaign hired just 4 in-house developers. The new approach of 2012 was, driven by sufficient funding and the goal of winning, enlarging human resources and hiring 40 engineers for the re-election in 2012.

Now that we have looked at the main similarities and differences of both approaches to campaigning by Obama and his team, we can concur with many analysts, scholars and journalists, who have stated many times, that both campaigns set milestones in various aspects. They had a global impact and brought about new trends with millions of dollars behind them. In 2008, a first African-American president was elected in the United States of America, who had already then a mammoth team behind him and tested new digital approaches which were a success. He then carried on his strategy in the re-election phase of 2012, only to develop even more innovative approaches and to become president again.

It has been written many times throughout this analysis, that one of the main reasons for Obama's historical success was supposedly also the new digital approach he and his team applied to both campaigns and rallied so many voters with, especially young people. This is an important analytical moment, since low turn-out rates in elections and a lack of interest in and motivation to learn about political systems have been recognized in several studies. On that note it is reasonable to assume that above stated and similar findings have stirred an on-going debate about the disengagement of young people from institutional politics and their low turn-out rates in many previous elections (Baumgartner and Morris 2010) and (Boyd 2007). In the next phase of our discussion we will try to examine what this approach was and how it had such an important impact on election outcomes.

7 COMPARING THE 2008 AND 2012 ELECTIONS – DIGITAL APPROACH

The traditional 30-second political spot together with other traditional and some new media campaign approaches has been the topic of much scholarly attention. Because of the availability of information about political advertising, we now have a good idea about what political ads are produced each year and where they are aired, be it on traditional television or new age digital outlets such as internet television and radio, SNS's, etc. (West 2009).

When we talk about digital, online political advertising, communicating with the electoral body, fundraising and other, we are interested in all forms of political communication, be it via internet and its social networks, emails etc. or by smart phones, which have been a great part the past two campaigns, especially the 2012 new strategies of the Obama for America team.

The 2008 Obama Presidential campaign, as we all know by now, made history. Not only was Obama the first African American to be elected president, but he was also the first presidential candidate to effectively use social media as a major campaign strategy. It's easy to forget, given how omnipresent social media is today, that in 2008 sending out voting reminders on Twitter and interacting with people on Facebook was considered a milestone. When Obama announced his candidacy in 2007, Twitter had only just been aired online and that was also the pre-iPhone era. Many things have changed in the past few years and the media landscape differs from the one in 2008 not only by the increasing number of online users but also by the revolutionary technology development. Currently, there are 69 % of American adults who use social networks, which is a significantly higher number of the 37% that was measured in 2008 (Rutledge 2013). Despite many discussions about the relevance of online political activism, much research, like that of MacArthur Research Network on Youth & Participatory Politics, finds that people, especially young voters who engage in online activities of political matter, are more likely to actually vote. Before the last election campaign took place, there have been many doubts about the impact social media might make, since in 2008, "McCain's campaign was as social-media-deaf as Obama's was social-media-savvy. Would the Romney campaign be able to compete in the social cyberspace? Would the Obama campaign be able to effectively harness social technologies again" (Rutledge 2013).

If we take the comparison of the latter author cited, like John F. Kennedy is known to be the first candidate who really understood television, we can safely say Obama is the first reelected president who actually grasped the social media landscape in all its vastness. (Rutledge 2013).

7.1 Analysis of the efficient use of Different Social Media in Campaigning

Some experts believe that with the evolution of Internet, a basis for new strong campaigns has been made and that this is one of the most important changes in American nomination politics, particularly if we look back at the last few voting cycles. Digital technology with its immense possibilities, which were embraced by political campaign managers and their candidates, has become an important asset for successful fundraising (Aldrich 2009). The media environment, constructed of a complex mixture of old and new platforms has pointed into the direction of the media and campaigns link intensifying.

In this analytical chapter we will try to establish if the digital approach, chosen by Barack Obama and his team for both election campaigns, was indeed successful and efficient in voter mobilization, especially with young voters and whether or not it had any significant impact on the election outcomes. Throughout our analysis we will also discuss the possible impact social media nowadays may have on fostering political engagement among young people.

Since we are looking at both 2008 and 2012 campaign activities, it is possible that some data from the 2008 campaign are not accessible anymore, especially some profiles of the candidate in social networks, thus we will mainly analyze data gathered from secondary sources.

The Democrats have shown better “navigational skills” than the Republicans in the diverse media environment for the first time during the election campaign of 2008. Although all candidates used the Internet for their promotional activities, Barack Obama’s campaign had the most innovative and successful approach in making the Internet work in their behalf, which is also demonstrated in the table below along with results of online presence of his main opponent for the 2008 presidential race, John McCain.

Table 7.1: Comparison of Obama and McCain online presence and activity in 2008

| CONDITION | BARACK OBAMA | JOHN MCCAIN |
|--|--------------------|---------------|
| Number of Facebook friends on election day | 2.397.253 | 622.860 |
| Number of videos, posted on YouTube | 1.822 | 330 |
| Time spent by people watching videos of both campaigns | 14,6 million hours | 488.000 hours |
| Number of Twitter followers | 125.639 | 5.319 |

Source: Briški (2009).

Before the election activities in 2008 started, Obama’s strategic team had put up a fan page of their candidate on Facebook and it was one of the main online channels which they used for communicating all Obama’s ideas, political beliefs, shared photographs and video footage, as well as inviting page fans and supporters to various campaign events. It gave voters the chance to access up-to-date information about their candidate and to engage in dialogue with other visitors.

The table shows impressive numbers of over 2 million Obama Facebook fans with more than 11.000 writings on Obama’s Facebook wall, which is far more than the 3.532 which Hillary Clinton got or 2.159 fans that wrote on McCain’s wall (Robertson et al. 2010).

This information alone shows us that Obama’s activities stirred up the most interest and attracted the most voters; compared to other candidates he was running against at that time.

Author Gulati states, that we can to some extent attribute Obama’s success in the 2008 campaign to the fact that his online activities were mostly about encouraging supporter meetings and their mobilization instead of just “*classical preaching to the choir*” (Gulati in Briški 2009). The focus was not on Obama’s ambitions as much as it was about selling the concept of his campaign to the public. Employing the use of new media and popular social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube has proven to be very successful when communicating with young potential voters and minorities, two of the traditionally more complex groups to reach. As some reports show, before Obama’s campaign started working on their personalized web page MyBarackObama.com, they consulted the co-founder of Mark Zuckerberg’s social network Facebook, Chris Hughes. With MyBO they supposedly

succeeded in mobilizing over 8 million volunteers and organized over 30.000 election-related events, carried out by Obama supporters in all 50 states (Toner in Briški 2009).

If we look at Facebook more closely, we can say that it has had the biggest growth in recent years with over 1 billion active users and has 168 million users only in America.

Table 7.2: Comparison of Obama and Romney online presence and activity in 2012

| CONDITION | BARACK OBAMA | MITT ROMNEY |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| Number of Facebook friends on election day | 34 million | 10.2 million |
| Number of followers on YouTube | 233,000 | 21,000 |
| Number of Twitter followers | 24 million | 1,5 million |

Source: The Week (2012).

In the 2012 election, Obama and his team went even further in preparation of campaign activities, changed some communication and analysis strategies and did even better in terms of fans, voter activity and mobilization than in the previous campaign. The actual election results showed a decrease in voter support for Obama, but despite many obstacles in his first term and the economic situation deteriorating, he still managed to gather enough percentage of the popular vote and enough electoral votes to win a second term.

The SNS numbers were even more staggering in 2012, with Obama getting over 32 million Facebook fans on election day and now the number is climbing over 34 million, with some analysts calling it “The Facebook megaphone”, as we can also see from the image on the next page.

Table 7.3: Comparison of Obama and Romney online presence and activity in 2012

| CONDITION | BARACK OBAMA | MITT ROMNEY |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| Number of Facebook friends on election day | 32,313,965 | 12,135,972 |
| Number of Twitter followers | 22,887,645 | 1,7 million |

Source: Ward (2012).

Image 7.4: Facebook entry page of Barack Obama in the 2012 election campaign



Source: Engage Research (2012).

Despite his team of only 4 people in charge of managing social networks being rather small in comparison to other departments running the campaign, they managed to get over 1.2M active Facebook app users and as mentioned before, over 34 million Facebook fans. The key was using a single application throughout the campaign, allowing them to build up a massive install base and add features throughout the duration of the campaign. 98% of the U.S. Facebook population was friends with someone who liked Barack Obama (Engaged Research 2012).

Another social network site that was used in both campaigns and reached many potential voters was MySpace (MySpace Barack Obama). During campaigns, page administrators posted photographs, statuses and videos online, but the main online tool to engage visitors and communicate the candidate's strategies and political visions, was writing a blog. It was full of speech videos, donation requests and other features, similar to Facebook activities. In the 2008 election campaign, Obama had almost a million MySpace friends, and that number nearly tripled until 2012. Again, he was ahead of his opponents in both presidential races (Lardinois 2008) and (MySpace Barack Obama).

Some scholars believe that we can also find main reasons for the success of online campaigning in the demographics of the Democratic coalition, which is fairly similar to the demographic characteristics of SNS users.

Among various analyzed social networks, we cannot go past Twitter, a social network site built up as a micro-blogging online sphere, which became instantly popular among online visitors despite its relatively short air time. Barack Obama did not lag behind in wowing the Twitter audience and by the 2012 campaign he had more than 24 million followers on Twitter and between 30 and 40 tweets from @BarackObama a day.

Image 7.5: The most tweeted photo in Twitter history was the photo of Michelle and Barack Obama after the reelection.



Source: Barack Obama Twitter (@Barack Obama)

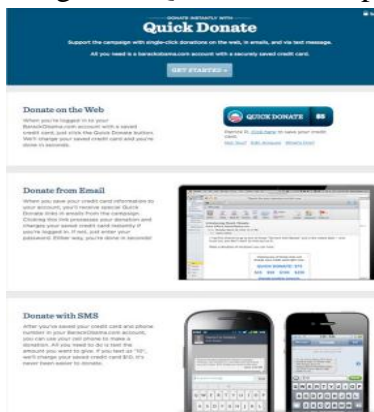
One other aspect that made Obama's campaign more efficient and likable to the audience is the fact he understood the immediacy of social media.

It creates instant channels for memes—an idea or symbol—to take hold and spread rapidly. Memes became a dominant cultural event; they frame or even override other messaging. Romney's campaign was hurt by their lack of understanding of both this phenomenon and the fluidity of Internet media channels. The most notable meme faux pas was the 'binders full of women' remark that started on Twitter and immediately went viral across multiple media including parody accounts on Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook (Rutledge 2013).

When analyzing the efficient use of social media for purposes of successful campaigning, we mustn't neglect other social media tools besides the already discussed popular SNS's. Obama's campaign, especially in 2012, had a very interesting and vast approach to digital media from the analytical point of view. They didn't stop at just using social media for

communication and spreading their messages, but also made significant milestone steps towards conceptualizing a brand new campaign approach for using the possibilities of digital technology working on their behalf. Let us look more closely at what other features they implemented in election campaigning. Since they have understood early on how important individual donations are, OFA designed a special online application for computer and mobile use called “Quick Donate”. It is an application which stored info credit card information of the donor directly on the personalized website MyBarackObama.com and made it possible for the donation to be made by just one click or over the mobile phone. This feature solved an important challenge they were facing; since they had over 25 % of voters only on mobile phones, but almost no donations from that source (Engage Research 2012).

Image 7.6: Quick Donate Application



Source: Engage Research (2012).

This application, a novelty of the 2012 campaign, actually had more than 1.5 million users and has helped raise \$115 million. Donors using this application donated three times more money and the frequency of the donation was four times higher (Engage Research 2012).

Furthermore, they solved one of the problems they faced in 2008 for decentralizing the digital field with the Dashboard project, since the MyBarackObama, the personalized website and online organizing platform, did not meet all of the field staffers’ needs. If we look at the online advertising history briefly, the numbers state that OFA was the first political campaign in history to spend more than \$1 million on online advertising and other activities, with the digital share of the whole campaign budget being 21 %. They used internet site overtakes,

direct response online ads etc.⁸ They were also strongly ahead of Obama's main opponent Mitt Romney with email campaigning and fundraising, since they tested 10,000 segments during the campaign of an email team with 18 staff members, who regularly tested as many as 18 variations on subject line and email copy. With this tactic, they saw up to an 80% difference between versions and they have also developed a special tactic for asking the optimal amount from previous donors. And what is also very interesting; they had almost no interference from campaign management on the content of emails being sent out (Engage Research 2012).

If we review all points made in this chapter together with all collected and analyzed data, we can establish that Obama and his team successfully embedded all available new technologies and vast communication possibilities of social media into both campaign strategies. This had a great impact on voter turnout, supporter engagement, fundraising, and last but not least Obama's reelection in 2012. We must concur with many authors claiming that social media importantly influenced the elections outcome, since it helped the campaign teams to organize and motivate millions of people in sharing key messages of the candidate in both presidential races. It has also served as an important organizational tool for field operations and a great mobilization source of young people's engagement and voter turnout. It has provided the two-way communication, which is much appreciated among voters and therefore highly rewarded by them going out and voting for Obama. In my opinion, he also made himself more reachable in the eyes of voters and by communicating through social media; posting everyday pictures online for example, he has proven to be just as normal and down to earth as every other average SNS visitor or user. He made an important switch from an unreachable candidate who only exposes himself through traditional media to someone voters can easily relate to.

There are also some authors who have arguments opposing the claims we made in our thesis; Goodstein (in Lemon 2008) stated that Obama did in fact make good use out of social media and their global impact, but that in fact that wasn't the main reason for his victory in 2008. He stated that it was actually the main message of the campaign that got the attention of the

⁸ Analysis data show that online advertisements with Michelle Obama worked best and that their strategy of asking people to sign up to a website first and than redirecting them to donation landing pages made the campaign raise more money (Engage Research 2012).

voters and consequentially their votes, and not how this message was delivered to them. In his opinion, the key to campaign success is the message as well as the messenger.

Becker (2008) and Raymond (2008) also carried out an opposing argument to social media dominance in the winning campaign of 2008; in their opinion, emails were an even more crucial aspect of success since it was supposedly the main tool for implementing Obama's communication goals. David Talbot (2008) also made an interesting comment right after Obama had won his first election race: "We are all very thrilled about the fact President Obama succeeded in getting over a million people to register but there are still 300 million of us in the USA. We are still in the early stages of technology capacity for social networking; not only in our politics, but in general."

Although all the above written comments may have some basis, still we argue the fact that social networks indeed were one of the "not so much hidden Trojan horses" of both campaign strategies by Barack Obama and his team. We will also further discuss our arguments made, supported with some additional research data and conclusions prepared, while also analyzing and interpreting the youth vote and mobilization impact, social networks had on this specific group of the electorate body in both campaigns of 2008 and 2012.

7.2 Do Social Networks Foster Political Engagement and does it reflect on Young Voters turnout?

Many of us are optimistic about the ability of political Internet use to increase political participation. The study of the Internet and new social media has grown significantly in the last few years through increased research efforts and better instruments of measurement, so we are beginning to get a better idea of how exactly to measure and interpret this influence (Mossberg, Tolbert and McNeal 2008, Xenos and Moy 2007).

In one of the more crucial calls for attention to groups, author Putnam (2000) details an alarming trend in group membership and civic engagement in the USA: as membership in civic groups decreases so does the civic engagement. Putnam believes the stock of social capital reinforcing civic engagement is built up through participation in voluntary organizations, largely offline. But still we have seen that the Internet is changing ways in which we used to communicate and socialize as well as organize. Also the Internet and its

revolution have brought about the inception of online groups that appear to resemble offline groups in function, if not in form as well (Bimber 2008, Vitak et al. 2010).

In our thesis we argue that online membership and engagement in social media political activities is likely to encourage offline political participation, especially among young people and give them incentive to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

If we look at voting of young people, it is forming of habit to some extent; if young people learn the voting process and vote when younger; they are more likely to do so when they are older. So if it has succeeded getting young people to vote early, that could be key to raising a new generation of voters and if candidates embed these facts in their election strategies and understand the importance of motivating young people, like Obama did in both of the election races, they can get an important part of the electoral body into their voting bloc (Feezell, Conroy and Guerrero 2009).

Young people are a major subset of the electorate and their voices do actually matter. Data from 2012 show that there are 46 million young people 18-29 years old that are eligible to vote, which makes them the 21% of the voting population in the USA. And if we compare them to the 39 million seniors that have voting rights, the number is not to be overlooked (CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement 2013).

Here are some points made by researchers at CIRCLE, about what actually affects youth voting:

- Young people who are contacted by an organization or a campaign are more likely to vote. Additionally, those who discuss an election are more likely to vote in that same election.
- Young people who are registered to vote turn out in high numbers, very close to the rate of older voters. If we look at the 2008 election, numbers show that 84% of those young voters aged 18-29 who were registered to vote actually cast a ballot. Youth voter registration rates are much lower than older age groups' rates, and as a result,

guiding youth through the registration process is one potential step to closing the age-related voting gap.⁹

- Having information about how, when, and where to vote can help young people be and feel prepared to vote as well as reduce any level of intimidation they may feel.
- A state's laws related to voter registration and voting can have an impact on youth voter turnout. Seven out of the top 10 youth turnout states had some of the more ambitious measures, including Election Day registration, voting by mail (Oregon), or not requiring registration to vote (North Dakota).
- By schools providing different civic education programs, like debates or simulations, it has been known to increase youth voting. "Unfortunately, many youth do not have these civic education opportunities, as research has shown that those in more white and/or more affluent schools are more likely to have these opportunities" (CIRCLE 2013).
- One's home environment can of course have a large impact on their engagement, since they are many times driven by example; if their family members go out and vote, they are also more likely to get engaged in voting.

In 2008, on average, 59% of young Americans whose home state offered Election Day Registration (EDR) voted; nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in EDR states (CIRCLE 2013).

It is certain that social media have grown in such a dimension over the past years that they are heavily influencing a whole new generation of young people among other Internet users and SNS's such as Facebook and Twitter have become permanent companions of their everyday lives.

As of 2012, there are over 165 million American users on Facebook and over 140 million American Twitter users. These two social media networks have grown into more than

⁹ That was the exact strategy of Barack Obama and his team both times running for president – they presented the registration process numerous times through different social media and popular websites among young people. Since there has been new voter ID laws adopted and challenges by lawmakers against college students' ability to vote, and widespread confusion about state voting laws, they enabled different tutorials and applications on how to register, where their nearest polls were etc. And they've managed to grasp the young people's language, their interests and their communication means as well (Hauser 2012).

social outlets; these sites are now used as ways to report on news and world events in a real time manner to a mass audience of people. In addition to the news, social media sites have become flooded with political activism and campaigning, which has deeply impacted the 2012 Presidential Election (Kiss and Calvello 2013).

The activity measured in social media sites throughout the 2012 election compared to 2008 indicates a major increase in political activity of candidates. We have already discussed the staggering numbers that accompanied both election campaigns in the social networks dimension and we have also explained the massive increase in President Obama's Facebook page from approximately 2, 5 million fans to over 34 million in 2012. A very similar and also previously discussed situation happened with Twitter and other at the time popular SNS's. Further research on the effect of social media could be a great asset for political campaigning and re-writing the election campaigns map, since the social media trend is so strong and it will only grow in years to come. Although the impact of social media has been established and recognized as strong, there are still potential voters who do not use SNS's, so of course this shouldn't be the only way to win an election.

If we look at the youth vote (18-29 years of age) more closely, we can establish that it was in large part secured by Obama and his team in the 2008 campaign by using social media to get closer to this part of the electorate and in 2012 he went a step further to be sure he repeats his previous success and motivate young people to understand him, support his political ideas and show their support at the polls. Analysts have supported their claims of internet use among young people with numbers that show over 72 % of young people online, using SNS's which makes them ahead of the older population; 30 years and more, for 40 %. (Kiss and Calvello 2013). We believe that social media activities conducted by Obama in both presidential races have made young voters reachable and the communication was led in a consistent and effective way. But still it remains a "complex part of this relationship between political interest and social media and repeatedly raises the question: "But does it get to them to the polls?" because in reality, that's what really what matters" (Kiss and Calvello 2013). We can actually explain the latter question by looking at both presidential election outcomes again.

Referring to a study that has been conducted by scholars Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2009), we can observe that voter turnout among young people has been on the increase in the years between 2004 and 2008. Although history tells us that the youth vote had been

traditionally low, the 2008 election saw the largest young voters' turnout since 1972, when the first exit polls have been measured. Also it has been noted that young voters have been the largest voting group that supported the Democrats since the 2000 election. Also a substantial youth voting gap has been measured comparing the Democrats with 45 % of youth support with the 26 % of youth voting for the Republicans (Kiss and Calvello 2013). This trend continued into 2012, with Obama winning over his opponent Romney with 60 % to 36 % of the youth vote. Although the percentage was a little lower this time; with slightly less young voters supporting Obama, but their votes mattered even more in 2012. All this analysis shows that both Obama's campaigns were far more efficient in reaching young people, compared to the activities conducted by his opponents.

7.3 Main Reasons for Barack Obama's Double Presidential Victory

In the last analytical chapter of this master thesis, before giving our final conclusions and answering research questions posed at the beginning, we will look at both campaigns of Barack Obama from 2008 and 2012 once more and try to establish the main reasons for his double success.

There have been many speculations made by journalists and scholars while analyzing the 2008 election results. Political scientist Sabato (2010) wrote in one of his post-election comments that "the truth is, any normal candidate of the Democratic Party would have won the 2008 presidential elections." Analysts Todd and Gawiser (in Briški 2009) also shared a similar opinion about the origin of Obama's success in the first election race. They stated that "the presidential election result was highly anticipated considering the political situation at the time, which favored the Democrats all year long." We can agree with the statements made to some extent when looking solely at the 2008 election, but still we argue that beside the political climate maybe being in favor of Barack Obama, his campaign also had some other important features that made it possible for him to win first of his two terms. The 2012 election race on the other hand was the opposite of 2008 - unpredictable and was not in any way inclined to Obama since he had four turbulent years of mandate behind him and had to go to fairly extreme lengths to get voters' support once again.

In the preface of this thesis we have mentioned Hadley's six criteria which serve for evaluation of candidate's success in the primaries as well as in the actual election race. (Cook

2004). Let us look at the mentioned criteria more closely to find some crucial reasons as to how Obama won two terms in a row:

- Hadley argued that a psychological test is an important aspect of candidate's level of preparation; it evaluates if the candidate has enough energy and physical endurance for a long process such the campaign actually is. The last two presidential races lasted for almost two years and in that time Obama travelled, held public speeches and was guest at numerous events. He was constantly under the limelight and under the wake public eye, where he had to be careful about every step made or word articulated and he did not lose his self-control at any time, despite the excruciating hours and battles fought.
- The other important criterion is what co-workers the candidates choose to help them run their campaign. Obama had chosen wisely both times around, since in 2008 he had the campaign lead strategist David Axelrod by his side, who stayed on board in 2012 as the senior strategist and Jim Messina took his place as campaign manager. Beside good leaders he also had a well harmonized team in both campaigns, consisting of not only political experts but also of analysts and technical engineers, especially in 2012. Obama had a specific attitude towards his team members; he didn't let anyone go and no member of the team spoke of their strategies outside the campaign before headquarters gave them special permission, so they actually functioned as a well synchronized team.
- Strategy is of course also one of the most important criteria for successful campaigning and through this indicator we can assess if the candidate has a clear concept for winning. Obama was ahead of his opponents from the start of the first campaign in 2008, when his central message "Change" was broadly embraced by the public and pushed other, up to that time more important candidates, to the margins of the campaign. The "No drama Obama" campaign team also proved to be ahead with the extensive knowledge of the fairly complicated pre-election system than other opponents and that proved to be important for young voters that granted him support in large percentage at both 2008 and 2012 campaign finish lines. Obama's team knew how to communicate some less attractive topics to the youth and knew exactly how to reach them – through extensive social media communication which has become one of the central communication channels for young people. They get most of the information needed from the Internet, they are online constantly, and it is the fastest

and most convenient way for them to stay networked and in touch with their peers. Barack Obama was omnipresent in all globally popular social media, with first records broken in 2008 and continuing that trend in even larger extent; with over 34 million fans on Facebook and his reelection photo being the most tweeted photo in history. His technological team also showed incredible knowledge and took the well-known polling system to a much higher level, making the 2012 election all about analysis and predicting polling results, which gave remarkable outcomes.

- The financial aspect of campaigning has also already been an important part of our discussion and is also an important campaign success criterion, according to Hadley (Cook 2004). Both election campaigns of Barack Obama had served us with new milestone records being set, since in both 2008 and 2012 Obama renounced the possibility of federal funding which strongly limit the candidates' possibilities of fund expenditure, and still managed to raise more money than his opponents and then any other candidate until then. This financial advantage gave him the opportunity to campaign more in states that have been traditionally Republican, which has proven successful since he won in most of these states. Obama moved borders and set entirely new standards for campaign fundraising as well as other aspects of presidential races.
- Media strategy is always one of the crucial moments in campaigning, since the media are known for their power to form public opinion. Some analysts have loudly criticized the work of journalists, covering especially the 2008 election, for being biased and portraying Obama as the most positive candidate among all competing for the presidency. Nevertheless, Barack Obama assured himself constant presence in the media. With the financial advantage he had he was able to buy more television advertisement time, he took over all social media, and his charisma made him a favorite in the public eye both in 2008 and in 2012. He is also still known as one of the best rhetoricians among politicians, which also gave him the needed advantage to win both elections.
- Lastly, Hadley discusses the importance of the electoral body, which decides the popular vote of the election. Here, candidates' success is assessed in their ability of developing a strong community of supporters, who are willing to volunteer for their candidate and contribute funding. Campaigns of the new era are not focusing only on fundraising and political slogans but on mobilization of voters as well. Euphoria that was present when Obama became candidate drove many new voters to register and the

numbers again worked in the Democrats behalf. His team, led by a charismatic and popular candidate, gathered numerous volunteers, mobilized different specifically targeted groups; such as young voters, sent millions of emails in both campaigns, asking their supporters to help them spread the word of their candidate, to raise money and to go to the polls on Election Day. Supported by enhanced technologies, they managed to persuade enough of the electoral body to win in 2008 and continued to earn their trust throughout the mandate only to win again in 2012 (Summarized after Briški 2009, 244-256).

We have discussed all main criteria which are analyzed when measuring candidates' success in campaigning and pointed out all advantages of candidate Barack Obama which made him win presidential elections in 2008 and 2012. With the discussion in this chapter we have shown which strategies of both Obama's campaigns made history and set important milestones for future presidential candidates as well as set new trends in technological and communicational sense.

8 CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have used the comparative approach to the analysis of presidential elections that took place in 2008 and 2012 with the goal of addressing the question of successful use of social media within Barack Obama's digital approach towards campaigning and to establish what were the main reasons for his double presidential victory.

For a better understanding of the case studies analyzed, we have begun the first part of our thesis with a theoretical background of the main characteristics of the American political system, established what the specifics of the presidential system are, such as the Electoral College, and discussed some main features of election campaigns in general.

In the methodological part of our discussion we have set a main thread of the thesis by asking ourselves two main research questions. Firstly, we have dealt with the question of plausibility to claim that Barack Obama won both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections based in large part on his extraordinary activities and communication with the electoral body through digital media and new age social channels and whether his extensive internet campaigning increased the voting turnout of young people. Since the main part of the paper was dedicated to analyzing the latter question, we have found several affirmative answers that establish a positive link between Obama's double presidential victory, social networks campaigning and the increase of the youth electoral body turnout.

Through a discursive analysis of secondary literature sources, comments of political scientists, journalist articles, and research data gathered and interpreted by various experts, we have come to a conclusion that indeed both observed presidential campaigns were won by Barack Obama with extensive help of his social media activity and the knowledge his team gathered on effective communication with different demographic groups of voters through online channels. The 2008 campaign was marked by many novelties in the area of modern digital communication and Obama held his lead position throughout the race, having millions of supporters spreading his message all over the country, using Facebook, Twitter, MyBO and other popular social media networks. With this viral effect of SNS's, he mobilized a record number of volunteers that organized numerous events and gathered over \$600 million solely online, which was also a record sum until then, which he exceeded again in 2012. Barack Obama definitely used the popularity and effectiveness of social media to his advantage, and with his historic social media campaign won over his opponent John McCain and achieved

another success that made history; becoming the first African-American president of the United States of America. This election, also called “The Facebook Election”, was known for Obama’s “rock the vote” rally, which resulted in him gathering 70 % of the youth vote, which was the highest percentage since exit polling in the USA began in 1976, as we also mentioned earlier in our thesis. He identified the importance of winning over specific groups within the electoral body and not only the general public. He then used SNS’ extensively to reach out to the youth and achieved an ongoing online friendship and appeal to the targeted demographic with being on the same level with them, using their language and therefore he became more liked; in the literal and metaphorical sense of the word. By the election campaign in 2012, Obama and his team continued their online and offline success. With knowing that they would have to be even better than in 2008, considering the complexity of the mandate behind President Obama and with the economic situation still not resolved, their strategy was even more widespread in terms of technology, numbers and voters reached. His digital approach was focused on extensive analysis rather than standard polling and with a highly professional team of analysis specialists, he knew at every point of the campaign, what his winning options were. His team micro-targeted specific demographical groups, with some similarity to their 2008 strategy, but went even more into detail on the behavioral features of their potential voters and studied their preferences thoroughly. He tried to appeal to young people again, communicated intensively with minorities and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) population and succeeded. His campaign was much focused on social media networks again, with over 34 million fans on Facebook reading his updates every day and over 22 million Twitter followers re-tweeting his messages and photographs, making his reelection photo, taken with his wife Michelle after his second victory, the most tweeted photo in history.

All the facts stated above and argued throughout our thesis suggest that Barack Obama’s digital approach, consisting of intense interaction on social media, advanced technologies applied, numerous targeted emails sent and volunteers mobilized, with the highest percentage of the youth vote support as well as over \$700 million raised in 2008 and the staggering \$1 billion dollars in 2012, was indeed extremely successful and was one of the main reasons, if not the most important reason, for his double presidential victory. When giving conclusions about the grounds for Obama’s double presidential victory, we mustn’t neglect to mention his statesmanlike features that made him a public’s favorite. He has incredible political skills, his rhetoric is subject to many scholarly discussions, and his cognitive style helped him recognize

relevant political topics. All this lead to his political progress and most importantly, winning the elections. We can also give a partially affirmative answer to the question about the increased young voters' turnout, which is supported by facts stated above and analyzed research data throughout the paper. Our answer is only partially affirmative because there are still not so many studies available with statistically significant data that would give us basis for an entirely affirmative answer.

The other research question that threaded our discussion was also through secondary source analysis, interpreting various studies outcomes and literature, to ascertain to what degree social networks foster political engagement and in what way. By data retrieved and analyzed it has become clear that young adults use the Internet, especially social media with the purpose of sharing and receiving information from their online friends. We have found out that most of the young population uses SNS's because of the familiarity of the experience they have when learning new information about politics. It makes political issues that are generally unpopular among youth more accessible and interesting. Trying to answer our second research question, we have looked at some individual studies which explored the possibility of a linkage between growing political engagement and use of social media. Again we can offer a partially affirmative answer to this research question, since some of the studies have offered statistically significant data, confirming our assumption about the influence social media may have on increased political engagement, especially among young people who are most frequent users of the Internet. However, some research experts remain skeptical about the indirect influence of social media activities on the intensifying level of political engagement. Our overall impression with data gathered and analyzed is that the field of social media is growing each day and so are different behavioral specifics of Internet users. One fact remains certain and that is the viral impact social media have nowadays on accessibility of information and dispersion of the latter. On the basis of all information we have gathered concerning the topic and also our own personal experience, we can say that to some extent social media are indeed levers for political engagement and activity of individuals, but they have to be supported by other tools for enhancing engagement and interest in politics as well as civic and political knowledge. As mentioned before, some studies have found through analyses that participation in online political groups and activities predicts offline political behavior and participation by engaging members online. It has also proven to be efficient with young people, a group traditionally perceived as apathetic in regard to civic and political engagement. Some scholars still find that some of the mentioned activities represent another

example of “feel-good” participation that has no actual impact in real life; it is also a concept referred to as “slacktivism”. We find that all these implications show the need for future research to be conducted with the goal of getting more accurate results in the level of connection between social media activity and political engagement as well as voters’ turnout.

There is no doubt left after this extensive research and discussion in this thesis, that the map of presidential elections campaigning is changing its face rapidly. Barack Obama has set a new tone and dynamic for his successors and their future campaign activities. He has proven to be innovative in communication approaches with his electorate, leaving no space for his opponents to be of any relevant threat to both of his victories in the presidential race. We can ask ourselves at this point, what is yet to come when looking at future campaign strategies from a digital point of view? According to Engage Research (2012), campaign teams will have to develop even better social targeting, since the traditional phone polling is slowly lagging behind. Also there is much more room for technology to develop and improve in terms of retrieving important electorate data from social networks, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc. There has been much discussion about “Big Data” analysis throughout both, but especially the 2012 presidential campaign and the trend is clearly inclined towards real-time analytics; understanding each voter as an individual and not as much as part of a specific subgroup as well as bordering online and real life behavior of potential voters. Experts estimate exponential growth of digital integration and digital primacy within future campaign strategies. There is no doubt left, that we will witness very dynamic and innovative campaigns in the future with candidates driven by Obama’s historic double triumph and the aspiration to write their own new success stories. There has been “Change” and there has been “Hope”, now let us wait for what’s next.

9 SUMMARY IN SLOVENE LANGUAGE

V pričujočem magistrskem delu smo skozi primerjalno prizmo ameriških predsedniških volitev leta 2008 in 2012 poskušali prikazati vlogo, ki jo imajo novi družbeni mediji pri komunikaciji z volivci in pristop, ki ga je v obeh volilnih bojih izbral takratni dvakratni zmagovalec, Barack Obama. Ker je bila strategija omenjenega kandidata v obeh primerih močno usmerjena v različne spletne aktivnosti, smo v primerjalni analizi med drugim poskušali ugotoviti, ali je obstajala neposredna povezava med zgodovinskim uspehom Obame in učinkom, ki naj bi ga imeli različni spletni komunikacijski kanali; predvsem priljubljena družbena omrežja. Prav tako smo raziskali, ali so omenjene spletne aktivnosti neposredno vplivale na večjo volilno udeležbo mladih volivcev. Naslednja ideja, ki je bila vodilo raziskovanju in pisanju magistrskega dela, je bilo vprašanje vpliva, ki naj bi ga imela obravnavana spletna družbena omrežja na spodbujanje političnega udejstvovanja, predvsem med mladimi.

Da bi bolje razumeli zapleten sistem ameriških volitev in dobili teoretični okvir za nadaljevanje preučevanja osrednje raziskovalne teme, smo v pričujočem delu uvodoma analizirali institucionalne značilnosti ameriškega političnega sistema, proces izvolitve ameriškega predsednika s poudarkom na eni izmed posebnosti ameriških volitev – elektorskega kolidža, ter glavne značilnosti volilnih kampanj.

Avtorji ameriške ustave so ameriški politični sistem opredelili kot sistem zavor in ravnovesij, v katerem je oblast ločena in razdeljena med zakonodajno, izvršno in sodno vejo oblasti, kar omogoča vsaki veji nadzor nad drugo. Prepričani so bili namreč, da bodo na ta način preprečili kopičenje oblasti (Briški 2009). Prav tako je federalna ureditev, ki je značilna za politični sistem Združenih držav Amerike (ZDA), implementirana, da bi se uravnotežila moč, ki jo ima centralna vlada, v odnosu do posameznih zveznih držav. ZDA so torej demokracija s federalno ureditvijo, kjer je predsednik države izvoljen s strani ljudstva, a le deloma neposredno, kar bomo razložili v nadaljevanju. Ustava ZDA določa, da mora biti kandidat za predsednika države rojen v ZDA, star najmanj 35 let in državljan ZDA vsaj 14 let. Poleg formalnih pogojev mora izpolnjevati tudi neformalne, kot so osebna karizma, politične izkušnje in sposobnost prilagoditve svojim potencialnim volivcem. Med zelo pomembne pogoje in aktivnosti predvolilne kampanje spada tudi zmožnost zbiranja sredstev za financiranje kampanje, ki lahko odločilno vplivajo na uspeh kandidata na volitvah (Ferfila 2002b).

Predsednik ZDA je izvoljen na podlagi dvostopenjskega procesa, ki vključuje nominacijo s strani politične stranke in splošne volitve (Schantz 1996). Posebnost volilnega sistema, ki smo jo že omenili, Elektorski kolidž pa je institucionalno telo, preko katerega volivci dejansko volijo svojega predsednika. Sestavljeno je iz 538 elektorjev, tisti kandidat ki v posamezni zvezni državi prejme večino glasov volivcev, prejme tudi vse elektorske glasove v tej državi. Omenjeni sistem dopušča tudi možnost, da prejme večino elektorskih glasov, četudi ni prejel večine glasov volivcev, kar se je v zgodovini ameriških volitev do sedaj zgodilo štirikrat.

Ko se kandidati prebijejo skozi proces nominacij znotraj političnih strank, se volilni boj preseli na prizorišče glavnih volitev, katerih sestavni del so predvolilne kampanje predsedniških kandidatov (Briški 2009).

Avtorji volilno kampanjo opredeljujejo kot sestav dejanj, ki so oblikovana z namenom doseganja določenega cilja. Ključnega pomena za uspešno kampanjo naj bi bila strategija in planiranje, vendar pa so skozi čas doživele številne spremembe. V preteklosti so bile kampanje namreč odvisne od dosegljivosti kandidata, neposredne komunikacije in skupne identifikacije z volivci. Uspeh kampanj se je odražal v osebnem kontaktu kandidata s predstavniki svojega volilnega telesa, medtem, ko sporočila kampanje niso odločala o izvolitvi in so bili s tem razlogom izidi volitev težje merljivi ter predvidljivi.

Danes je dinamika volilnih kampanj močno spremenjena, saj na proces vplivajo številni dejavniki kot so tehnološki napredek in spremenjeni vzorci obnašanja volilnega telesa. Močan vpliv na kampanje danes imajo tudi različne vrste medijev, brez katerih kandidat ne bi imel možnosti dosega svojih potencialnih volivcev in podpornikov.

Volitve za predsednika ZDA, ki se odvijajo vsaka štiri leta, so edinstvene in težko primerljive z volitvami v ostalih državah po svetu, saj ima izid volitev vsakič pomembne globalne posledice. Funkcijo predsednika Združenih držav Amerike mnogi opredeljujejo kot najtežji poklic na svetu, mnogi avtorji pa poudarjajo da je edina stvar, težja od sprejemanja odločitev znotraj Bele hiše, pot, ki jo mora kandidat prehoditi do izvolitve.

Najbolj pomemben cilj, ki ga želita doseči obe največji ameriški politični stranki; Demokratska in Republikanska stranka, je zmaga na predsedniških volitvah, ki nato omogoča tudi številna nova delovna mesta znotraj javne uprave (Grant 2004).

Volilno leto 2008 kot tudi vse okoliščine predvolilnega dogajanja so bili edinstveni iz več razlogov. Ameriški narod je bil pripravljen na velike spremembe – kar je bil tudi glavni slogan kampanje Baracka Obame; »Change« ali sprememba.

Številni politologi so prav tako izpostavljali visoko volilno udeležbo mladih pod 30 let, kot enega najbolj zanimivih aspektov predsedniških volitev 2008 (Alexandrova 2010). Obama je skupaj s svojo ekipo dosegel pravo »mobilizacijo« mladih volivcev – volitve in politika kot taka so postale zanimive delu volilnega telesa, ki ga nihče do takrat ni znal nagovoriti na pravi način in motivirati k sodelovanju (Dugan 2012).

V pričujočem magistrskem delu bomo poskušali ugotoviti tudi, v kolikšni meri je Obami dejansko uspelo učinkovito nagovoriti mlade in kaj je ta morebitni uspeh pomenil za volilno udeležbo in izide leta 2008 kot tudi 2012 ter primerjalno analizirali tudi odnos Obamovih tekmecev do mladih potencialnih volivcev.

Tako kot politične organizacije in stranke na nacionalni ravni, so se tudi stranke na ravni zveznih držav v zadnjih letih začele intenzivno posluževati interneta kot enega glavnih orodij v predvolilnih kampanjah. Prevzele so večino novih komunikacijskih kanalov in digitalnih orodij, kot so družbeni mediji in omrežja (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, itd.) vse do interaktivnih koledarjev in personaliziranih spletnih strani, ter se jih naučile tudi učinkovito uporabljati (Bekafigo in Cohen 2011).

Z implementacijo interneta v ameriško politiko se je mobilizacija volivcev razširila tudi v virtualni svet in s tem kandidatom povečala možnosti nagovarjanja svojih privržencev. Predsedniška kampanja Baracka Obame iz leta 2008 je bila hvaljena prav zaradi uspeha pri uporabi digitalnih orodij, saj je ekipa dosegla nepričakovano visoko raven internetne komunikacije in najvišjo do tedaj znano raven sodelovanja skupnosti pri posameznih aktivnostih kampanje ter močno povezanost kandidata z volilnim telesom.

Obamova ekipa je bila prisotna na Twitterju, Facebooku in MySpacu, prav tako pa so oblikovali svoje lastno družbeno omrežje in spletno stran; MyBarackObama.com. Kampanja je na ta način, pod okriljem slogana »Change«, sprememba, uspela motivirati tudi tiste podpornike, ki se načeloma ne vključujejo v politične procese, obenem pa tudi doseči zgodovinski uspeh pri zbiranju sredstev za izvedbo aktivnosti kampanje. Po govoru Sarah Palin na konvenciji Republikanske stranke leta 2008, je Obamova kampanja dosegla rekordno višino zbranih sredstev v 24 urah – 10 milijonov dolarjev od 130.000 donatorjev.

Ustanoviteljica znanega časopisa in spletnega portala Huffington Post, Ariana Huffington je v eni od svojih analiz po volitvah dejala, da Barack Obama ne bi bil nominiran s strani

Demokratske stranke in ne bi bil izvoljen za predsednika ZDA, če ne bi bilo interneta (Fox 2012). Mnogi so volitve 2008 poimenovali kar »Facebook volitve«, preden je sploh postalo jasno, kako eksplozivni in pomembni bodo postali družbeni mediji v prihodnje.

Volilno leto 2012 je Barack Obama začel z oblikovanjem svojega digitalnega tima, ki ga je sestavljalo veliko članov iz leta 2008 in za katerega je do tedaj že vedel, kako pomemben je. Leta 2008 je bilo eno najpomembnejših družbenih omrežij Facebook, kjer je imel Obama 2 milijona prijateljev, sledilcev in podpornikov, v času predvolilnih bojev leta 2012 pa je ta številka zrasla na neverjetnih 35 milijonov. Sam Graham-Felsen, glavni »blogger« Obamove ekipe iz leta 2008 je dejal, da je obseg in vpliv družbenih omrežij eksponentno narastel, zato se je kampanja v obeh volilnih letih trudila ustvarjati vsebine, ki jih bodo člani družbenih omrežij in skupnosti sprejeli (Fox 2012).

V magistrskem delu se bomo, prav zaradi nekaterih zgoraj omenjenih dejstev in trditev številnih avtorjev, ki so preučevali fenomen Baracka Obame, ukvarjali tudi z vprašanjem, ali so bile številne digitalne aktivnosti v sklopu obeh predvolilnih kampanj ključnega pomena za Obamovo ponovno izvolitev in poskušali ugotoviti zakaj so bile tako učinkovite.

Ob preučevanju »najboljših internetnih potez Baracka Obame« lahko zaznamo skupni trend in sicer dejstvo, da je Obama v svoj digitalni tim povabil tehnologe in ne politikov, ki so na koncu ustvarili nekaj podobnega start-up podjetjem, ki jih poznamo danes, znotraj same predvolilne kampanje. Številke govorijo same zase, saj je imel Obama v letu 2012 1,2 milijona uporabnikov Facebook aplikacije, 35 milijonov Facebook oboževalcev in 98% uporabnikov tega priljubljenega družbenega omrežja v Ameriki, je bilo prijateljev z vsaj enim Obamovim oboževalcem, kar je seveda močno pripomoglo k viralnosti vseh predvolilnih sporočil. Prav tako ga je na Twitterju spremljalo kar 24 milijonov sledilcev, precedens pa je postavil z objavljeno fotografijo, ki je postala najbolj »retvitana« fotografija v zgodovini Twitterja. Vsi navedeni podatki in zgodovinske številke nam nakazujejo, da naj bi imel Obama za seboj številčno veliko ekipo medijskih in digitalnih strokovnjakov, ki so mu pomagali dosegati omenjene rezultate. A temu ni tako, saj je imel Obama v svoji ekipi za upravljanje digitalnih aktivnosti in družbenih medijev le štiri strokovnjake. Prav ta ekipa pa mu je pomagala tudi pri razvoju novih, revolucionarnih pristopov za targetiranje volivcev prek družbenega omrežja Facebook. Polovica ciljne skupine med 18-29 let, ki jo je Obamova kampanja hotela doseči v predvolilnih aktivnostih, je bila nedosegljiva po telefonu, vendar jih

je bilo kar 85% uporabnikov Facebook aplikacije ali Obamovih oboževalcev na Facebooku. Kampanja je zato omenjeno družbeno omrežje spremenila v platformo za določanje in doseganje ciljnih skupin ter na Facebooku pozivala podpornike k mobilizaciji omenjenih ciljnih skupin. 600.000 ljudi je doseglo 5 milijonov volivcev, od katerih je bilo pri vsaj 20% zaznati neke vrste politično aktivnost. Obamova kampanja je leta 2012 zbrala več kot 690 milijonov dolarjev samo prek internetnih aktivnosti in digitalne mobilizacije, kar je skoraj 200 milijonov dolarjev več kot leta 2008, saj je bilo opravljenih veliko več online donacij, povprečna donacija pa je znašala med 126 in 156 dolarjev (Fitzpatrick 2012).

Naslednji pomemben cilj magistrskega dela je tudi primerjava predsedniških volitev 2008 in 2012. Skozi raziskovanje in interpretacijo različnih analiz smo zbrali številne podatke o Obami in njegovih nasprotnikih v obeh predsedniških bojih, poskušali izpostaviti najpomembnejše razloge za Obamovo ponovno izvolitev in osvetliti pomanjkljivosti, ki so jih kazali nasprotniki. Prav tako smo za analizo Obamovega uspeha kot ključna merila upoštevali šest kriterijev Arthurja Hadleya, ki jih je definiral za ocenjevanje uspešnosti kandidatov na predsedniških volitvah (psihološki test, sodelavci, strategija, finančni načrt, mediji, volivci) (Cook 2004). S pomočjo omenjenih kriterijev smo opravili poglobljeno analizo Obamovih aktivnosti in uspeha v obeh volilnih bojih, navedena pa je v poglavju 8.3. V magistrskem delu smo torej uporabili primerjalni pristop k analizi omenjenih predsedniških volitev s ciljem naslavljanja vprašanja o uspešnosti uporabe družbenih medijev znotraj Obamovega digitalnega pristopa h kampanji in da bi ugotovili, kateri so bili glavni razlogi za njegovo dvojno zmago in ponovno izvolitev leta 2012.

Za boljše razumevanje študij primerov smo prvi del posvetili teoretičnem ozadju glavnih značilnosti Ameriškega političnega sistema, poskušali ugotoviti posebnosti predsedniškega sistema in kot že omenjeno, poglobljeno razpravljali o eni od njih in sicer Elektorskem kolidžu. Prav tako smo pregledali nekatere glavne značilnosti predvolilnih kampanj na splošno.

V metodološkem delu diskusije smo postavili osrednjo idejo magistrske naloge z dvema raziskovalnima vprašanjema. Najprej smo se ukvarjali z vprašanjem, ali je verjetno trditi, da je zmaga Baracka Obame na volitvah 2008 in njegova ponovna izvolitev leta 2012 temeljila v veliki meri na izredni frekvenci aktivnosti in komunikaciji z volilnim telesom preko digitalnih medijev in novodobnih družbenih medijev, ter ali je njegova obsežna internetna kampanja povečala volilno udeležbo med mladimi.

Skozi diskurzivno analizo sekundarne literature, komentarjev in razprav politologov, novinarskih člankov in raziskovalnih podatkov, smo prišli do zaključka, da sta bili obe predsedniški kampanji, v katerih je zmagal Obama, dobljeni predvsem zaradi ekstenzivnih aktivnosti v družbenih medijih in znanja, ki ga je akumulirala Obamova ekipa na področju učinkovitega komuniciranja z različnimi demografskimi in ciljnim skupinami volivcev skozi internetne komunikacijske kanale.

Volilno kampanjo 2008 so zaznamovale številne novosti s področja modernih digitalnih komunikacij in Obama je vzdrževal pomembno prednost vseskozi kampanjo, predvsem s pomočjo več milijonov podpornikov, ki so s pomočjo družbenih omrežij kot npr. Facebook, Twitter, MyBo, itd., širili njegovo sporočilo po ZDA. Z opisanim viralnim učinkom, ki ga je Obama dosegel s pomočjo družbenih medijev na internetu, je leta 2008 mobiliziral rekordno število prostovoljcev, ki so zanj in za potrebe kampanje organizirali številne dogodke ter samo s pomočjo interneta zbrali več kot 600 milijonov dolarjev. Ta številka je pomenila tudi dotedanji rekord, dokler Obamova ekipa ni presegl svojega lastnega uspeha s še višjo vsoto zbranih sredstev leta 2012. Barack Obama je nedvomno znal izkoristiti priljubljenost in učinkovitost družbenih medijev ter ju obrniti v prid uspešnosti kampanje. Z zgodovinsko kampanjo, ki je temeljila na uporabi interneta, družbenih medijev in spletnih strani ter ostalih spletnih orodij in komunikacijskih kanalov, je Obama premagal svojega takratnega tekmeca, Johna McCaina in dosegel še en zgodovinski uspeh, postal je namreč prvi temnopolti predsednik ZDA. Kot že omenjeno, so nekateri analitiki predsedniške volitve 2008 poimenovali kar Facebook volitve, ki pa so znane tudi po enem od Obamovih predvolilnih shodov »rock the vote«, po katerem je uspel zbrati kar 70% glasov mladih volivcev, kar velja za najvišji odstotek že vse od leta 1976, ko so se izidi volitev v ZDA začeli meriti. Skupaj z ekipo je strategijo volilne kampanje zasnoval tako, da je dosegel in prepričal posamezne ciljne skupine znotraj celotnega volilnega telesa, njegova komunikacija je potekala ciljno in segmentirano, saj ni nagovarjal vseh volilnih upravičencev na splošno, z enakimi vsebinami. Na enak način je uporabil tudi družbene medije in prek interneta dosegel mlade tako, da se je poistovetil z njimi in se jim približal s temami, ki jih zanimajo in so za njih pomembne. Pri komunikaciji z mladimi je uporabljal njihov jezik, z njimi komuniciral kot z enakovrednimi sogovorniki, ki so pomembni za oblikovanje in izvajanje politik v ZDA, ter na ta način postal priljubljen »zvezdnik« med politiki. V predvolilni kampanji 2012, je Obama skupaj z ekipo nadaljeval s komunikacijskimi uspehi v virtualnem svetu in izven njega. Z zavedanjem o določenih pomanjkljivostih predsedniške kampanje 2008, upoštevanjem kompleksnosti

Obamovega preteklega predsedniškega mandata in zapletene ekonomske situacije v državi, so oblikovali tehnološko še bolj izpopolnjeno strategijo, ki je dosegla še več volivcev in višje številke v vseh merjenih segmentih predvolilnega boja. Digitalni pristop ekipe je bil usmerjen v obširne analize, namesto v klasične javnomnenjske raziskave, kar je Obami, skupaj z ekipo izkušenih analitikov, omogočilo, da so vsak trenutek kampanje vedeli, kakšne možnosti za zmago ima njihov kandidat. Skupaj z ekipo se je usmeril tudi v podrobno identifikacijo demografskih skupin, ki so imele nekaj skupnih točk s strategijo iz leta 2008, a z nekaj pomembnimi razlikami, kot je bilo na primer zelo natančno spremljanje behaviorističnih značilnosti potencialnih volivcev in ugotavljanje njihovih preferenc. Ponovno je poskušal učinkovito nagovoriti mlade, intenzivno je komuniciral z manjšinami in LGBT skupnostjo, ter zopet požel velik uspeh. Kampanja je bila, po pričakovanjih, usmerjena v aktivnosti na internetu, kjer je samo na Facebooku njegove objave dnevno bralo več kot 34 milijonov oboževalcev, na Twitterju pa je imel kar 24 milijonov sledilcev, ki so brali, objavljali in delili njegova sporočila.

Vsa zgoraj navedena dejstva in argumentirane razprave, ki so spremljale pisanje magistrskega dela nakazujejo, da so bili zelo uspešni in pomembni, če ne celo najbolj pomembni faktorji za Obamovo dvojno predsedniško zmago: njegov digitalni pristop, sestavljen iz intenzivne internetne komunikacije, obvladovanja in dominance na družbenih medijih ter uporabljenih naprednih tehnologij, velikega števila ciljno poslanih elektronskih sporočil in mobiliziranih prostovoljcev, najvišja podpora volilnega telesa med 18 in 29 let, ter visokih 700 milijonov dolarjev zbranih sredstev leta 2008 in neverjetna milijarda dolarjev sredstev, ki je zaznamovala predvolilno kampanjo 2012. Ko razpravljamo o glavnih faktorjih zmage in zgodovinskih dosežkih Baracka Obame, moramo izpostaviti tudi njegove državniške značilnosti, zaradi katerih je bil vsa leta najbolj priljubljen politik med volivci doma in v tujini. Njegove politične veščine so na zavidljivo visoki ravni, retorika je predmet številnih strokovnih razprav in analiz, izražen kognitivni slog pa mu omogoča prepoznati relevantne politične teme. Vse navedeno je bilo zagotovo pomembno pri Obamovem političnem uspehu in ponovni izvolitvi za predsednika ZDA.

Deloma smo lahko pritrdilno odgovorili tudi na drugi del zastavljenega raziskovalnega vprašanja o povečani volilni udeležbi med mladimi volivci, kar argumentiramo z vsemi do sedaj navedenimi dejstvi in analiziranimi podatki, obravnavanimi vseskozi magistrsko delo.

Odgovor je le delno pritrديلen, saj za enkrat še ni dovolj izvedenih in objavljenih analiz s statistično relevantnimi podatki, s pomočjo katerih bi bil lahko odgovor v celoti pritrديلen.

Naslednje raziskovalno vprašanje, ki je predstavljalo osrednjo idejo obravnavane tematike, je bilo ugotoviti do katere mere in na kakšen način družbena omrežja na internetu spodbujajo politično udejeztvovanje. Odgovoriti smo poskušali s pomočjo analize sekundarnih virov in interpretacije nekaterih študij ter literature in prišli do zaključka, da večina mladih uporablja internet in razpoložljive komunikacijske kanale z namenom deljenja in pridobivanja informacij od prijateljev v virtualnem svetu. Dognali smo, da večina mladih uporablja družbena omrežja zaradi domačnosti in poznavanja uporabniške izkušnje pri pridobivanju novih informacij o politiki, kar pretvori na splošno nepriljubljene teme v informacije, ki so dostopne in zanimive mladim potencialnim volivcem. Pri iskanju odgovora na zastavljeno vprašanje, smo preučili nekatere študije, v katerih so avtorji raziskovali možnost povezanosti med višanjem stopnje politične angažiranosti in uporabo družbenih medijev. Ponovno lahko ponudimo le delno pritrديلen odgovor, saj nekatere študije nudijo statistično relevantne podatke, ki so našo tezo o vplivu družbenih medijev na povečanje političnega angažmaja, predvsem med mladimi, potrdili, nekateri strokovnjaki pa glede omenjene teze ostajajo zadržani ali celo skeptični. Naša interpretacija zbranih in analiziranih podatkov zagovarja dejstvo, da področje družbenih medijev raste vsak dan, prav tako pa se s podobno dinamiko spreminjajo behavioristične značilnosti posameznikov, ki uporabljajo internet. Nesporno pa velja, da imajo internet in družbena omrežja neverjetno viralno učinkovitost na dostopnost informacij in razpršitev le-teh.

Ob vsem navedenem in osebnimi izkušnjami z aktivnostmi na internetu, lahko trdimo da so družbena omrežja do neke mere tudi vzvodi za politično sodelovanje in aktivnosti posameznikov, ki pa morajo biti podprta z ostalimi orodji za spodbujanje sodelovanja in zanimanja za politiko ter ustreznim državljskim in političnim znanjem. Kot že omenjeno, so nekatere študije potrdile, da je sodelovanje v internetnih političnih skupinah in aktivnostih lahko napovednik za politično obnašanje posameznika izven virtualnega sveta in njegovo politično udejeztvovanje. Prav tako je lahko udejeztvovanje take vrste učinkovito pri mladih, ki s(m)o načeloma v družbi obravnavani kot apatični v odnosu do državljske in politične odgovornosti.

Nekateri avtorji kljub vsemu še vedno trdijo, da vse omenjene aktivnosti predstavljajo še enega v nizu primerov »feel-good« participacije, ki naj ne bi imela nobenega dejanskega vpliva na realno življenje in le vzbuja občutek angažiranosti pri posamezniku, v trenutku aktivnosti na internetu. Omenjeni koncept nekateri imenujejo tudi »slacktivism«, ki ga lahko v slovenskem jeziku pojasnimo kot leni ali navidezni aktivizem. Prav razhajanja pri obravnavani tematiki, ki pa je že postala velik del našega vsakdanjega življenja in realnosti tudi izven virtualnega sveta, kažejo na pomembnost nadaljnjega raziskovanja povezave med virtualnimi aktivnostmi, politično participacijo in volilno udeležbo ter ostalimi dejavniki vpliva virtualnega na realno. Po opravljeni analizi ni več nobenega dvoma o tem, da se zemljevid predsedniških volilnih kampanj hitro in pomembno spreminja. Barack Obama je postavil nove mejnike in spodbudil novo dinamiko predvolilnih bojev, ki jim bodo morali njegovi nasledniki slediti in jih preseči. Skupaj z ekipo je pokazal veliko mero inovativnosti v komunikacijskih pristopih z volilnim telesom ter na ta način močno omejil manevrski prostor nasprotnikov, ki na koncu niso predstavljali dejanske grožnje Obamovemu uspehu v obeh predvolilnih bojih. Na tej točki se lahko vprašamo tudi, kaj vse lahko še pričakujemo pri razvoju strategij predvolilnih kampanj, predvsem z vidika vsega digitalnega? Analitiki pri Engage Research (2012) trdijo, da bodo strateške ekipe morale oblikovati še boljše načine za usmerjeno družbeno analizo, saj tradicionalno telefonsko anketiranje in raziskovanje že izginja. Prav tako naj bi bile možnosti za razvoj tehnologij, potrebnih za pridobivanje pomembnih volilnih podatkov iz različnih družbenih omrežij, še zelo velike. V magistrskem delu smo razpravljali tudi o »velikih podatkih«, kot analitiki imenujejo podatke, ki jih je Obamova ekipa pridobivala predvsem v letu 2012. Trend razvoja se nagiba v smeri dejanske, vsakodneвне analize in obravnave volivca kot posameznika in ne kot dela določene podskupine, obenem pa se kot pomembna navaja tudi potreba po razmejitvi značilnosti znotraj virtualnega in realnega življenja potencialnih volivcev. Strokovnjaki predvidevajo eksponentno rast integracije digitalnih kanalov komunikacije in digitalne prevlade v predvolilnih kampanjah, ki sledijo. Brez dvoma bomo v prihodnje priče dinamičnim ter inovativnim kampanjam, v katerih bodo kandidati spodbujeni z zgodovinskimi dosežki Baracka Obame in željo po pisanju svojih lastnih zgodb o uspehu. Bili smo priče »spremembam« in »upanju«, sedaj pa z zanimanjem čakamo na nadaljevanje.

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