

Macaca Moments Reconsidered... YouTube Effects or Netroots Effects?

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Abstract

This paper explores “Macaca moments” – high profile candidate gaffes that are captured on YouTube and receive a cascade of citizen viewing, leading to substantial political impacts. Such moments are widely taken as indicative of the way that YouTube is changing politics. Through a detailed comparative case analysis of the original “Macaca moment” – George Allen’s controversial statement in the 2006 Virginia Senate election – and the most often-cited such incident in the 2008 election – Michele Bachmann’s verbal misstep on *Hardball with Chris Matthews* – the paper discusses the varying impacts of YouTube itself versus the “netroots” political community. Though there is great similarity between how the 2006 and 2008 moments involved YouTube, the substantial differences between how the netroots engaged with the larger campaigns led to widely divergent outcomes. The paper seeks to bring political organizations back in to the study of online collective action, and is one of the first academic works to treat the robust political community at DailyKos.com as a topic worthy of examination in its own right.¹

¹ The paper relies on data from archived DailyKos blog posts, which were coded into an Excel database. The database will be placed into the *JITP* dataverse for future public reference and analysis.

“This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, Macaca, or whatever his name is... He’s following us around everywhere. And it’s just great. Hey, let’s all welcome Macaca to America, welcome to the real world of Virginia.” – Senator George Allen (R-VA), August 11, 2006

“What I would say is that the news media should do a penetrating expose and take a look. I wish they would. I wish the American media would take a great look at the views of the people in Congress and find out, are they pro-America or Anti-America? I think the American people would love to see an expose like that.” – Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R, MN-06), October 17, 2008

This paper seeks to contextualize so-called “Macaca moments:” political gaffes that are heavily accessed through YouTube, leading to cascades of media and public attention with noticeable impacts on electoral campaigns. Made famous by Senator George Allen’s utterance of the obscure racial slur at a camera-wielding, Indian-American opposition campaign operative during a rally, the term has entered the American political lexicon as a synonym for YouTube’s effects on elections. Ryan Lizza of the New York Times perhaps put it best, “When politicians say inappropriate things, many voters will want to know. Now they can see it for themselves on the Web.”² Political scientist Vassia Gueorguieva suggests that YouTube “ha[s] increased the potential for candidate exposure at a low cost or no cost at all and the ability of campaigns to reach out to the public for campaign contributions and for recruiting volunteers. In addition, [it] ha[s] provided lesser known candidates with a viable outlet to divulge their message to voters.”³ Against these positive pronouncements of YouTube’s transformative effects, we must recall Matthew Hindman’s rejoinder that various sorts of web traffic approximate a heavily-skewed power law distribution, suggesting that although anyone can freely speak on the web, only an elite few are substantially heard.⁴ If a candidate gaffe or user-generated commercial is published on YouTube, and no one is there to view it, does it make any impact? Particularly given that the supposed “Macaca Moment” of 2008 – Michelle Bachmann’s neo-McCarthyite episode on *Hardball with Chris Matthews* – failed to produce an electoral result, have we been too quick to credit YouTube with panoptic implications?

I argue against the technology-centric framework commonly used to discuss YouTube, fundamentally suggesting that we gain greater theoretical traction by *bringing the organizations back in*. YouTube, like other internet communication technologies, dramatically lowers the transaction costs of content production, moving us (in Clay Shirky’s words) from a world of

² Lizza, Ryan. 2006. “The YouTube Election.” *The New York Times*. August 20, 2006. Accessed online, March 26, 2009: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/weekinreview/20lizza.html>

³ Gueorguieva, Vassia. 2008. “Voters, MySpace, and YouTube: The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond.” *Social Science Computer Review*. Sage Publications. Vol 26, No 3. Pg 288.

⁴ Hindman, Matthew. 2008. *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

“filter, then publish” to a world of “publish, then filter.”⁵ This leads to a condition of *information abundance*, wherein the filtering, rather than the publishing, becomes the dominant challenge to mass collaboration or collective action. This act of filtering – of signaling to large, networked components of the online population that a video, blog post, or issue is worthy of their attention – is largely accomplished by a new set internet-mediated organizations. Political communities-of-interest, mobilizing under the guise of MoveOn.org, Dailykos.com, and other hub spaces, incorporate tools such as embedded YouTube video into their tactical repertoires, guiding and harvesting the cascade of mass attention to further their strategic goals.

I argue that the political impact of YouTube videos is deeply rooted in the usage of such videos by these “netroots” organizations – simply put, when YouTube videos are highlighted by the major netroots groups, including elite political blogging communities like DailyKos, they receive substantial viewership and, more importantly, are converted into campaign donations and pressure campaign tactics. Without these donations and pressure tactics, it is unclear why large national viewer numbers would be determinative in the outcome of a local election. Rather than the common techno-centric “YouTube effects” explanation, which treats collective action as though it happens spontaneously or in response to formal elites, this theory of “netroots effects” argues that the dramatic lowering of video content-production costs only bears political fruit when organized interests incorporate them into ongoing efforts. Thus the lasting impact of such web 2.0 technologies as YouTube lies not in the dissolution of elite control, but in the creation of more porous elite networks and the development of new, “peer-produced” tactical repertoires.

I present this argument through detailed cross-case comparison of the original “Macaca moment,” (the 2006 Virginia Senate race) and its 2008 successor (the 2008 Minnesota District 6 House race). Using the large volume of content posted to DailyKos through user diaries to reconstruct the full time-series of events in each case, I demonstrate that, although both instances led to substantial public outrage and partisan giving, and both led to increased respect from elected officials to the DailyKos “netroots” community, the central difference between them was the 2006 moment occurred in the context of an ongoing high-priority netroots campaign, while the 2008 moment was merely a brief, attention-drawing scandal. This method of analysis is also meant to illuminate just how different DailyKos is from standard personal blogs, and to perform an argument for increased scholarly attention to this major, understudied online political association. The paper is meant to provide theoretical grounding for future research attempts at studying the drivers of traffic and influence in YouTube, which will necessarily be more quantitative in nature.

Background

There has been surprisingly little written about the political “netroots” thus far – in the academic literature, virtually nothing in fact. Some research on political blogging has appeared in political science journals – most notably a special issue of *Public Choice* and various issues of *Journal of Information Technology and Politics (JITP)* – but this has largely considered bloggers as a single, discrete set of “citizen journalists” and sought to discuss their habits, practices, and effectiveness (see Pole 2005, McKenna and Pole 2004, Lenhart and Fox 2006, McKenna and

⁵ Shirky, Clay. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: Penguin Group

Pole 2008). While the blogosphere circa 2004 was arguably small enough to allow for such a classification, the explosive growth of the technology has since rendered such population-level studies problematic. Blog software is a relatively simple type of code, and as blogging has grown in popularity, various institutions have adopted blogging into their suite of online communications tools. While Duncan “Atrios” Black and Glenn “Instapundit” Reynolds – two early bloggers from the Left and the Right, respectively – shared much in common with each other and could be reasonably classified according to their role as “bloggers,” it is unclear why we should expect NBC News Anchor Brian Williams or Sierra Club Executive Director Carl Pope to use their blogs in much the same way. Likewise, with the launch of the community-engaging Scoop software platform in 2003, blogs like DailyKos began to offer their readers the opportunity not only to comment on the posts by Markos Moulitsas (nicknamed “Kos” during his time in the Army), but also to author their own “diary” posts and have them hosted for free on the site itself. I argue in a 2008 *JITP* piece that these “Community Blogs” function as gathering spaces for identity-based communities-of-interest. The DailyKos community, for instance, endorses, fundraises, and volunteers for a slate of “netroots” political candidates, even holding an annual in-person convention of self-identifying “kossacks.” The group engages in political education efforts, chooses issue campaign priorities, and attempts to pressure political decision-makers. The difference between an elite community blog and a traditional interest group lies in the details of staffing, tax status, and tactical repertoires, while the similarities between such a hub community blog and the average pseudonymous individual blogger’s site are few enough to make sweeping generalizations about “bloggers” highly problematic.

Below, I reproduce two figures from a recent study to demonstrate just how expansive the DailyKos community has become. The data comes from an ongoing data-gathering project called the Blogosphere Authority Index, openly accessible to the research community online. Figure 1 illustrates the growth of content production in the DailyKos blogging community since it switched to the “Scoop” platform. This is the total number of blog posts, both in front page and diary format, per month, an important figure given Marlow’s (2005) finding that content generation, rather than pure preferential attachment, is the main driver of increases in site traffic over time. We see that content production increases during the months surrounding an election, and we see a continual increase in the overall size of the community. Figure 2 provides some context for just how enormous DailyKos has become, comparing the average number of *comments* per week posted to DailyKos, the next 24 largest progressive political blogs, and the top 25 conservative political blogs during and after the high-traffic 2008 election season.⁶ One year prior to the election season, in November 2007, DailyKos received nearly as many comments as the next 24-largest progressive blogs *combined*, and nearly 50% more comments than the entire elite conservative blogosphere (Karpf 2008a). During the 2008 election season, the lion’s share of increased public participation in the blogosphere went to DailyKos, with no

⁶ I often use comments as a proxy for community activity, since neither hyperlinks nor site traffic effectively distinguish between posts that are actually being read versus posts that are merely skimmed or skipped over. It stands to reason that, prior to posting a comment, a reader must be actually engaging with the material and considering it long enough to form an opinion worth posting. It further stands to reason that these motivated commenters are more likely to engage in other forms of community activity, such as donating money or taking political action.

analogous growth anywhere else in the political blogosphere (see Karpf 2009 for a full discussion of shifts in various measures of blog authority during the 2008 election season).⁷

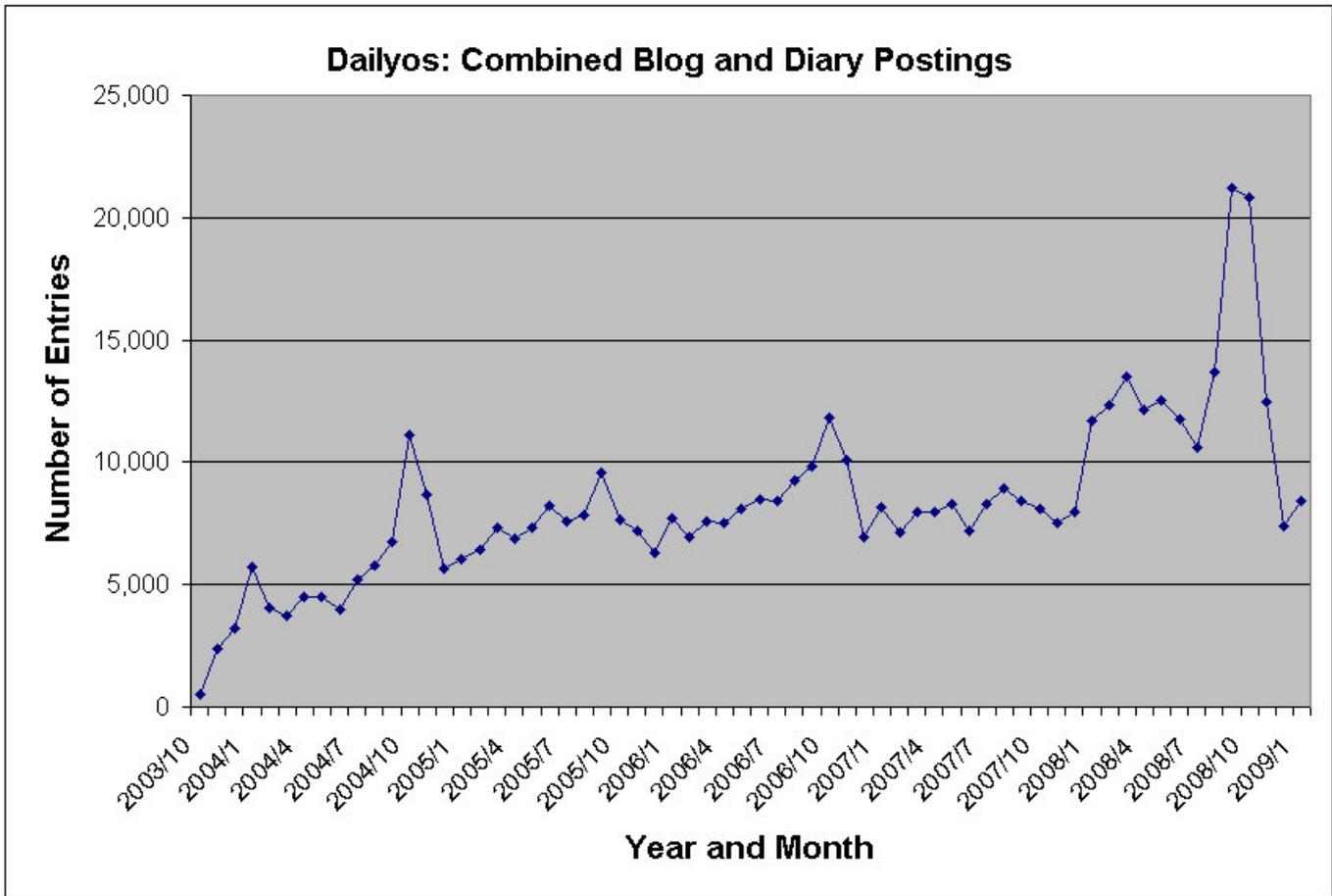


Figure 1: DailyKos Blog Posts Over Time

These changes are particularly important given that the literature has, to date, sidestepped the DailyKos community. In his otherwise-excellent *JITP* piece, “Political Blogs: Transmission Belts, Soapboxes, Mobilizers, or Conversation Starters,” Kevin Wallsten notes the methodological challenges in studying a “hive blog” like DailyKos and, noting that, circa 2004, the site was not much larger than its contemporaries, excludes it from his study of the political uses of blog posts. Wallsten concludes his study – which introduces the content analysis framework that I rely upon in this project – by suggesting the importance of the site as an area of future research: “If the political significance of political blogs is to be accurately determined, therefore, future work should explore how the Daily Kos is used and whether its readers are taking political action.”⁸ No member of the research community has followed up on this

⁷ Data for both of these figures comes from the Blogosphere Authority Index dataset. See www.blogosphereauthorityindex.com or Karpf 2009 for further discussion.

⁸ Wallsten, Kevin. 2007. “Political Blogs: Transmission Belts, Soapboxes, Mobilizers, or Conversation Starters.” *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*. 4(3). pg 34.

suggestion, though, and in the meantime works such as Matthew Hindman’s *The Myth of Digital Democracy* have treated the site as if it were a solo-author blog, ignoring the internal site mobility that allows the most popular active community members to eventually become paid full-time “Kos Fellows” with front page-posting privileges and a national daily audience in the hundreds of thousands.⁹ David Perlmutter’s 2008 book, *Blog Wars*, includes some discussion of community blogs and the “netroots” more generally, but his largely interview-based approach sheds limited light on the comparative size and strength of these sites. Perlmutter is primarily a journalism and communications scholar, and so his work treats the DailyKos community as “citizen journalists” rather than political mobilizers or partisan activists.¹⁰

Total Comments/week

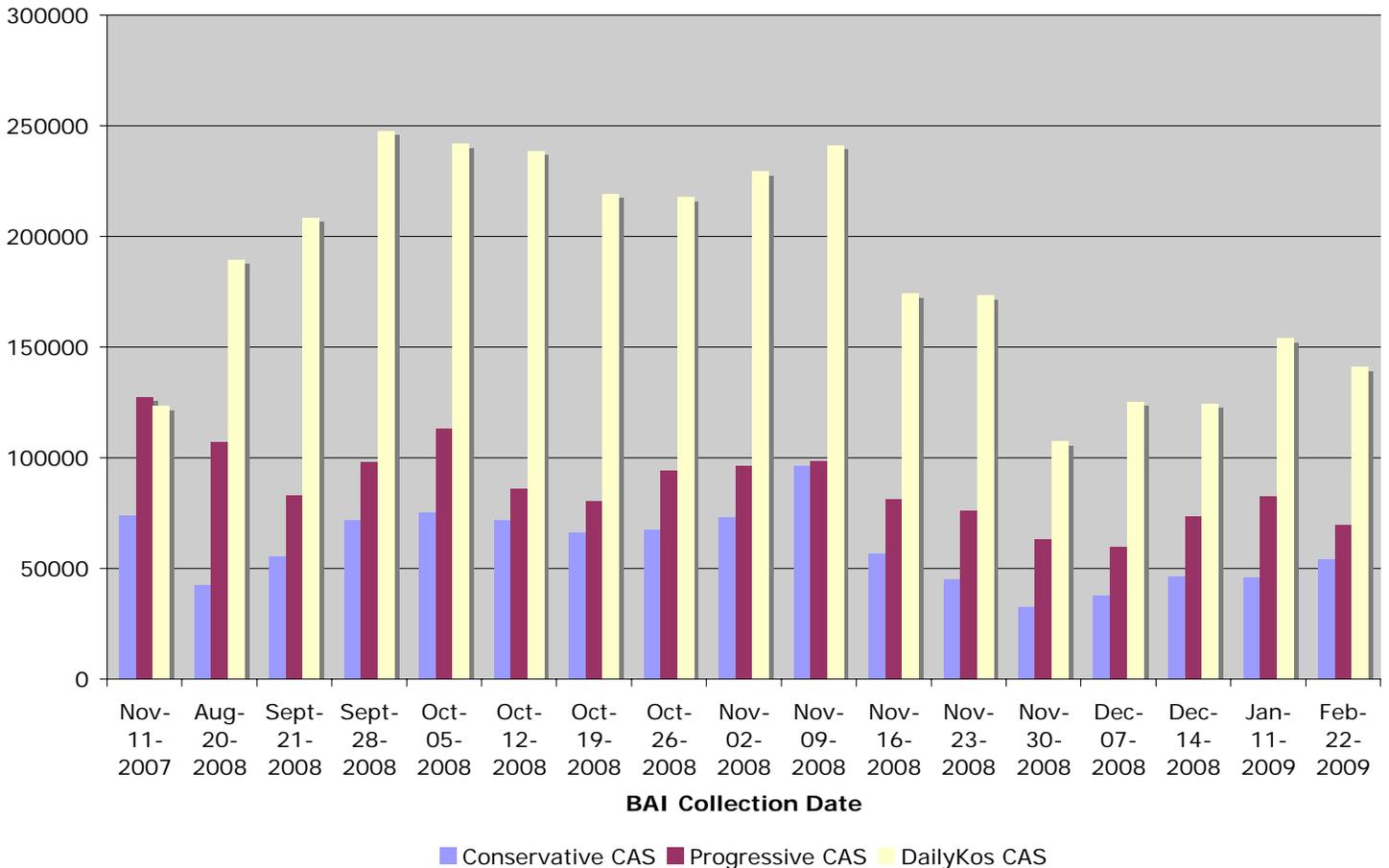


Figure 2: Comments/Week during the 2008 election season (including baseline data from Karpf 2008a)

⁹ Hindman, 2008. Pg 119.

¹⁰ Perlmutter, David. 2008. *Blog Wars*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

For this reason, most of what has been written about the “netroots” consists of journalistic coverage in newspapers or magazines, or of books published by netroots leaders and the journalists who follow them (see Moulitsas and Armstrong 2006, Bai 2007, Feld and Wilcox 2008, Moulitsas 2008). These works unsurprisingly tend to display the sort of techno-optimism and broad, sweeping claims of effectiveness that make for popular writing. Deeply theorized accounts of how these “netroots” political interests are affecting politics, much less attempts at large-scale data gathering, have yet to emerge. Some excellent research has been conducted on the use of blogs and internet tools by formal political campaigns (see Bimber and Davis 2003, Latimer 2007, Foot and Schneider 2006, Bloom and Kerbel 2006, Pole 2008), but these studies have not been aimed at considering independent “netroots” blogging communities.

It is the aim of this paper then, through comparative case analysis, to begin building some theory of the distinctive effectiveness we should expect from these internet-mediated political associations. What, in essence, does all of the “netroots” activity amount to? It is an especially important moment to engage in such theory-building, because the same sort of technology-focused pieces that we originally saw regarding the blogosphere a few years ago are now being produced regarding YouTube and Twitter. A few scholars – most notably Bruce Bimber (2003) and Andrew Chadwick (2007) – have discussed the internet’s impact on interest groups and social movements, but their work has not made the direct connection with community blogs or other leading social technologies. If I am correct in the assertion that successful collective action is almost always organized, rather than spontaneous, then a deeper understanding of these novel quasi-interest group leaders is deeply needed.

Methodology

Following Bloom and Kerbel’s 2003 study, which traced blog involvement in publicizing Senator Trent Lott’s racially-charged statements at Senator Strom Thurmond’s birthday celebration, this study relies upon archived blog posts to construct an accurate time-series of events for qualitative content analysis. The value of online data such as blog posts to qualitative studies has been relatively underappreciated, overlooked in light of the more tantalizing implications that floods of internet data hold for quantitative studies. Rather than relying on the faulty memories and 20/20 hindsight of political actors in the aftermath of an event, however, archived blog posts allow us to investigate “who said what,” “when,” “to whom,” and “with what issue frames,” with remarkable accuracy. Furthermore, these findings are replicable in a manner that many qualitative studies are not. They are akin to ethnography or participant-observation in their rich detail, but the data is freely available for competing analysis.

I chose to engage in comparative case analysis of the George Allen-2006 and Michelle Bachmann-2008 candidate gaffes because of the substantial technological similarities between the two. Both were heavily-publicized verbal gaffes by Republican candidates who were aware that a camera was trained on them. Both received heavy and repeated play on YouTube, with Allen receiving over 380,000 views and Bachmann receiving over 189,000 views.¹¹ Both resulted in election forecasters changing the status of the race from “Republican favored” to

¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G7gq7GQ71c> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJIQm_7YAUl. Both of these videos were posted multiple times on YouTube, and therefore it is unclear what the exact total of unique views would be.

“leans Republican” or “tossup” – important since this signal of competitiveness can lead to increases in donor interest and strategic resource support from the Democratic and Republican Congressional and Senatorial Campaign Committees. Both were, in fact, referred to as “Macaca moments,” albeit the latter reference was an indication of its similarity to the former. The similarities also extend to how the formal campaign operatives attempted to use the event. Each campaign tried to capitalize on the gaffe in local, national, and online media spaces, deploying campaign operatives to post diaries at DailyKos and even having the candidate himself (Jim Webb in the Allen case, Elwyn Tinklenberg in the Bachmann case) post long “thank you” diaries on the site to great response. The major difference between the cases, then, included differences in timing (Allen’s gaffe occurred in August, before the start of the traditional campaign season. Bachmann’s gaffe occurred with only two and a half weeks left in the campaign season), national profile (Allen’s seat could determine which party held the Senate majority in a non-presidential election year, Bachmann’s seat would have no such national implications, and occurred in the context of the Obama-McCain presidential contest), and netroots engagement. While we cannot rule out the importance of timing and national profile in this two-case comparison, a detailed look at how the netroots treated the two gaffes, how these “Macaca moments” differed, can provide a valuable framework for evaluating claims of the transformative impact of the technology itself.

A few caveats should be offered regarding the limits of comparative case analysis. I do not present this research as evidence of causality – such a research design is inappropriate for making firm causal claims. Rather, comparative case analysis is of greatest value in areas of research that are theory-poor. Detailed case analyses can be used to clarify hypotheses and develop theories for testing in later research, and comparative case analysis can be particularly useful for distinguishing variance that calls for future explanation. This research design tells us little about broader trends in YouTube usage by bloggers, or about the interplay between political blogs and the mainstream media. Both Rachel Maddow and Keith Olbermann heavily featured Bachmann’s comments on their MSNBC programs, for instance. What impact did these mainstream media segments have on the Bachmann affair, as distinct from the YouTube effects discussed here? Wallsten (2008) has offered a provocative thesis regarding the interplay of blogs and mainstream media in the spread of viral video, and I would urge readers to consider his early findings with regards to such questions. More generally, the choice of focusing on two cases comes at the price of ignoring the huge quantities of data available on web-based and YouTube-specific activity. At this juncture, I would suggest that cross-case comparison is of value specifically because it aids us in constructing testable hypotheses further down the road, but as a scholarly community, it is mostly useful in these early stages of research. Later projects ought to take advantage of the wide range of sophisticated tools that are now becoming available, as well as the theory-buiding that case analyses like this one provide.

Given the large volume of content on DailyKos, and its aforementioned status as a central hub among the elite progressive blogs, I chose to build upon Wallsten’s 2007 content-coding scheme for this study. Using DailyKos’s tagged searching feature, I coded all blog entries tagged with either “MN-06,” “Michelle Bachmann,” or “Elwyn Tinklenberg” that were posted in 2008 up through November 3rd 2008, the day before election day. I did the same for all entries tagged with “VA-Sen,” “Jim Webb,” and “George Allen” from December, 2005 through November 6, 2006, the day prior to election day. This yielded 211 Bachmann-related entries and 825 Allen-

related entries.¹² For each of these data points, I recorded the date posted, author, title, number of comments, and whether the post appeared on either the Front page of the site or the high-traffic “recommended list.” I then duplicated Wallsten’s content-coding scheme, with a series of bivariate entries for (1) Link or Quote Only, (2) Commentary, (3) Request for Feedback, and (4) Mobilize Political Action. Following Wallsten, I broke down (4) into a number of sub-categories, including (4-1) voting, (4-2) protest, march, or rally, (4-3) contribute money, (4-4) send an e-mail, (4-5) online poll, (4-6) online petition, (4-7) volunteer, and (4-8) phone call. I found that the DailyKos community often added internal polls to their own blog posts as a mechanism for requesting feedback, and given that I found zero cases of DailyKos bloggers asking their readers to take action by voting on non-DailyKos online polls, I reclassified (4-5) as (3-5) to indicate that, on this site, online polls are used to solicit feedback. I then added a fifth category to the content analysis, (5) YouTube link. This was divided into four subcategories, (5-1) user-generated content, (5-2) media clip, (5-3) campaign commercial, and (5-4) video mashup. This category was added so that I could specifically examine netroots usage of different types of YouTube content.

I use the data to investigate three questions regarding the DailyKos community’s involvement in the two cases. First, over what time period and in what quantity did “kossacks” post about the cases. This question doubled as a qualitative time-series investigation, mimicking Bloom and Kerbel’s 2003 study. Reading blog entries in chronological order allowed me to identify the sequence of major events as they occurred, which led to some surprising findings about the Allen case in particular (detailed below). Second, what types of posts did kossacks commonly use, and how did this change between 2006 and 2008? Third, what was the breadth and depth of community involvement in the issues? For this third question, I isolated the subset of the population that appeared either as front page content or was voted onto the recommended list, and also counted the total number of unique diarists in each case and their frequency of posting. The findings for each case are presented individually below, with between-case comparison and analysis provided in the discussion section.

Netroots Campaign Moments: “Macaca” and the Campaign for Jim Webb

The original “Macaca moment” has become the stuff of legend in American political campaigning. University of Virginia senior S.R. Sidarth was tasked by the Webb campaign as a “tracker,” attending George Allen’s events and recording them with a handheld camera. On August 11th, 2006, after five days on Allen’s campaign trail, the aspiring Presidential candidate and elected Senator of Virginia acknowledged Sidarth’s presence to the crowd, referring to him as “Macaca” and “welcoming him to America and the real world of Virginia.” The clip was later posted to YouTube, where it received hundreds of thousands of visits. The cascade of negative attention essentially ended Allen’s Presidential aspirations (he had spent most of the summer

¹² For those interested in either duplicating the data collection or conducting similar content analysis projects, I discovered one important bug in the DailyKos search system. The tagged search feature itself underreports blog and diary entries, yielding only 71 Bachmann-related posts, for instance. Clicking directly on the tag of interest reveals the much larger universe of tagged entries, in reverse-chronological order.

visiting the early primary campaign states of Iowa and New Hampshire) and led to a running campaign issue that eventually let his opponent, Jim Webb, win a narrow victory in the race, 49.6% to 49.2%, or a difference of about 9,000 votes. David Perlmutter summarizes the lessons from this event as such: “Politicians learned, from the example of George Allen, that the ‘citizen journalist’ with a cause and camera should not be ignored. Allen’s ‘macaca moment’ would have been a local story or even no story, but via YouTube it received upwards of 400,000 viewings in weeks.”¹³ Online news magazine Salon.com would later name S.R. Siddarth their “Person of the Year,” for “changing history with a camcorder.”¹⁴ The details of the original “moment,” however, paint a far less clear picture of YouTube’s supposed importance to the episode.

The central question we need to ask is whether Perlmutter and others are correct in asserting that the obscure racial slur would have been “a local story or even no story” without the presence of YouTube. Here one detail of the episode is often left forgotten: Siddarth was not a “citizen journalist with a camera.” He was a campaign operative on assignment as a “tracker.” The video was property of the Webb campaign, and was not posted to YouTube until August 14th – three days after the event occurred, and also after the Washington Post had been successfully pitched to run a front-page story about the episode.¹⁵ Salon.com records that the campaign had initially been unsure how to use the video, and indeed their initial reaction was to focus on the “real Virginia” dimension of the comment, in an appeal to affluent Northern Virginia Democrats, rather than focusing on the potentially more explosive racial connotations.¹⁶ Webb had offered a similarly tame response to an April 26, 2006 feature story in *The New Republic* by Ryan Lizza which discussed Allen’s long history of racially-tinged associations, including keeping a noose in his old law office, voting against the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial holiday, and long collecting Confederate Flags and memorabilia.¹⁷ The political netroots, including the DailyKos community, a number of active Kossacks cross-posting from the Virginia State community blog, RaisingKaine.com, and other top progressive blogs such as Atrios’s “Eschaton” and Joshua Micah Marshall’s TalkingPointsMemo, seized on the racial dimension of the comment and, over the next two and a half months, consistently returned to that theme.

Why did the comment receive front-page treatment from the Washington Post prior to the large number of YouTube visits? The reason, quite likely, is the same as the reason why the journalist Lizza had devoted column inches to a George Allen profile in April, 2006: Allen was viewed as an early presidential front-runner, and in the months prior to the congressional election season, news and speculation on early presidential front-runners had national appeal. Further, the impact of Lizza’s article, generally ignored in popular retellings of the Macaca episode, meant that there was an ongoing narrative that the incident connected to. Though the term is not a commonly-used racial pejorative in America, the original *Washington Post* piece noted, “it’s not

¹³ Perlmutter, pg 105.

¹⁴ Scherer, Michael. December 16, 2006. “Salon Person of the Year: S.R. Siddarth.” *Salon.com online*. Accessed online, March 29, 2009:

<http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2006/12/16/sidarth/index.html>

¹⁵ Craig, Tim and Michael Shear. 2006. “Allen Quip Provokes Outrage, Apology.” *Washington Post*. August 15, 2006; Page A01. Accessed Online, March 29, 2009:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/14/AR2006081400589.html>

¹⁶ Moulitsas, Markos. 2008. *Taking on the System*. New York: Celebra Books. Pg 85.

¹⁷ Lizza, Ryan. April 24, 2006. “George Allen’s Race Problem.” *The New Republic*.

the first time Allen has confronted charges of insensitivity to race or ethnicity from minority leaders and longtime political opponents.” Kossacks had been blogging about making Allen’s racial views a campaign issue in April and May 2006, priming the pump for the YouTube moment.¹⁸

Though the zero-cost publishing and direct access of YouTube led hundreds of thousands to view the video, arguably boosting the appeal of the story, extending the media cycle, and creating an identifiable turning point in the campaign, we have to keep in mind that the lion’s share of these viewers were likely not Virginians. Unless these viewers forwarded the video to a Virginian friend, donated money, or took some other political action, it is unclear how we would expect them to affect the Senate race. The YouTube video may have helped raise the comment from campaign-trail-gaffe to lasting campaign moment, but without Allen’s national standing, one has to wonder whether many people, Virginia voters in particular, would have cared. The initial reading from the national punditry was that the gaffe had likely ended Allen’s presidential ambitions, but his \$7 million campaign war chest and incumbency advantage in traditionally-Republican Virginia left him well-positioned to hold his seat against the underfunded and little-known Webb campaign.

It is in the disposition of the Webb campaign itself that the “netroots effects” are most clearly visible. Beginning in late December, 2005, Lowell Feld of the Raising Kaine state blog, posting under the username “lowkell” on DailyKos, began advocating for a “Draft Jim Webb” effort online. The frontrunning Democratic candidate at that time was Harris Miller, a close associate of Virginia Governor Mark Warner. Miller was unpopular with labor leaders due to his years working as a lobbyist in favor of outsourcing information technology jobs. The “lobbyist” label was likely to be a particularly big problem in an election year featuring national outrage over lobbyist Jack Abramoff’s conviction for purchasing political influence on Capitol Hill. Feld felt that Webb, a former Republican who had served as Secretary of the Navy under Reagan but had switched to the Democratic Party and become an outspoken early critic of the Iraq War, would be a far stronger candidate. Webb, however, was reluctant to enter the race. The Draft Jim Webb effort raised the somewhat paltry sum of \$40,000, but also identified 240 Virginia-based volunteers who were enthusiastic to work on Webb’s campaign and made it clear that there was grassroots support awaiting the first-time candidate. Webb agreed to enter the race in mid-February and eventually would defeat Miller, despite a 3-to-1 fundraising disadvantage, in the June Democratic primary without purchasing a single campaign commercial. Instead, the Webb campaign relied on earned media, with an outpouring of campaign volunteers, organized largely through Raising Kaine, and a series of high-value endorsements from interest groups and national elected officials.¹⁹

The DailyKos community would go on to name Webb as one of their top-tier “netroots candidates,” regularly blogging about the campaign and urging their national community-of-interest to donate and volunteer for the Webb campaign. All told, the DailyKos community would donate \$193,248 to Webb through their ActBlue.com fundraising page, while Raising Kaine, the Webb campaign, and other online activist groups would raise an additional \$700,000

¹⁸ See Feld, Lowell. “George Allen: Disturbed and Disturbing,” May 1, 2006, and username “The Apathetic Militant,” “Sen. Alen knows what a noose means and so do I.” May 25, 2006.

¹⁹ Moulitsas, pgs 52-60.

for the candidate through the ActBlue fundraising system.²⁰ DailyKos coverage of the campaign also continually focused attention on Allen’s racially-charged statements, including both the “Macaca moment” and later Allen campaign gaffes, including the revelation that Allen had once stuffed the head of a deer carcass into the mailbox of his black neighbors, that Allen had repeatedly used the “n-word” in his youth, despite public declarations that he never had, and Allen’s testy response during a campaign debate that a question about his mother being raised as a Jew qualified as “casting aspersions.”²¹ The political netroots actively recruited Webb to run for the Senate, they consistently wrote about the race, they pursued the racial elements of the “Macaca” story during the early days when the Webb campaign was resisting “playing dirty” in this way, and they were engaged in the campaign itself on multiple levels. Lowell Feld was hired by the Webb campaign as their “netroots coordinator,” various top campaign staff posted heavily-read entries on DailyKos, and Webb himself (or a campaign staffer empowered with writing in his voice) posted three diaries to the DailyKos site, including a June 16, 2006 thank-you post, “My Netroots Victory.”²²

Coverage of the Webb campaign on DailyKos was both broad and consistent throughout the 2006 campaign season. Figures three and four provide two measures of this coverage. Figure 3 depicts the total number of blog posts (including user diaries) posted about the campaign from December 2005 through November 6, 2006. What we see is that, after the August 14th YouTube posting, there was a sharp increase in site discussion over the race, from 14 early August diaries to 164 late August diaries. This fluctuated through the rest of the campaign, but remained at a very fast pace. New polls and new Allen missteps produced a flurry of blog posts, while weeks without a new poll or major misstep still saw a few dozen posts on the subject. Since anyone can post to the site, and the opportunity costs of content production are so low, this measure may not be the best example of popularity. The high-traffic “recommended list,” however, provides another measure, since space is limited to the five most-popular diaries on the site, as determined by registered user “recommend” voting. Table 4 provides the incidence of recommended diaries on the subject during the campaign season. Starting a few weeks before the Democratic primary, there was an average of 1 to 2 recommended diaries per week on the subject. In reaction to the “Macaca” clip, this soared upward, with 16 recommended diaries in the two week period, but this total was exceeded in late September and late October. As the campaign drew closer to a close, the DailyKos community became increasingly invested in it, voting it a higher and higher priority.

²⁰ www.actblue.com/page/netrootscandidates

²¹ Moulitsas, Markos. September 19, 2006. “VA-Sen: What does Allen have against Jews?” Blog post. Accessed online, March 28, 2009: <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2006/9/19/114631/103>

²² Webb, Jim. June 16, 2006. “My Netroots Victory.” Blog Post. Accessed online, March 31, 2009: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2006/6/16/15221/5192>

Allen Diaries

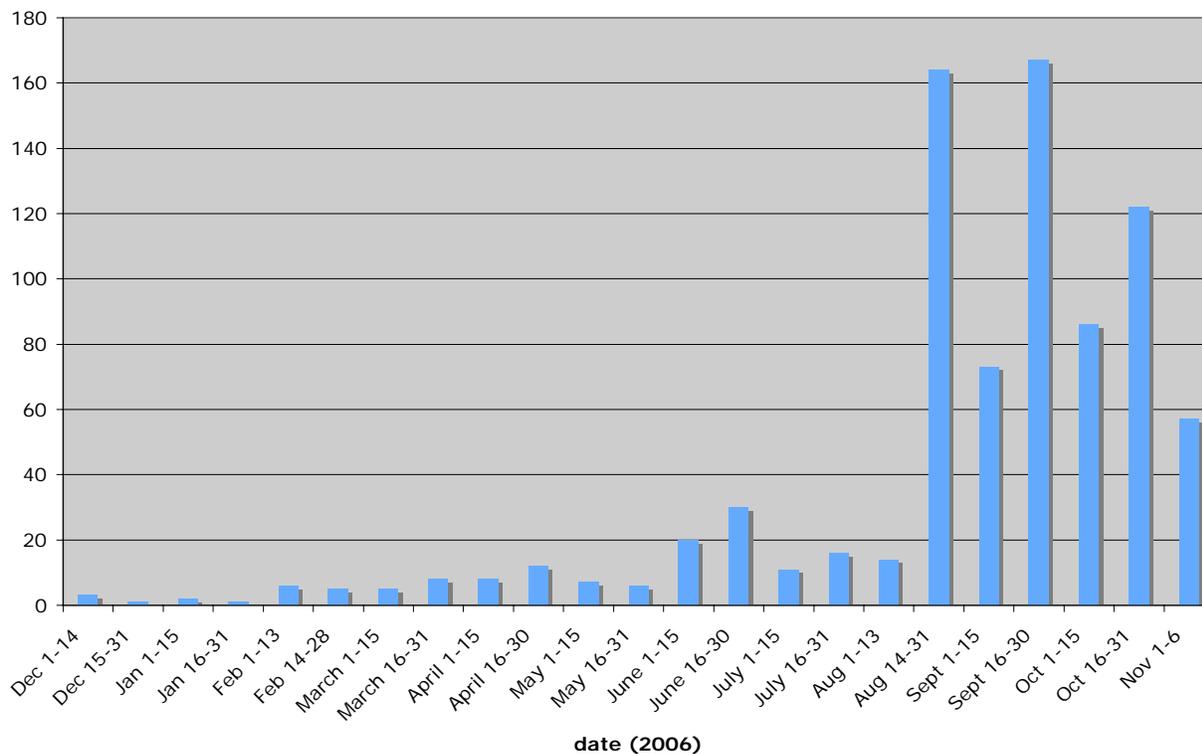


Figure 3: Allen-related diaries, pooled into two-week periods

Allen Recommended Diaries

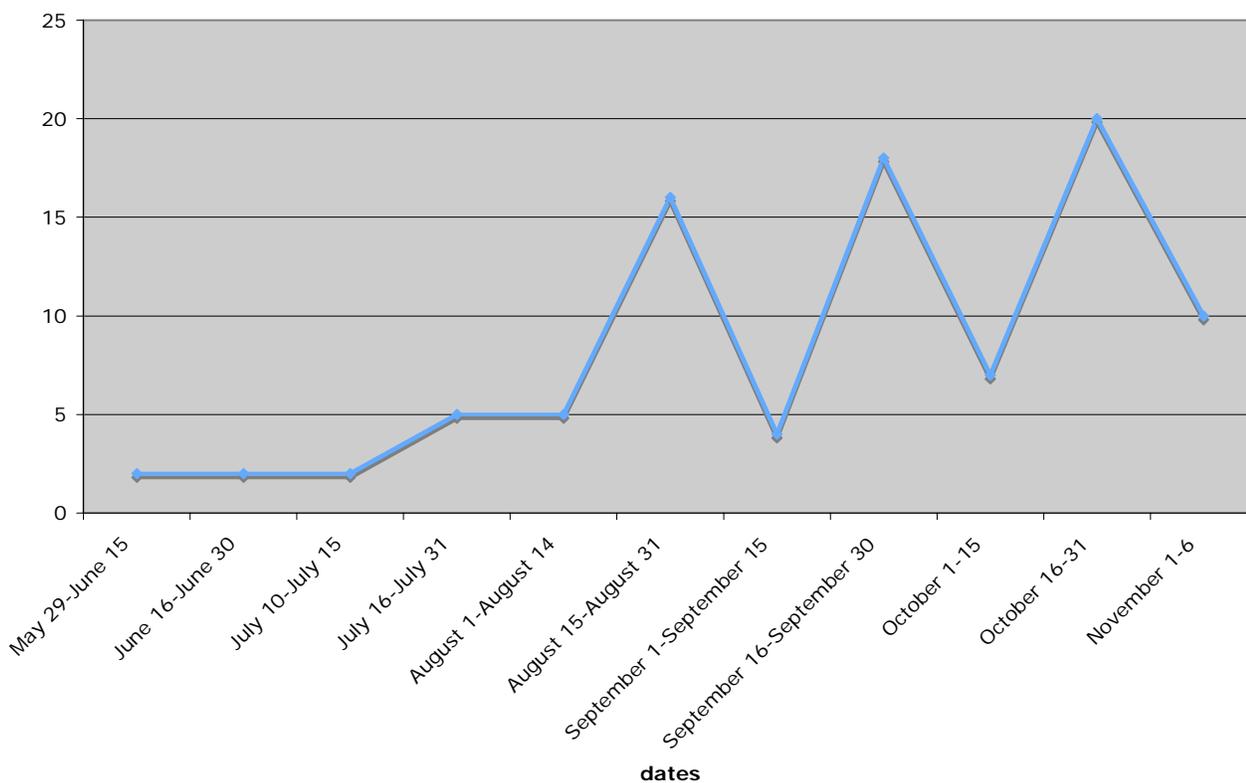


Figure 4: Allen-related Recommended Diaries, pooled into two-week periods

Table 1 provides the frequency distribution of the 825 blog posts by author. 33% of the Virginia Senate campaign-related posts came from a poster who only discussed the issue once. The top 3 most-frequent posters, meanwhile, produced 21.3% of the content on this topic. These top 3 posters were netroots coordinator Lowell Feld (84 posts), Markos Moulitsas (68 posts) and DailyKos regular “teacherKen” (24 posts), who lives in Northern Virginia and volunteered regularly for the campaign. Feld and TeacherKen were also regulars on the recommended list, with 24 and 9 recommended posts, respectively. Recommended and front page posts garnered an average of 206.7 comments per entry, with a large standard deviation of 124 indicating substantial variance in these numbers. The full 825-post dataset had a mean of 62.3 comments per entry, however, with a standard deviation of 97.9. Incidence of the five major content categories, along with the particularly important “donate” subcategory, are detailed for full dataset and recommended/front page subset in Table 2.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Allen-related posts by author

# of posts	# of authors	frequency
1	275	.333
2	54	.131
3	14	.051
4	12	.058
5	4	.024
6	5	.036
7	3	.025
8	1	.010
9	2	.022
10	1	.012
11	1	.013
12	1	.015
13	1	.016
15	1	.018
17	1	.020
24	1	.029
68	1	.082
84	1	.102

Table 2: Allen-related posts by activity-type

	Full Allen Dataset	Recommended and FrontPage
Comments (Standard Dev.)	62.3 (97.9)	206.7 (124)
Link and Quote Only	4.4%	5.4%
Commentary	94.7%	94%
Request for Feedback	15.2%	4.2%
Mobilize Political Action	25.4%	40.5%
Fundraising Request	11.9%	31%
YouTube Usage	6.9%	14.3%

Similar to Wallsten’s findings on the wider blogosphere, we find that commentary is the most frequent use of blog posts. Recommended and front page diaries are 15.1% more likely to mobilize political participation than the population as a whole, and 19.1% more likely to include a donation link. This appears to indicate a strong preference in the DailyKos community for “action diaries,” though of course such a conclusion needs to be tested against the full population of DailyKos diaries, rather than the case-specific time series I am investigating here. YouTube usage rose from 6.9% to 14.3% between the full population and the subset, but both of these indicate the generally low incidence of embedded YouTube videos or YouTube hyperlinks in this, supposedly video-led, case.

The picture that emerges from the aggregated time-series of “Allen,” “Webb,” and “VA-Sen”-tagged diaries on DailyKos is of a topic that attracted early interest and involvement, spiked in interest during the “Macaca” scandal, then continued to receive high and continuous engagement as election day approached. The netroots publicly claim Webb’s victory as an example of their growing influence and efficacy within the Democratic party coalition, and an examination of their archives supports this claim: kossacks helped to “draft” the candidate, they volunteered for and were hired to work on his campaign, and they routinely highlighted the campaign within their online community-of-interest long before it was clear that Webb would emerge as the winner. The other element that emerges from this time-series is the limited scope of the “Macaca moment” itself. Prior to that moment, Webb was polling roughly 10 points behind Allen in the Senate race. Afterward, the gap closed to roughly 5 points, and it wasn’t until late October that Allen took a lead in the majority of polls. The 2006 Virginia Senate race was a close affair throughout, and though S.R. Siddarth’s camera work proved an early turning point, there were several other candidate gaffes along the way which reinforced the narrative, and without those gaffes, a strong Democratic challenger, and sizable field and fundraising campaign components, it is likely that Webb’s tiny margin of victory would have instead been yet another example of “internet hype” that produces no change in Congressional leadership.

MN-06: Michelle Bachmann Gives a Gift to Her Opponent

If the Allen case was initially newsworthy because of his large national profile, Michelle Bachmann's gaffe was the exact opposite. Bachmann, the Republican House member from Minnesota's Sixth District, was facing an easy reelection campaign against the poorly-funded and mostly-unknown Elwyn Tinklenberg. In mid-October 2008, with less than three weeks left before election day, Tinklenberg had raised roughly \$1 million in the previous nine months and had yet to take out a single television commercial. Though he was listed among the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's (DCCC's) second-tier target list, and though increased DCCC fundraising had led them on October 16th to add this and several other races to their list of funding priorities, the campaign had a virtually nonexistent national profile and was viewed as a "likely Republican" seat retention. Given that the Democratic Party held a large majority in the House, was pursuing a 60-seat, filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, and was primarily focused on electing Barack Obama to the Presidency, the Bachmann race received little attention from either the national media or the political netroots. Bachmann spent much of the fall appearing as a Republican surrogate on the 24-hour news channels, her reelection seemingly assured.

That all changed on the evening of Friday, October 17th. Appearing as a McCain presidential campaign surrogate on *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, Bachmann was asked to defend the latest Republican talking points, which were focused on Obama's associations with controversial left-wing individuals like Reverend Jeremiah Wright and former Weathermen extremist William Ayers. With Obama leading in the polls, Republican campaign rhetoric had taken a highly negative tone, and it was Bachmann's job to defend campaign-trail comments and try to keep the conversation focused on Barack Obama's associations. After seven minutes of grilling from the veteran political reporter, Bachmann found herself backed into a verbal corner and, in response to question about "who else in the Congress holds 'anti-American views'," suggested that "the news media should do a penetrating expose and take a look ... into whether people in Congress are pro-America or anti-America."²³ The specter of Eugene McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Commission was too obvious to miss, and Bachmann's comments dominated the weekend news cycle as an example of a vicious campaign going too far. Two days later, when former Secretary of State Colin Powell announced his endorsement of Barack Obama, he made specific mention of the "Congresswoman from Minnesota" when indicating that the Republican campaign had gotten far too negative.

Bachmann initially attempted to brush the comments off as being taken out of context, and later settled on the claim that she had "walked into a trap" on *Hardball*. Indeed, if one watches the entire 7-minute interview, it seems highly plausible that Bachmann's comment was more an example of clumsy media skills than an explicit, intentional call for a return to McCarthyism. But Bachmann's initial denial that she hadn't made any such statement on *Hardball* was exactly the wrong tactic in the YouTube-infused campaign environment. As Markos Moulitsas put it, "in the old world, blatant lies ... could be easily covered up. A reporter catches you saying something stupid? Who cares! Just lie and deny it. At that point it becomes a 'he said, she said; question and people will shrug their shoulders unable to independently determine who is right. Enter YouTube ... Bachmann can blatantly lie and it doesn't matter because *we have the video and can see for ourselves what was actually said*. What's more, the more Bachmann explicitly denies her comments, the more insulting it becomes for those who

²³ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJIQm_7YAUl

can see for themselves the truth of the matter. People may assume politicians lie, but they don't appreciate having it rubbed in their face."²⁴ Time and again, DailyKos members posted the clip, and with close to 200,000 views on YouTube, newspapers and bloggers alike were quick to dub this the "Macaca moment" of the 2008 election.

Once again we must wonder, however, what a high-traffic YouTube video is worth. Bachmann's appearance on Hardball made her a target of left-wing ire and a ready example for pundits on the Sunday talk shows, but if that does not translate to money, volunteers or votes, what difference does it make? This was not the first controversial appearance Bachmann had made on national television, nor would it be the last. The constituents in her district had apparently displayed a tolerance with her antics.

What made this different, in essence, was the way YouTube was *used* by the political netroots. After months with barely a passing mention on DailyKos, Bachmann suddenly became the symbol of all that the community-of-interest disliked about the Republican Party. Popular longtime community member "thereisnospoon" quickly pulled together a diary that featured the YouTube clip, outlined the state of the race, including the latest polling that showed it was winnable, the DCCC's recent decision to upgrade the campaign's status, and background on the centrist Tinklenberg who, though not a classic fit for the interests of the progressive arm of the party, suddenly seemed an outstanding upgrade for the U.S. House of Representatives. He also included a fundraising link to Tinklenberg's website and, after that website immediately crashed from the torrent of traffic, a new link to an ActBlue fundraising page devoted to electing Tinklenberg.²⁵ Over the course of the next 48 hours, Tinklenberg would receive over \$810,000 in online donations – nearly doubling the money raised in an entire *year* of fundraising. \$130,000 of that came in from the Kossack-created ActBlue page alone. Recognizing the importance of the netroots community, Tinklenberg himself (who, at the time of Bachmann's Hardball appearance, had been shaking hands at a local hockey game) authored a diary for the DailyKos site titled "Kossacks, Thank You and Michele Bachmann, \$488,127.30 raised!"²⁶

The DailyKos community would continue to discuss the Bachmann incident for the following week, in particular noting new poll data that showed a too-close-to-call race, and posting YouTube embeds of Tinklenberg's campaign first campaign commercials that debuted the following Monday. But within a few days of the event, Kossacks lost interest in the race and turned their attention to the *next* latest scandal from the Republican presidential campaign. Commenters even began to caution each other that they had given "enough" to Tinklenberg, and should instead be donating to other worthwhile races through the sites "Hell to Pay" program, which highlighted a different race every few nights and encouraged the community to engage in a 24-hour donation binge. A week after Bachmann's Hardball appearance, the only bloggers still

²⁴ Moulitsas, Markos. October 21, 2008. "MN-06: Unprepared for a YouTube World." Blog post: <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/10/17/165616/08/769/633833> Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Username "thereisnospoon," October 17, 2008. "Help Kick Michele Bachmann out of Congress. NOW." Blog post. Accessed online, March 28, 2009: <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/10/17/17297/266>

²⁶ Tinklenberg, Elwyn. October 18, 2008. "Kossacks, Thank You and Michele Bachmann, \$488,127.30 raised!" Blog post. Accessed online, March 28, 2009: <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/10/18/2550/3286>

posting about the race on DailyKos were MN-06 locals and Tinklenberg campaign operatives, and their posts were no longer making it to the high-traffic recommended list. The Bachmann case was a classic example of what has been termed a “moneybomb” – a short-duration online fundraising explosion that infuses a large amount of cash into the otherwise-offline race. With only two and a half weeks left before Election Day, Tinklenberg put the influx of funds to the best use he could, but he had only achieved financial parity with the incumbent Bachmann, and with so little time, he eventually went on to lose the race 46% to 43%, with 11% going to a third-party candidate.

Figures 5 and 6 demonstrate the incidence of Bachmann, Tinklenberg, and the MN-06-tagged diaries on DailyKos, again in the form of total diaries and recommended or front page posts. What we see is that, though both “Macaca moments” were indeed self-inflicted campaign gaffes, captured on YouTube and covered by the blogosphere, the heavy and ongoing coverage we saw in the VA-Sen campaign was not present in this case. Perhaps more interesting than that lack of coverage pre-gaffe is the *decline of coverage post-gaffe*. It appears that the DailyKos community acted as an amplifier of sorts, reacting to the same latest intrigues that were covered by the mainstream media, but adding an infusion of vital campaign cash that otherwise would not have been present.

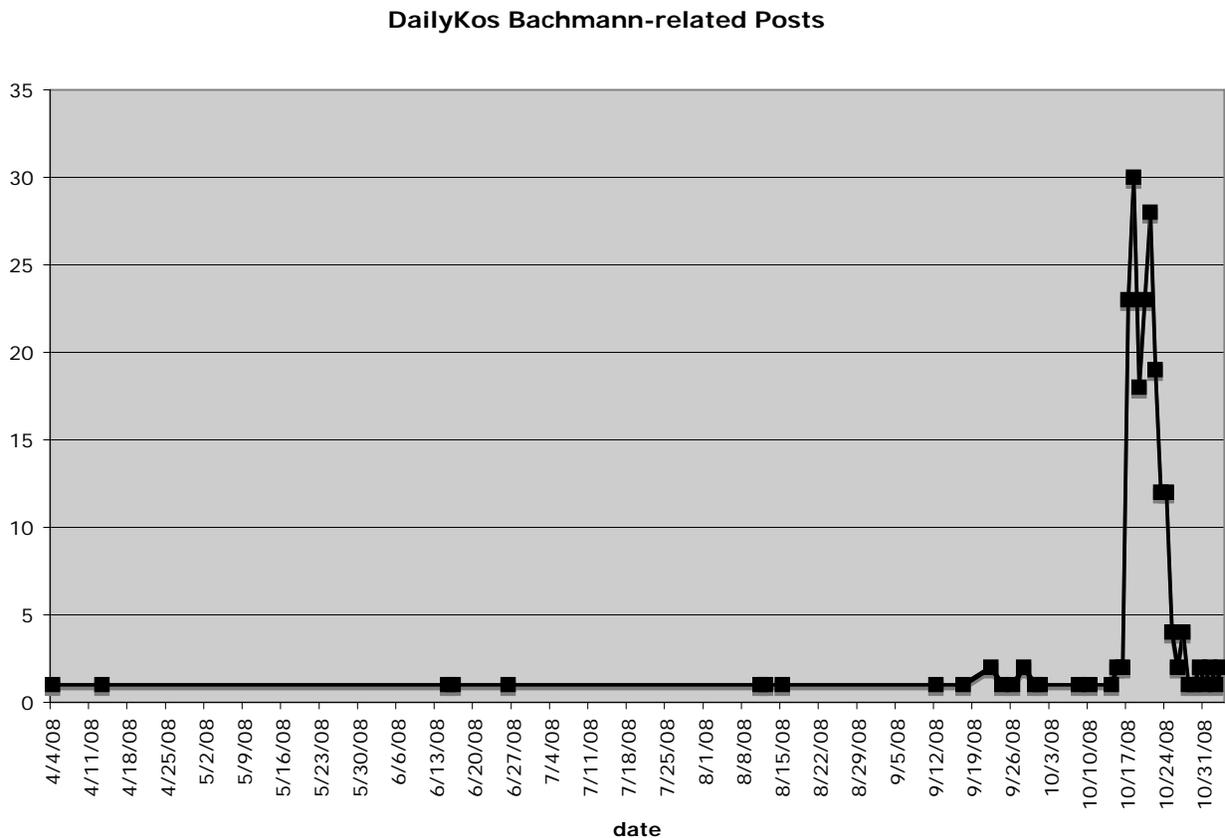


Figure 5: Bachmann-related posts by day (dates with no datapoint had zero posts)

Bachmann rec'd diaries

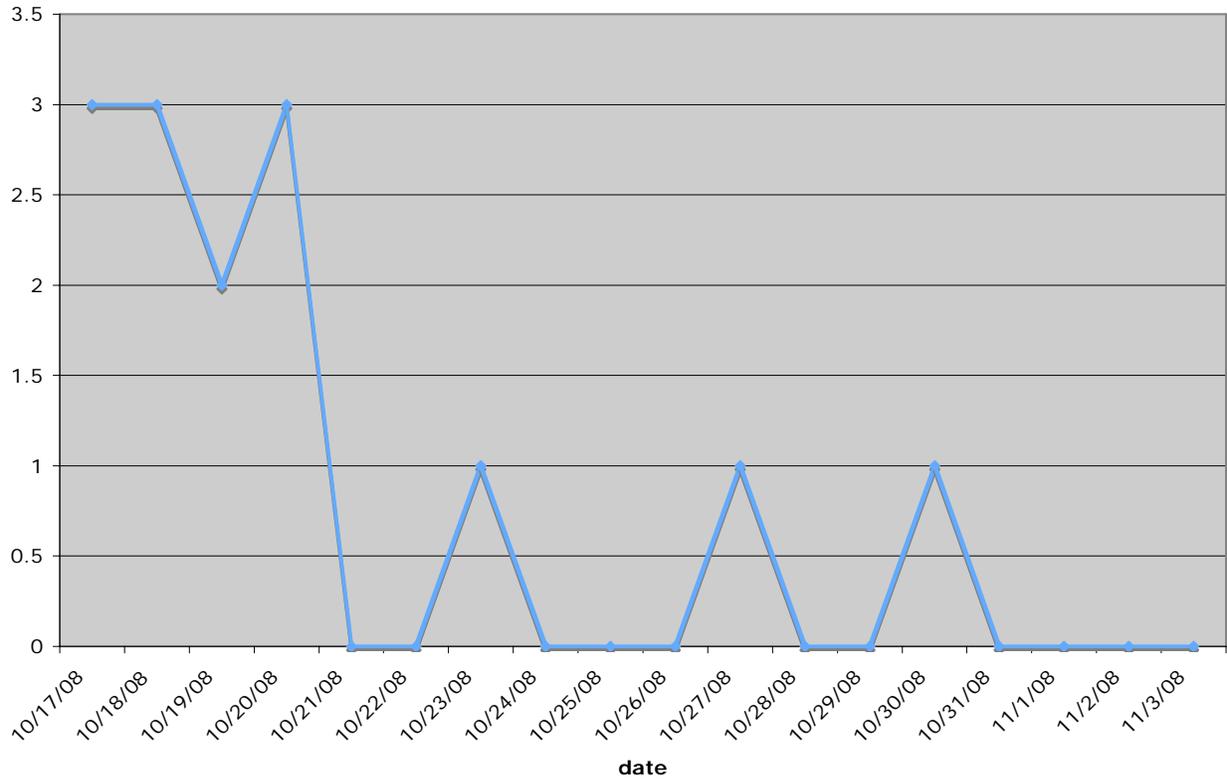


Figure 6: Bachmann-related Recommended Diaries by day (zero rec'd diaries prior to October 17, 2008).

Table 3 provides the frequency distribution of the 221 Bachmann-related blog posts by author. The short time horizon of the Bachmann episode is evident in the broader, flatter distribution, with 139 authors posting a single diary on the subject (65.9%) while three high-volume local authors, Bill Prendergast (21 posts), Ken Avidor (7 posts), and “Nada Lemming” (6 posts) provided 16.1% of the posts, including nearly all of the posts occurring pre-*Hardball* and more than one week post-*Hardball*. Table 4 offers a snapshot of how these posts were used. Not surprisingly, given the “moneybomb” nature of the event, there is a 42% gap between the full population and the Recommended or Front Page posts. “Action Diaries” were particularly appreciated. Likewise, the high incidence of YouTube usage on the recommended and front page list should not be overinterpreted, as this is associated with a single, very visible campaign moment.

The increase in fundraising requests between this case and the VA-Sen case is quite substantial, however, from 31% to 84.2% on the Recommended List and front page. This either indicates that kossacks were more interested in giving to Tinklenberg than Webb (highly unlikely), kossacks were more motivated to give in 2008 than 2006 (somewhat unlikely – people generally give more in Presidential years than congressional years, but it is unclear why that would translate to Senate and House races in an already-motivated community of givers), or kossacks have developed additional institutions to support political giving. This third explanation seems the most plausible, as the “ActBlue thermometer” widget provided an easy giving tool in 2008 that had not been developed in 2006. Likewise, the usage of YouTube embeds may have

risen because of advances in the software platform that made it easier for users to post such videos – there were a number of diary comments in 2006 that explicitly included a link to YouTube and a question to readers about how one embeds clips into a blog post.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Bachmann-related posts by author

# of posts	# of authors	frequency
1	139	65.9%
2	15	14.2%
3	3	4.3%
6	1	2.8%
7	1	3.3%
21	1	10%

Table 4: Allen-related posts by activity-type

	Full Bachmann Dataset	Recommended and FrontPage
Comments (Standard Dev.)	75.9 (174.4)	497.4 (370.1)
Link and Quote Only	0.5%	0
Commentary	98.1%	94.7%
Request for Feedback	13.3%	0
Mobilize Political Action	42.2%	84.2%
Fundraising Request	37.4%	84.2%
YouTube Usage	26.5%	57.9%

The picture that emerges from the Bachmann episode shares several technological commonalities with the Allen episode – both featured elite-captured candidate gaffes that received heavy play on YouTube, which in turn led to additional media coverage of the gaffe – but otherwise indicates that the “Macaca moment” alone does not fundamentally reconfigure the course of an election. In essence, Bachmann *volunteered* herself as the target of netroots ire for a weekend by offering to appear on *Hardball* and then making her noteworthy verbal misstep. This led to tangible benefits to her opponent, in the form of both free media and an avalanche of financial support from the online community-of-interest, and those material resources helped him to become more competitive in the race. But this is a more reserved impact than the picture usually drawn when discussing “Macaca moments.” Netroots dollars may flow quicker and in much larger bundles than small-dollar contributions did in the pre-internet campaign world, but

an infusion of campaign cash has the same limited effects that it did previously. The ongoing involvement of the DailyKos community, which was evident prior to Allen's gaffe, and continued to develop long after it, did not materialize simply because of a *Hardball* appearance. Bachmann was not a campaign priority for the netroots, and so they briefly paid attention to her, and then reverted to their main priorities. The online environment augments the traditional news media cycle with opportunities for web-based partisan engagement, but it does not uproot or necessarily democratize the news cycle.

Discussion

The central finding emerging from this cross-case comparison is that the political implications of these high-viewership "Macaca moments" on YouTube vary greatly depending on other contingent factors – many of which could be termed "netroots effects" rather than "YouTube effects." Though the Allen and Bachmann incidents bear several facial and technological similarities, each was embedded in a very different campaign context, and that made a crucial difference. In both cases, we see evidence that Democratic political candidates are paying increasing attention to the "netroots," DailyKos in particular, with both Tinklenberg and Webb hiring staff who were tasked with interacting with the netroots and with both of them posting diaries of their own at times. Given the large influx of funds the netroots can provide – far more than interest group-affiliated Political Action Committees are legally allowed to give – this is quite a sensible choice.

Beyond the formal, candidate-run political campaigns, both of which attempted to engage the netroots at the local and occasionally national level, the biggest difference between the two cases lies in the DailyKos community's own priority-setting. Moulitsas and others decided in early 2006 that Jim Webb would make a strong opponent to George Allen, and they aggressively prioritized the Virginia Senate race, sensing correctly that it could prove the difference between a Republican and Democratic Senate majority. In a non-Presidential election, this made the Webb-Allen race a central focus for the kossacks, and this is demonstrated by the large amount of content, spread across nearly a full year. The Bachmann episode occurred as a sideshow of sorts, outside of the 2008 DailyKos priority races. As such, it received "moneybomb" attention for the duration of the media cycle, and then it faded from view.

One additional difference and one additional similarity stand out as worthy of further discussion. First, it is worth noting that, despite Allen's status as a higher and longer-term priority, roughly 2.5 times as much money was raised for Tinklenberg online than for Allen, and in a *much* shorter timeframe. I would suggest that this is likely indicative of the growing influence of the political netroots as a whole. With more Americans turning to blogs for their news and political involvement than ever before (Rainie and Smith 2008), and with DailyKos registering over 2 million visits per day during the 2008 election season (versus roughly 600,000 two years previously), the kossacks are able to generate far more total funding in 2008 than in 2006 because they are an expanding portion of the interest group spectrum. This is also visible in the growth of total comments on the blog posts in these two cases, with the average recommended or front page diary receiving 206 comments in the Allen case and 497 comments in the Bachmann case. Assuming those users who take the time to participate through comments are likewise more likely to make a small donation, it stands to reason that the growth of the DailyKos hub yields a continuing increase in its potential donor base for supported candidates.

Likewise, the blog has continued to add new participatory institutions, both under the guise of programs like “Hell to Pay” and in the guise of permissive software code that makes ActBlue fundraising, YouTube embeds, and other engagement opportunities simpler, lowering the transaction costs of online involvement even further.

The additional similarity, which is of particular importance when considering the political impact of YouTube as a whole, is that both of these high-profile cases were elite-generated. The “citizen journalist with a cause and a camera” may be responsible for the bulk of YouTube’s total content, but those clips that get picked up and used by the political netroots are of a different sort. Both Allen and Bachmann made the standard type of political gaffe, well aware that they were, in fact, being filmed. Both would have endured a negative media cycle regardless, with Allen’s gaffe being reported by the *Washington Post* simultaneously with its release on YouTube, and Bachmann’s gaffe itself occurring on national television. The heavy viewership on YouTube added another story or two to each of these episodes, as political reporters reported on the novel/newsworthy technological aspects of each, but that is a short-term effect: the first time a political gaffe leads to \$800,000 for an opponent in 48 hours, it is news, the fifth time, it is standard practice.

YouTube, like so many other “web 2.0” technologies, drastically lowers the costs of publishing content online. The resultant condition of information abundance presents a challenging search environment, in which mass collective action can only occur if all actors can end up in the same “place.” Anyone can start their own blog, or post their own YouTube content on the internet – and indeed, local blogs such as DumpBachmann.blogspot.com played this role for Tinklenberg supporters prior to the *Hardball* appearance. But elite netroots institutions like DailyKos have the same bandwidth limitations as traditional media and political organizations. They can only focus on so many topics or priorities at once, and though they may set these priorities using novel, bottom-up tools, the limited space on the DailyKos front page and in the high-traffic Recommended Diaries means that the DailyKos community cannot advocate for all political candidates or sample all YouTube content simultaneously. The content that receives wide viewership appears to primarily be culled from other elites. The internet has made elite political networks more porous, with quasi-interest groups like DailyKos gaining power and access that previously would have been available to smaller circles of people, but this reality is a far cry from some of the radical democratic hopes we see displayed in techno-optimist journalistic and scholarly accounts.

Conclusion

I have premised this study on the suggestion that the DailyKos community blog functions as a quasi-interest group, and that it is in their pursuit of netroots priority campaigns that we see the most important effects of the internet on American politics. Indeed, through a deeper look at the Webb campaign in particular, we see the political netroots had an ongoing, important effect on both bringing the candidate into the race, building early primary support for the candidate, focusing attention on the racial dimensions of the candidate gaffe, and continually focusing national attention and donor support on their Virginia priority Senate race. The Bachmann case, which was not a netroots priority, was very similar to Allen in terms of the “Macaca moment” itself receiving heavy viewership on YouTube. But without the longterm netroots priority status, the case resulted in only a brief “moneybomb” and then faded from view. If we are to understand

the political impact of new media technologies, we must look not only at formal political campaigns and mass audiences, but also bring the interest group-type organizations back into focus. It is in internet-mediated organizations like DailyKos and MoveOn that new tactical repertoires are being unveiled and radical new membership and fundraising regimes are being developed. These drastically change the makeup of those organizations that structure and mobilize collective action, but they only come into focus for political scientists when we discard the assumption that collective action occurs spontaneously.

I hope to have demonstrated in this study the value of, as conservative pundit Dean Barnett once put it, “Taking Kos Seriously.” The netroots, and the DailyKos community in particular, have gained substantial influence in the last two election cycles, and they represent not only a set of deep puzzles worthy of exploring, but also a treasure trove of open and accessible data. Though these are only two high-profile cases, we should remember that they were also closely watched by political elites themselves. The “proof of existence” that netroots mobilization has resulted in the election of candidates like Jim Webb and Jonathan Tester (D-MT, their other top 2006 priority candidate), and has resulted in the primary campaign victory of Ned Lamont over Joe Lieberman (even though Lieberman was then elected as a “Democratic Independent” in the general election) has very real influences on the political calculus and rational decision-making of congressional elites. They have made clear, on a level that other progressive interest groups have not, that those candidates who *most* stand with them or *most* stand against them will be rewarded and punished come election season. This creates a set of carrots and sticks, visible in actions like Webb and Tinklenberg posting multiple diaries on the site, and in the choice by all Democratic Presidential Contenders in the summer of 2007 to attend a debate at the YearlyKos convention. The lowered transaction costs of the internet have allowed for the formation of a robust online community-of-interest, and that community’s actions have received the attention of political elites. These new actors, “transitional elites,” if you will, are the instantiation of the internet’s impact on American politics, far more than the mass accessibility enabled by individual technological mediums. It is not just the technology, but the new actors that master it, that makes these “Macaca moments” worthy of study.

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