

**Congressional Candidates' Use of YouTube in 2008:
Its Frequency and Rationale**

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent of candidates' use of the video sharing YouTube site in 2008, and analyzes which Congressional candidates were more likely to use this tool. A large majority of the major party candidates for the Senate opened YouTube channels as did a much smaller proportion of those running for House seats in 2008. This is about double the percentages of House and Senate candidates who made use of profiles on the social network Facebook site when these emerged as campaign vehicles in 2006. For House candidates, campaign fundraising is the only strategic resource that differentiates both having a YouTube channel and the number of videos posted to it. In addition to better financed candidates, those in competitive elections also were more likely to open channels. Incumbents joined better financed candidates in posting more videos to their channels. Percentage minority is the only constituency attribute related to YouTube use, and is significant only for the level of activity. YouTube is best understood as a vehicle for disseminating campaign communications produced by or for traditional media, especially television, and not so much as a new technology tool.

Social networking sites emerged as campaign tools in 2006.¹ The site most prominently used by the candidates that year was Facebook.² Although YouTube made its debut February 15, 2005, its notoriety that election cycle derived not from its use by candidates, but because of user generated videos that compromised candidates and in a few cases drove them from the race. This study investigates the extent of candidates' use of the video sharing YouTube site as a campaign tool in 2008,³ and analyzes which Congressional candidates were more likely to use it. We supplement this empirical analysis with interviews of staffers from almost 25 congressional campaigns.

The candidates' use of YouTube in 2008 affords another opportunity to study the early adoption and dissemination of new technology tools in campaigns. These tools have the potential to change not only the conduct of campaigns, but the relationship between candidates and voters. YouTube speeds up the transmission of content and emphasizes visuals over the printed word. Like other mass media, it is accessible to large numbers of people, but is disseminated at their initiative and often through their connections to other social networks or via email sent by acquaintances. This viral property makes it an attractive, inexpensive means of conducting voter outreach, and given the popularity of online communication with younger voters, a means of targeting that demographic. Once in the public domain, video content can be altered through mashups and applied to new purposes or agendas. Content from video sharing sites has generated a continuous stream of blog posts and comments. This research seeks to establish a benchmark for understanding the extent of YouTube use as an election tool and how candidates view it within the larger context of their campaigns.

YouTube in the 2008 Elections

The first Webcast videos emerged in 2000. Notable among them was "Political Points," an experiment by the *New York Times* and ABC News that aired daily during the election. The technology was cumbersome and these efforts died out. In 2004, Jib Jab's "This Land Is Your Land" was one of hundreds of edgy videos circulated virally by e-mail during the campaign. A few gained large audiences by being replayed on television news, but most remained within the circles of the politically well connected. The launch of YouTube in February 2005 solved the limited distribution problem by providing a centrally organized Web site that allowed easy posting by means of a digital camcorder, laptop computer and inexpensive software (May, 2008).

¹ The authors wish to thank Patrick Bozarjian, Ryan Burke, Brian DePerry, Nicholas Leventis, and Jonathan Peters for their thorough and persistent efforts in conducting the interviews with congressional candidates and campaign staff that were cited in this manuscript.

² In 2006, Facebook created entries for all U.S. congressional and gubernatorial candidates, which they could personalize, and which were available for members who wished to view them, register votes supporting specific candidates, and notify friends.

³ YouTube promotes itself as the leader in online video, the premier destination to watch and share original videos worldwide via the Web by uploading or downloading video clips to and from web sites, mobile devices, blogs, and email. See < <http://youtube.com/t/about>>.

In February 2007, YouTube created a section of the site called YouChoose that was devoted to showing videos from presidential candidates.⁴ Seven of 16 candidates for the presidency announced their candidacies in Web videos that circulated widely on YouTube (Heffernan, 2008). The emerging importance of the medium was apparent when YouTube partnered with CNN for two presidential debates. Selected users' questions for the candidates were broadcast and answered on the television network, drawing the largest 18 to 34 year old audience in cable news programming history (May, 2008). According to Joe Trippi, YouTube users spent 14.5 million hours watching official Obama campaign videos (Wagner, November 10, 2008). Altogether, 35% of Americans watched online political videos in 2008, compared with 13% in 2004-- almost triple the proportion in the previous election (Smith and Rainie, 2008).

YouTube's reach also extended to the Congressional elections. Democrat Robin Weirauch announced her candidacy in a video posted on the site (Boak, 2007). A debate between Senate hopefuls Udall and Schaffer was posted to YouTube (Riley, 2008). The candidates for the seat won by Niki Tsongas (D, MA, 5th district) posted commercials, debate segments and statements from supporters to YouTube (Viser, 2007). As in the presidential race, videos posted to YouTube both helped and hindered candidates. For example, a widely circulated video of John Hall singing a duet with Stephen Colbert on Comedy Central and another video clip of his opponent, 6 term incumbent Sue Kelly, running away from a television crew attempting to question her are credited with turning that long-shot race into an upset (Lombardi, 2007; Hernandez, 2006).

The deluge of online videos flooding the Internet in the 2008 election cycle continues the technological transformation in how candidates communicate and American voters receive information about campaigns. From a candidate perspective, YouTube has a number of advantages over traditional media and campaign websites:

- It is timely: the channel can be updated immediately
- It is easy: updating is simply a matter of uploading a video
- It is cost effective: campaigns do not have to purchase as much bandwidth for their websites if they just post a video tab directly linking to YouTube from their website
- It reaches a large and growing audience.⁵

Our own interviews with candidates, staffers, and consultants from nearly 25 congressional campaigns during fall 2008 reveal a variety of reasons for using YouTube, and a fair amount of skepticism about its value. One from Ohio noted that "it's just like a yard sign, just more clutter, but because others are using it, we have to use it too."⁶ Another from Illinois observed that his constituents are not well versed in YouTube technology, so a ground game is a

⁴ For a review of the use of YouTube in the 2006 election cycle, see Gueorguieva (2008).

⁵ As of December 2008, YouTube had nearly 70 million unique visitors. (<http://siteanalytics.compete.com/youtube.com/>) with an audience demographic of 22% under age 18, 36% in the 18-34 age group, 23% in the 35-49 age bracket, and 19% 50 years or over (<http://www.quantcast.com/youtube.com>).

⁶ Staff member, campaign for David Robinson (D-OH), Personal Interview, 30 October 2008.

more effective means of targeting voters.⁷ A Minnesota campaign staffer echoed this assessment: “When you are a new candidate and not an incumbent, the YouTube Channel is not effective because you need to go out and meet the voters. You cannot hope they will subscribe to your Channel and emails. It is more important to engage with the voters through one-to-one contact, like literature drops.”⁸ On the other hand, another staffer felt that voters are better able to connect with a politician by seeing a video of them speaking so they are able to place a face to a name. A Minnesota candidate’s staffer pointed out that YouTube was one of the easiest ways to reach young voters.⁹

Explaining Candidates’ Use of YouTube

We hypothesize that the explanatory variables predicting which candidates posted campaign videos on YouTube in 2008 will mirror those that predicted web presence in the early days of Internet campaigning. Studies of this period identified two sets of factors that explained which candidates posted a campaign web site. The first set represents indicators tied to attributes of their constituencies, namely demographic attributes correlated with citizen access to and use of the Internet: education, income, ethnicity, age, and urbanization (Chadwick, 2006; Herrnson, 2004; Klotz, 2004; Mossberger et al., 2003).

Higher levels of education make people more comfortable with and skilled in the use of technology, while higher levels of income make computers easier to afford. Although whites use the Internet at higher rates than do blacks, racial differences have diminished over time (Kohut, et al., 2008) and seem to be a reflection of disparities in education and income (Marriott, 2006). Herrnson, et al. (2007) find that in 2000, white candidates had a significantly higher propensity to sponsor campaign web sites than minority candidates, and the percent minority interacts with the percentage of college educated constituents in 2000. The age gap in Internet usage persists, however, declining with each advancing age group. Urban areas have greater Internet use than rural areas, but the difference has declined substantially. These constituency demographics in turn influence candidates’ Internet use (Herrnson, et al., 2007).

The second set of explanatory factors includes attributes of the specific candidates and election contest: incumbency status, political party, competitiveness of the race, and amount of funding (Herrnson, et al., 2007; Klotz, 2004). In the early days, incumbents were less likely than challengers to campaign on the Web, but a competitive race increased its use by incumbents and challengers alike (Kamarck, 2002; Herrnson, et al., 2007). Similarly, candidates for open seats were more likely to have a web site than those in races where an incumbent was standing for reelection (Greer, et al., 2004). This is likely because open seats tend to be more competitive, particularly in House races.

When comparing the two major parties, the findings have been mixed. Data show that fewer Democrats posted campaign sites in 2000 (D’Alessio, 2000; Puopolo, 2001), reversing the

⁷ Staff member, campaign for Martin Ozinga (R-IL), Personal interview, October 31, 2008.

⁸ Steve Sarvi (D-MN), Personal Interview, 31 October 2008.

⁹ Staff member, campaign for Tim Walz (D-MN), Personal Interview, 30 October 2008.

finding from 1998 where Democratic candidates evidenced a higher incidence of web sites. Puopolo also credits the Republicans with being more Web savvy in their use of interactive and other features in 2000. Gulati and Williams (2007) found that reverses in 2004 when Democrats make greater use of interactive features than Republicans, although there are no significant differences between the parties on web site content or mobilization services. Except for online fundraising, Herrnson, et al. (2007) did not find statistical differences between Democratic and Republican candidates' web sites when controlling for other variables.

Third party and financially disadvantaged candidates were less likely to have a campaign web site in the early days of Internet campaigning, although these have proved less of a barrier subsequently. Financial resources still differentiate which campaigns incorporate the latest technology and features, however. In summary, electoral attributes are less important today in differentiating which campaigns have a web site, but remain important determinants of the degree to which they provide more sophisticated content and use their web site to engage and mobilize supporters (Gulati and Williams, 2007).

The 2006 elections afforded an opportunity to study adoption of a new technological tool by political candidates, the social network site. As part of a 2006 election feature, Facebook created entries for all U.S. congressional and gubernatorial candidates. Candidates or their campaign staff then could personalize the profile with everything from photographs to qualifications for office. Facebook members could view these entries and register their support for specific candidates. Based on a study by Williams and Gulati (2007), 32% of the major party candidates running for U.S. Senate posted some form of content to their Facebook profile, and of those running for the House, 13% updated their profiles.¹⁰ Democrats were more likely to update a profile and had more supporters as well. For House candidates, challengers, better-financed candidates, and candidates running in competitive races were the most likely to update their Facebook profile. Competitiveness of the race was the only variable to have a significant effect on whether or not a Senate candidate campaigned on Facebook. These data corroborate most of the research findings on early adoption of campaign web sites, and underscore the importance of our second set of explanatory factors, the strategic attributes of elections.

Data and Methods

To identify the congressional candidates who created their own YouTube channel, we entered each major party Senate and House candidate's name into YouTube's internal search engine during the final week in October.¹¹ Although YouTube created a specific space for candidates in 2008, we used the search engine rather than simply browse the list of candidates appearing on *Politicians* since we noticed that many candidates had created a standard channel in the same way that any individual or group can. Our search revealed that 47 of the 66 (72%)

¹⁰ The authors provided us with data that they had revised after presentation of their original paper.

¹¹ Candidates were identified initially by monitoring several political web sites (i.e., Politics1.com, The DC Political Report, Project Vote Smart, and C-SPAN) that maintained candidate lists. We later cross-referenced our list with the official list produced by the Clerk of the House and removed any candidates not included on their list.

major party Senate candidates and 231 of the 818 (28%) major party House candidates created their own channel in 2008. This wide gap in usage between Senate and House candidates continues a pattern in online campaigning that began with the introduction of campaign Web sites and continued with the introduction of each new online tool (Herrnson et al., 2007).

Although recent research on Facebook usage by congressional candidates found that Democratic candidates were more likely to embrace Facebook than Republican candidates (Williams and Gulati, 2007), we did not find the same partisan difference with respect to YouTube. As Table 1 shows, 73% of Republican candidates for the Senate in 2008 and 71% of Democratic candidates created their own YouTube channel. In the House races, Democratic candidates were slightly more likely than Republicans to have created their own channel, but the differences between the two parties were not statistically significant at the .05 level ($X^2=2.860$; $p=.091$). The Democrats' greater success on Facebook and other social networking sites is partly a reflection of partisan differences in mobilization strategies that finds Democrats more eager than Republicans to use the Internet as a way to communicate with their supporters. Republican strategists and activists typically have worked within a top-down organizational structure and find the unruly nature of the Internet foreign and unpredictable. And as is common for the party in power, Republicans tended to rely on communication and mobilization strategies that they have pursued and successfully implemented in the past (Rasiej and Sifry, 2007; Stirland, 2007; Thompson, 2008). The posting of professionally produced television advertisements and the development of videos for online-only distribution, however, does not represent a major transformation in communication strategy for either party.

Table 2 presents the results disaggregated by incumbency status. Challengers for the Senate (73%) were the most likely to open a YouTube channel, followed by open seat candidates (72%) and then incumbents (11%). In the House, incumbents (31%) were the most likely to open a channel, followed by open seat candidates (29%) and challengers (26%). However, the differences were not statistically significant either for Senate ($X^2=3.559$; $p=.169$) or for House candidates ($X^2=5.754$; $p=.056$) at the .05 level.

Table 1
Presence of a YouTube Channel in the 2008 Congressional Campaigns by Party

	Democrats	Republicans	All
<u>Senate</u>			
Candidates w/own channel (%)	70.6	72.7	71.6
N	33	33	66
<u>House</u>			
Candidates w/own channel (%)	30.8	25.5	28.2
N	422	396	818

Source: Data collected by the authors

Table 2
Presence of a YouTube Channel in the 2008 Congressional Campaigns by Incumbency Status

	Incumbents	Challengers	Open Seats	All
<u>Senate</u>				
Candidates w/own channel (%)	70.6	72.7	71.6	71.6
N	33	33	66	66
<u>House</u>				
Candidates w/own channel (%)	30.8	25.5	28.2	28.2
N	422	396	818	818

Source: Data collected by the authors

As we identified the candidates who had opened their own channels, we also noted the number of videos that they had uploaded onto their channels. This number provides a broader gauge for measuring activity on YouTube than the simple dichotomous classification. The Senate candidates with channels posted a combined total of 1,458 videos. The median number of videos uploaded was 20.5, and the average number per candidate was 31. Because many of Joe Biden's videos were from the presidential campaign, we excluded his videos when calculating the mean. Challenger Jeff Merkley (R-OR) was the most active Senate candidate on YouTube, having posted 112 videos onto his channel. As can be seen in Table 3, seven of the top 10 most active users were Democrats and all seven were challengers. The three most active Republicans were all incumbents, however.

Table 3
The Top 25 in 2008: Number of Videos Posted on YouTube by Senate and House Candidates

Ranking	Senate				House			
	Candidate	State	Party	# of Videos	Candidate	State	Party	# of Videos
1	Merkley	OR	D	112	Pelosi	CA	D	1445
2	Franken	MN	D	79	Kucinich	OH	D	212
3	Collins	ME	R	77	Cole	OK	R	140
4	McConnell	KY	R	69	Paul	TX	R	136
5	Udall	CO	D	66	Diaz-Balart	FL	R	128
6	Allen	ME	D	60	Blunt	MO	R	126
7	Lunsford	KY	D	57	Lee	CA	D	122
8	Noriega	TX	D	57	Markey	MA	D	114
9	Coleman	MN	R	54	Towns	NY	D	108
10	Shaheen	NH	D	52	Boehner	OH	R	92
11	Smith	OR	R	46	Cohen	TN	D	84
12	Udall	NM	D	45	McCotter	MI	R	71
13	Begich	AK	D	44	King	IA	R	55
14	Landrieu	LA	D	44	Garcia	FL	D	54
15	Cornyn	TX	R	43	Pingree	ME	D	53
16	Gilmore	VA	R	42	Frank	MA	D	53
17	Chambliss	GA	R	41	Perriello	VA	D	49
18	Inhofe	OK	R	41	Massa	NY	D	47
19	Warner	VA	D	37	Young	AK	R	46
20	Rice	OK	D	28	Doggett	TX	D	40
21	Johnson	SD	D	26	Reichert	WA	R	39
22	Kennedy	LA	R	23	Grayson	FL	D	35
23	Kerry	MA	D	22	Lien	SD	R	35
24	Rothfuss	WY	D	21	Israel	NY	D	34
25	Hagan	NC	D	20	DeGette	CO	D	32

Source: Data collected by the authors

The House candidates with channels posted a combined total of 5,453 videos, with a median of 8 and a mean of 22.3. The number of videos for presidential candidates Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich were excluded when calculating the mean for House candidates. The top 25 most active YouTube users among House candidates also are displayed in Table 3. Unlike the Senate, the entire top 10 consisted of incumbents and there was an even split between Democrats and Republicans. The House candidate with the most activity was Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who had 1,445 videos posted on her channel. Presidential candidates Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) and Ron Paul (R-TX) also were quite active on YouTube, but most of their videos did not pertain to their congressional campaigns.

Tables 4 and 5 present the data broken down by party and incumbency status. In sum, there seems to be no real pattern to the data and none of the differences are statistically significant at even the .10 level. Democrats and challengers seem to be the most active in the Senate, while incumbents seem to be the most active in the House.

Table 4
YouTube Activity in the 2008 Congressional Campaigns by Party

	Democrats	Republicans	All
<u>Senate</u>			
Median Number of Videos Uploaded	27	15	20.5
Mean Number of Videos Uploaded	36.6	25.0	30.7
N	24	24	48
<u>House</u>			
Median Number of Videos Uploaded	8	9	8
Mean Number of Videos Uploaded	26.7	16.6	22.3
N	129	100	229

Note: Averages do not include data for incumbents who all ran for president or vice president: Joe Biden, Dennis Kucinich, and Ron Paul.

Source: Data collected by the authors

Table 5
YouTube Activity in the 2008 Congressional Campaigns by Party

	Incumbents	Challengers	Open Seats	All
<u>Senate</u>				
Median Number of Videos Uploaded	19.0	23.0	15.0	20.5
Mean Number of Videos Uploaded	27.8	36.5	26.3	30.7
N	22	17	9	48
<u>House</u>				
Median Number of Videos Uploaded	11.0	7.0	7.5	8.0
Mean Number of Videos Uploaded	31.7	10.7	12.4	22.3
N	127	84	20	231

Note: Averages do not include data for incumbents who all ran for president or vice president: Joe Biden,

To explain more fully the reasons why some candidates created their own channel while others did not, we estimated a logistic regression model of YouTube presence for all 818 major party House candidates. The dependent variable—*YouTube Channel Presence*—was coded as a “1” if the candidate opened a channel and coded a “0” if the candidate did not. We excluded Senate candidates from the multivariate analysis because of their smaller population size.

Our independent variables in the model predicting which House candidates would open a channel included four electoral characteristics and four indicators of constituency-demand, all of which have been linked both theoretically and empirically to the presence of campaign web sites in previous studies (Herrnson et al. 2007; Gulati and Williams 2007; Williams and Gulati 2007). Dummy variables were constructed for Republicans, challengers and candidates to open seats, with Democrats and incumbents serving as the reference categories. Our indicator for the campaign’s financial resources is the total net receipts collected between January 1, 2007 and September 30, 2008.¹² Our fourth electoral variable is the competitiveness of the race. A race was coded as competitive if it had been designated as a toss-up, leaning toward one party, or likely for one party by the *Cook Political Report* on November 3, 2008.¹³ The indicators that we used to account for constituency-demand were: (1) the percentage of residents over 24 with a college degree, (2) the percentage of residents classified as white, (3) the percentage residents under 65, and (4) the percentage of residents living in urban areas.¹⁴

To explain the reasons why some candidates were more active in posting videos on their channel, we estimated a (zero-inflated) negative binomial regression model of the number of YouTube videos posted for 815 major party House candidates.¹⁵ We excluded former presidential candidates Kucinich and Paul from the analysis and also Speaker Pelosi, who was a clear outlier with respect to YouTube activity. The values on the dependent variable—*YouTube Activity*—range from 0 to 140. Our independent variables in the model for YouTube activity include the same four electoral characteristics and four indicators of constituency-demand that we used in the model for YouTube presence.

Analysis and Findings

¹² Data on campaign contributions were obtained from the Federal Election Commission: <<http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/ftpsum.shtml>>.

¹³ See <http://www.cookpolitical.com/charts/house/competitive_2008-11-03_17-12-33.php>.

¹⁴ These data are from the 2000 Census and were obtained from the U.S Bureau of the Census.

¹⁵ We used the negative binomial regression model rather than the Poisson model because the latter assumes that the probability of an event occurring at any given time is independent of all previous events. In the case of video postings, the assumption of independence is violated because candidates who post one video may be more likely to post additional videos, and those posting additional videos may be more likely to post even more videos (King, 1989).

The results of the multivariate logistic regression analysis of YouTube channel presence for House candidates are presented in Table 6. These data show that better-financed candidates and candidates running in competitive races were the most likely to open a YouTube channel. This would suggest that the candidates who are the most likely to embrace this relatively new form of video distribution are those who see this new communication medium as an additional tool for winning votes. When the race is more competitive, all candidates regardless of incumbency status have an incentive to exploit every available technological resource that might help them expand their electoral base and maximize turnout among their supporters. Even though the cost of uploading videos to YouTube is extremely low, better-financed candidates are more likely to open a channel because campaigns with the most money also tend to have the most sophisticated and professional organizations (Shea and Burton, 2006). They are more likely to be early adopters who see the Internet as a fundamental component of an effective communication and mobilization strategy.

Table 6
Logistic Regression Analysis of YouTube Presence in the 2008 House Races

Independent Variables	Coef.	S.E.	p
<i>Party (Democrats=reference category)</i>			
Republicans	-0.219	0.169	0.193
<i>Incumbency Status (Incumbents=reference category)</i>			
Challengers	0.030	0.209	0.886
Open seat candidates	-0.583	0.321	0.069
Contributions received (in 100,000s)	0.057	0.012	0.000
Competitive seat	0.784	0.209	0.000
Percent white	0.004	0.006	0.495
Percent w/college degrees	0.022	0.012	0.077
Percent under age 65	0.016	0.029	0.578
Percent rural	0.000	0.006	0.989
Intercept	-2.365	0.553	0.000
N	815		
Percent correctly predicted	73.6		
Pseudo R ²	0.165		

The logistic regression results in presented in Table 6 are also interesting for revealing that certain variables identified in early studies as affecting online campaign strategy were not statistically significant with regards to YouTube presence. For example, we found no partisan difference on opening a YouTube channel. In 2006, Democrats concentrated on Facebook and

other Internet tools related to mobilization to a much greater extent than Republicans. The current findings suggest that for both Democrats and Republicans, YouTube simply provides an additional medium for spreading communication already developed for television and archiving past advertisements. Thus, for Republicans, it does not represent a deviation from their primary methods of campaign communication.

Some of the non-significant results are also noteworthy. Although the difference does not achieve the .05 level of significance, the direction of the coefficient suggests that open seat candidates were the least likely to open a YouTube channel. This is the opposite of other studies where incumbents were the least likely to experiment with new tools since they tend to rely on the ones with which they used to win previous campaigns. Moreover, open seat elections tend to be competitive and attract the “best” candidates and, thus, have tended to feature campaigns with some of the most sophisticated campaign consultants on board (Herrnson, 2008; Jacobson, 2009). As was the case for Republicans, distributing videos already produced on YouTube is not a significant deviation from buying time to have their advertisements run on television. They are simply uploading previously produced content to an additional distribution channel.

Candidates in districts with a higher percentage of college graduates were more likely to have used YouTube, but the effect did not achieve statistical significance at the .05 level ($p=.077$). The effects of the other three demographic variables were not statistically significant at conventional levels of significance either. As a whole, this is essentially the same pattern that was observed in studies of campaign web sites (Gulati and Williams, 2007).

The limited impact of constituency demographics suggests that House candidates do not see YouTube as a vehicle for targeting their campaign strategies and tools to groups who are more likely to use the Internet or expect access online to information about campaigns and politics in general. The comments we received in interviews that we conducted with nearly 25 congressional campaigns about their online strategy in 2008 bear this out. A common theme in their comments was that YouTube was not a tool that was capable of mobilizing voters and that a sound ground game was a more effective means for targeting specific groups of voters.¹⁶ The demographics of YouTube viewers validate their assumptions. The YouTube audience is a relatively close match with the American electorate as a whole (BIGresearch, 2007), and much more so than the demographic profile of Facebook.

While the estimates from the multivariate model are useful in identifying the relative importance of the independent variables included in the model, the summary statistics reveal that there still is a great deal that is unknown about what increases the likelihood of House candidates to open a YouTube channel. The percentage of cases correctly predicted by the model (73.6%) is not much better than the percentage of correct predictions that would have made by simply guessing the modal value (72%). The somewhat random nature of YouTube channel presence is similar to what was observed in a recent study of which candidates were the most likely to campaign on Facebook in its initial availability as a campaign tool (Williams and Gulati, 2007) and the early studies of which candidates were the most likely to launch a campaign Web site. When campaign web sites were in the experimental phase and still considered a novelty, a personal interest in new technology by the candidate or a staff member tended to be the reason that the candidate campaigned online (Foot and Schneider, 2002).

¹⁶ Staff member, campaign for Martin Ozinga (R-IL), Personal Interview October 31, 2008.

The results of the negative binomial regression analysis of *YouTube activity* are presented in Table 7. The coefficients indicate that better-financed candidates, incumbents, and candidates running in districts with a high percentage of minority residents were the most likely to use YouTube. Campaign finance receipts, moreover, is the only independent variable that also was significant in the model of YouTube presence. When a campaign for Congress raises a large amount of money, it almost always is used to finance additional television advertisements (Shea and Burton, 2006). Thus, the more ads that a campaign produces, the more videos are available for posting on their YouTube channel.

Television ads are not the only videos that candidates can post on their channels. Also present on many channels are videos of speeches, campaign rallies and other events, and online-only video messages. This may explain why incumbents were more active on YouTube than their challengers or candidates for open seats. Incumbents frequently are asked to address members of a civic or professional organization, give keynote addresses, and introduce speakers at community events and awards ceremonies (Fenno, 1978). Moreover, as sitting members of Congress, their campaigns tend to start much earlier than challengers and open seat candidates and, thus, have more opportunities for producing content.

Table 7

Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression Analysis of YouTube Presence in the 2008 House Races

Independent Variables	Coef.	S.E.	p
<i>Party (Democrats=reference category)</i>			
Republicans	-0.537	0.150	0.721
<i>Incumbency Status (Incumbents=reference category)</i>			
Challengers	-0.650	0.161	0.000
Open seat candidates	-0.759	0.271	0.005
Contributions received (in 100,000s)	0.027	0.008	0.000
Competitive seat	0.129	0.150	0.390
Percent white	-0.012	0.004	0.009
Percent w/college degrees	0.012	0.011	0.265
Percent under age 65	0.007	0.022	0.770
Percent rural	0.008	0.005	0.124
Constant	0.811	0.089	0.000
N	812		
Log likelihood	-1313		
LR χ^2	44.45		

When candidates begin to campaign or the number of events candidates promote and hold do not appear to be related to campaign decisions about creating their own channel. From our interviews, we found that challengers were eager to consider using YouTube as “a great way to get [the candidate’s] name out there in the beginning,”¹⁷ But when it came to actively using it, the feeling was that the incumbents were “too strong” to “waste time” on an unproven medium such as YouTube.¹⁸

We found it surprising that candidates with constituencies who had a higher percentage of minorities were the most active YouTube users. Past studies of online campaigning have found that when the racial and ethnic composition of the district matters, the candidates from constituencies with few minorities are the most active online campaigners. Yet current data show that minorities have a higher regular usage of new media than whites, regardless of type. They are more likely to use iPods, text on cell phones, play videogames, use video/picture phones, instant messaging online and watch videos on cell phones (BIGresearch, 2007).

It is possible that because Web sites and social networking sites are used to target constituencies that are more comfortable with new technology, campaigns see YouTube as a way to reach constituencies that prefer more traditional means of learning about campaigns and to reach a wider audience.

While the competitiveness of the race had an effect on the decision to open a channel, it did not affect how many videos the campaign posted. As we discussed above, candidates in a tough race are more likely to explore every avenue possible in an attempt to gain voters and mobilize their core supporters. Investing considerable resources into actively using an experimental tool is a risky proposition, however. Our data and personal interviews suggest that while some candidates are willing to take that risk, many candidates from both competitive and non-competitive races would prefer to focus on more traditional forms of grassroots organizing that are more apt to generate votes. One staffer working for a candidate in a competitive race said they did not invest in YouTube because “it won’t help much getting votes.”¹⁹ Others echoed this view and noted their commitment to grassroots activities that have been shown to yield more positive results on Election Day. But many campaigns in non-competitive races had come to the same conclusion. Incumbents with little opposition saw no need to deviate from standard campaign communication practices. In addition, the lack of serious opposition means that fewer ads were produced and, thus, fewer ads were available to post on YouTube.²⁰ For challengers who are on the short end of a non-competitive race, expanding into different media platforms does not seem to be a way to alter the dynamics of the race.²¹

¹⁷ Julie Petrick, campaign manager for Gary Peters (D-MI), Personal Interview, 31 October 2008.

¹⁸ Anthony Williams (R-IL), Personal Interview, 30 October 2008.

¹⁹ Stu Wulsin, staff member for Victoria Wulsin (D-OH), Personal Interview, 31 October 2008.

²⁰ Staff member, campaign for Russ Carnahan (D-MO), Personal Interview, 30 October 2008.

²¹ Julie Petrick, campaign manager for Gary Peters (D-MI), Personal Interview, 31 October 2008.

Discussion

Our data on YouTube are consistent with earlier research on the adoption of new technologies in some respects, but show interesting differences in others. We view YouTube not so much as a new technology tool but as a vehicle for disseminating campaign communications produced for or by traditional media, generally television. What's new is that YouTube makes this easy, fast and inexpensive, and can reach a large audience. We find YouTube to be more attractive to candidates than Facebook proved to be in 2006. This is likely the case because YouTube more closely mirrors the demographic profile of the general voting population. It is also more attractive than campaign web sites were in their early days, again probably because more people are online and have broadband connections today, making Internet hosted sites like YouTube widely available to the general population.

Despite its skew toward the younger age demographic and our personal interviews with campaign personnel that campaigns view the medium as a means of outreach to the youth vote, the percentage under age 65 was not a significant predictor of either YouTube presence or activity.²² Indeed, among constituency attributes, only percentage minority had a positive relationship, and only with YouTube activity.²³ Given that there is less differentiation between the YouTube viewing segment of the population and the electorate, these results suggest that YouTube is not a particularly useful targeting medium for particular kinds of congressional districts. This essentially replicates the findings from Williams and Gulati (2007), but diverges from some of the early research on campaign web site adopters.

Campaign fundraising is the only strategic resource that differentiates both YouTube presence and activity levels. Wealthier campaigns have the professional staffing and sophistication to incorporate new tools for voter communication and mobilization more readily. They also have the financial wherewithal to generate more video content. Incumbents are similarly advantaged: they tend to have greater resources, but are also able to leverage their position as newsmakers. Just as incumbents lagged in posting campaign web sites, incumbency did not affect candidates' motivation to open a YouTube channel, only the amount of activity once they had one. A competitive race does, however, affect who decides to open a channel on YouTube. When a small number of votes can make a difference, candidates pursue every means of voter outreach, and as we have seen, YouTube has a number of advantages over traditional media in disseminating those messages during a campaign.

This initial study of YouTube use as a campaign tool suggests that the medium has not changed the underlying campaign dynamic: the best financed candidates utilize and have more of every resource, including online video sharing; competition serves to increase the variety of

²² This needs to be confirmed by using a direct measure of the youthfulness of a constituency, such as the percentage under age 35, rather than its seniority, i.e., the percentage over age 65, as we have done in this analysis.

²³ In our Facebook study, only percentage of college educated was a significant predictor of profile usage.

methods candidates employ to reach and persuade voters. While YouTube has expanded the potential reach and timeliness of campaign communications, it has not replaced traditional campaign tactics or tools, rather it augments them. Early adopters are not yet evenly or widely distributed at all levels of office. Most are still experimenting with the medium, and many, even those who have opened campaign channels, remain skeptical of its value. That skepticism may result more from uncertainty about how best to exploit YouTube than doubts that clever video clips can generate massive attention. In the future, the challenge for campaigns may center around monitoring and controlling viewers' negative comments about the videos and reigning in individuals who produce and distribute their own videos in support of the candidate that are not consistent with the campaign's central message.

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Competitive seat	0.784	0.209	0.000
Percent white	0.004	0.006	0.495
Percent w/college degrees	0.022	0.012	0.077
Percent under age 65	0.016	0.029	0.578
Viser, M. (2007). "Attention, please; House hopefuls try new tactics to draw voters." <i>Boston Globe</i> , A.1, August 16.	0.000	0.006	0.989
Percent rural			
Intercept	-2.365	0.553	0.000
Wagner, M. (2008). Dawn of the Internet Presidency. <i>Information Week</i> , November 10.			
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N	815		
Percent correctly predicted	73.6		
Pseudo R ²	0.165		