HOW WAS PASSION STIRRED THROUGH INTERACTIVITY

IN OBAMA'S BLOG?

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of Communication Studies,
Indiana University

January 2009

Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

The impact of new technology on the current presidential campaign has prevailed. A small but fundamental change quietly took place in the candidate's website—Barack Obama's official campaign blog. The campaign is now operating two sub-blogs at the same time, the Obamablog (also known as the Obama HQ blog) and the Community Blog. The former becomes a must-have tool in a political campaigner's strategy, whereas the latter, which allows visitors to actually write, publish, and manage posts, is novel. This new function seems an audacious step up from the rest of the blogs of this kind since the 2004 presidential election because it gives citizen users freedom to express their own ideas that could put the campaign on an impromptu situation to respond.

However, no research has learned what actually happened in Obama's sub-blogs. Has the Obama campaign ever responded to its blog visitors? Has it truly "turn[ed] the table to the blog users" by having them register as blog members rather than just blog visitors (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006)? Or, is it just the Obama campaign's strategic plan that consciously uses "membership" as campaign rhetoric, as far as the community is concerned? Rather, in terms of genuine interaction between the campaign and its blog users, there is more to inquire about the Obamablog. Campaigns have used asynchronized features of blogs to solicit interactivity through crafted messages. Particularly, did the Obama campaign make a promise to interact *with* its blog users? How did his campaign actually invite interactivity via the blog, compared with the six categories of strategies used in the first presidential campaign

blog (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006)? More importantly, did the campaign keep its promise by genuinely interacting with the blog users? What was the participants' perception of the interactivity? In other words, what kind of affect did the actual interactivity produce in the Obamablog?

The grounded theory method will be used to analyze the empirical materials selected from the posts and comments in Obama's two sub-blogs, the Obamablog and the Community Blog, during the early 2008 Presidential primary season. Since the method is inductive, qualitative-only content analysis, the result of this research is meant to explain an unusual phenomenon by identifying and categorizing its elements, rather than testing a theory through experiment. The findings of the soliciting-interactivity strategies will be used to compare with those in Stromer-Galley and Baker's (2006) research. Then, the Obama campaign's blogging practices will be used to illustrate the potential of using EPPM (Witt & Allen, 2000) as a model to build a message strategy which could effectively manage positive affect forged by campaign blog staffers. The researcher contends that this strategy would help the campaign fulfill its commitment to genuine interaction in blogs. The interactivity in the Community Blog will be assessed in the discussion section. As a result, this qualitative study will contribute to the researcher's understanding of the creative practice of the 2008 presidential campaign blogs. The conceptual data/framework can be used in future research to learn bloggers' perception of official campaign blogs and their voting preference. The limitations of this research will be addressed at the end.

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