

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
CENTER FOR NORTHEAST ASIAN POLICY STUDIES

**DIGITAL DEMOCRACY:
HOW THE AMERICAN AND HONG KONG CIVIL SOCIETIES
USE NEW MEDIA TO CHANGE POLITICS**

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April 2008

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Digital democracy and “You”

Democratic participation faces challenges in many modern societies, including the United States and Hong Kong. Americans are confronting growing executive power and legislative gerrymandering, and the resulting disillusionment of the electorate. Hong Kong citizens are struggling for something more basic about democracy—universal suffrage. New media, based primarily on the Internet, which allows users much more autonomy to create and distribute content than traditional mass media, are being heralded as the savior of government by and for the people. Time Magazine, for instance, selected “You” as its 2006 Person of the Year, in part due to the emergence of blogs and YouTube videos as a political force in the 2006 U.S. mid-term elections.¹ Can new media actually boost democratic participation and change politics in a lasting way? Or is such optimism as inflated as internet stocks during the dot com mania at the beginning of this millennium?

People-based political activism in the digital age contributed to the loss of the Republican majority in both houses of Congress to the Democrats in the last elections. Blogs and online video sites raised awareness of George Allen’s “macaca” incident and Mark Foley’s lewd messages to pages, both of which bruised the GOP’s reputation. Surprise wins in Senate races by Democrats Jim Webb in Virginia and Jon Tester in Montana were facilitated by the rising influence of netroots bloggers within the Democratic Party, political “vlogging” on YouTube, online election fund raising drives, and get-out-the-vote operations conducted through the Internet and mobile phones. After the 2006 mid-term elections, the power of new media—once the domain of “political insurgents” who lacked money and support from the political establishment—is now fully recognized by mainstream American politicians. Many candidates in the 2008 presidential election, including Democratic frontrunners Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards, used the Internet to announce the formation of their exploratory committees or candidacies.

In Hong Kong, an advanced economy with a very different political system and culture, access by average citizens to digital technologies is comparable to, and in some ways surpasses, access in United States. But the use of new media in politics by Hong Kong civil society still has a long way to go to match the sophisticated new media strategies that have been adopted in America. The potential for further development, however, is clear. Since 2003, more and more Hong Kong citizens are using new media in the democracy movement. Without much guidance from pro-democracy politicians, ordinary citizens spontaneously used websites, e-mail, online video and cell phone messaging to mobilize their families and friends to participate in democracy rallies attended by tens of thousands; to get out the votes for pro-democracy candidates in elections; and to use Internet radio to express opinions seldom found in the self-censored mainstream media.

¹ Grossman, Lev. “Person of the Year: You. Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world.” *Time Magazine*, December 13, 2006.

Apart from the U.S. and Hong Kong, there are other international examples of political changes facilitated by new technologies. For example, average citizens used mobile phone text messaging in the People Power II demonstrations in the Philippines that led to the downfall of former President Joseph Estrada in 2001.

Do these developments signal the dawn of digital democracy? The idea has excited many who believe in the power of information technology to transform the world. Skeptics, however, claim that the real victories of digital democracy are actually more limited and gradual than many predicted. After all, the new media are simply tools to facilitate bottom-up, people-based participation in many aspects of civic life. How “You” use the new media tools matters more than the technological possibilities.

This paper examines how the American and Hong Kong civil societies have explored the use of new media to promote democratic participation and change political realities. The choice of the United States and Hong Kong for comparison is made because the two are well-developed international economies with widespread access to advanced information technologies; but the political, social, and cultural environments are different. This paper chronicles recent developments on the strategic use of the Internet in the U.S. elections as well as the spontaneous use of online and mobile media during democracy and social movements in Hong Kong. The conceptual and empirical discussions aim to shed light on several questions. What are the potential benefits and limitations of new media as a civic tool? What factors should be considered when using new media for political purposes? How can civil society groups and individual activists adopt the new media technologies in politics? What strategies and new media applications have been used, and why? What has been the impact on political outcomes so far? In what cases has new media succeeded, backfired, or made no difference, and why? What have been the problems? What are the possible future directions and concerns?

Discussion of these questions is structured into four parts. Part 1 introduces the definitions and scope of major concepts adopted in the article, and discusses the theoretical potential and limitations of using new media in civil society. Part 2 identifies general key factors for civil society activists to map out a new media strategy: legal, social, economic, cultural considerations and the ecology of traditional media, which differ from society to society. Part 3 uses case studies of Hong Kong and the United States to illustrate the application of digital media to political participation in different political systems and cultures. The concluding section compares the impact of the use of new media on the politics in the two societies; examines the problems arising from this development; and looks to the future of new media applications.

The means and results of the political use of new media in the American and Hong Kong civil societies are dissimilar in many respects due to the political, social, and cultural reasons. Of particular interest is that the American liberal netroots have used the new media strategically and systematically to challenge the Republican Party, whereas Hong Kong citizens have spontaneously used new media (without a coherent proactive strategy from civil society leaders) to mobilize participation in the democracy movement. In both cases, the use of new media increased democratic participation by the otherwise apathetic masses. Both cases support several generalizations about how new media may

increase participation in politics. First, it reduces frictions in political mobilization particularly in the areas of fund raising, voting, and participation in protests; and this is especially useful at the times of general discontent in the society. Second, it fosters a sense of individual empowerment among citizens, thereby reducing political apathy. Third, so far political insurgents (those out of office or out of the mainstream) have more effectively experimented with alternative media than incumbents, who enjoy advantages in resources and access to the traditional mass media. Fourth, in election campaigns, the more competitive the race, the higher the incentives are for the candidates to explore creative use of digital media.

Part 1: Concepts, benefits, and limitations of new media in civil society

New media, civil society and democratic participation

There are three dominant and inter-related trends of global governance: globalization, marketization, and the rise of information technology. Together, they create the “networked society” of the 21st century.² The idea of a “third industrial revolution” has been suggested³ as the cost of information and computer technology (ICT) keeps falling and the technologies are applied more and more broadly and deeply to daily life. The digital “revolution” may take on social or political significance if citizens empowered by affordable and user-friendly new media tools are able to use them to change the way they live or make political choices.

For the sake of this paper, new media are defined as the digital technologies of the wired Internet and wireless networks. Internet media comprise all forms of networked computing technologies that transmit data using a standardized Internet Protocol, over fixed-line backbone networks of cables and optical fibers; and the front-end applications are computer-based, using mainly web- or browser-based solutions. The most popular applications are undoubtedly emails and webpage, and the last five years have also seen the rapid growth of affordable and user-friendly applications such as weblogs (“blogs”), podcasting, online videos (such as on Youtube.com), and e-payment services for donation and shopping. Wireless media encompass a wide range of technologies such as Wifi, WiMAX, satellite communications, Bluetooth, radio frequencies, infrared, and, most commonly, mobile phones, mobile messaging (SMS), and personal digital assistants. There is a trend towards convergence of fixed-line and wireless technologies; for examples, web-to-mobile SMS, blogs on mobile phones (“moblogs”), and e-donations via mobile phones.

² Nye, Joseph S., Jr, “Information Technology and Democratic Governance,” in Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., (eds) 2002. *Governance.Com: Democracy in the Information Age. Visions of Governance in the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; Castells, Manuel and Cardoso, Gustavo (ed.) 2006. *The Networked Society: From Knowledge to Policy*. Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press; Castells, Manuel 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

³ Drucker, Peter, 1994, *Post-capitalist Society*, Collins.

In this paper, the new media are distinguished from traditional media by the amount of *user autonomy in content creation*. In the digital era, the many traditional media outlets (such as newspapers, magazines, and radio, and television) may adopt similar technologies as they are moving toward the incorporation of new media technologies. Indeed, some mass media operators have tried to popularize new digital applications. However, the way in which old and new media outlets create content and interact with users is distinct. Traditional media outlets generally engage in one-to-many communication, with agendas, rules, content, format, and editorial decisions controlled at a central location. With new media, the user has control over his content and other users may interact with the original content creators, thereby contributing to a continuous process of new content creation. Peer-to-peer or many-to-many communications characterize new media. While a television broadcaster may provide programs over new media channels, including webcasts, podcasts and blogs, that is not the same as John Doe's personal blog or Jane Doe's video posted on Youtube. Certainly, the difference is a matter of degree now that some traditional media are experimenting with opening up their editorial process so that readers or audiences can also create new content. For instance, some cable news networks encourage invite audiences viewers to submit video footage for possible inclusion in regular television programs. The social, economic, and political impact of user-generated content on a society can be both positive and negative.

Much of the effect of the political use of new media is determined by how the civil society adopts the technologies. Civil society, identified as the organized social community, is one of the three domains in modern governance. In modern day governance, the three domains of state, market and civil society can be figuratively imagined as three overlapping circles in a Venn diagram, each differing in logic, values, and norms of behavior. In contrast to the state (which is guided by law, rules, and power) and market (which is guided by pricing mechanism and profits), civil society is guided by value-driven voluntarism and accommodates a wide range of organizational structures. The state, market, and civil society domains overlap just as an individual person is a political, economic, and social being all at the same time. Civil society actors inevitably interact with the state (such as in participation in politics and government affairs) and the market actors (such as obtaining funding and resources). Civil society actors in political affairs may come from a wide spectrum of political ideology from the left to the right, and thus they may compete with each other for support and resources from the state and market, or from the public at large. While civil society is often regarded as the non-profit sector, this article adopts a broad definition that covers all forms of organized activities and organizations outside the state and market. Hence, apart from charity or voluntary organizations, the definition of civil society here encompasses political parties and groups (for those portions not being part of the government) or informal grassroots networks that are involved in political activities.

A vibrant civil society, in which citizens participate in politics and elections effectively, is a pillar of democracy.⁴ A democratically formed government has the

⁴ Eberly, Don E. (ed.) 2000. *The Essential Civil Society Reader: Classic Essays in the American Civil Society Debate*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield; Dionne Jr., E. J. (ed.) 1998. *Community Works: The Revival of Civil Society in America*; Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; O'Connell, Brian Rikkie L K Yeung
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responsibility to protect citizen participation in politics. In a healthy civil society, citizens maintain a good balance between individual rights, responsibilities to collective interests, and participation in government affairs—including the responsibility to vote and speak out.⁵ Political scientist Margaret Conway organizes political participation into “conventional” and “unconventional” categories.⁶ Conventional participation includes activities such as voting, running for elective office, and working for a candidate or a political party, whereas unconventional participation ranges from legal, peaceful protests to terrorist violence.⁷ Conway finds that political participation does impact the government’s policy agenda and policy outcomes.⁸ Nonetheless, political participation in many democracies is currently in an unhealthy state, as indicated by the gradual decline in voter turnout and general disinterest in politics in the United States. Although interest and participation in the 2008 presidential election in the U.S. appears to be high, the general trend is toward political apathy, which can be caused by an expansion of the state, government-imposed limits on political participation, a large gap between wealthy and poor citizens, influential special interests, and an unbalanced expansion of individual liberties.⁹ In non-democracies such as Hong Kong, there are further constraints on political participation imposed by political systems, government authorities, those people in power or with vested interests, and associated culture such as general skepticism about politicians. The empirical discussion in Part 3 will elaborate and contrast the challenges of democratic participation in the United States and Hong Kong.

Since the 1990s, the prospect of using advanced information technology to expand the realm of civil society and revive political participation has been hotly debated. Some IT enthusiasts have predicted the dawn of cyber-democracy, which will revolutionize the whole process of governance and public political participation; while skeptics question the ability of information technology to enable political change.¹⁰ The Internet and wireless network technologies do possess the potential to serve democracy as more than neutral communication tools. The characteristics of new media networks—interactivity, high speed, versatility, global reach, low cost, and ease of use—can facilitate bottom-up, people-based networking that enhances democratic participation. New media are not, however, a panacea for the ills of civil society. The next section

1999. *Civil Society: The Underpinnings of American Democracy*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. Tufts University.

⁵ O’Connell 1999, p 11-12, 39.

⁶ Conway, M. Margaret 2000. *Political Participation in the US*. Third Edition. Washington DC: CQ Press, p. 3-5. Conway also described the third category of political participation as being repression (by either government authorities or private citizens) of conventional and unconventional political participation. For the purposes of this paper, this category is not considered relevant.

⁹ Conway 2000, 3-5.

⁸ Conway 2000, p.195-204.

⁹ See Conway 2000, p.6-12; O’Connell 1999, p. 123-6; Elberly 2000, p. 11-15; Dionne, 1998, p. 8-10.

¹⁰ Nye, Jr., Joseph S. 2002; Castells, Manuel 2001. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 137-167; Hague, Barry N. and Brian D. Loader (eds) 1999. “Digital democracy: an introduction,” *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*. London, New York: Routledge; Jenkins, Henry and David Thorburn (eds) 2003. *Democracy and New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press; Valovic, Thomas 2000. “The myth of electronic democracy: A reality check,” *Digital Mythologies: The Hidden Complexities of the Internet*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

explains the theoretical potentials as well as limitations of new media in serving civil society, with supporting examples from the United States and Hong Kong.

What new media can and can't do for civil society

Two favorable trends should convince civil society actors to seriously consider incorporating new media into their operations. The first is the rapid penetration of online and wireless technologies. Internet and mobile phones are already part of the daily lives of Americans and Hong Kong citizens. The Internet penetration rates in the United States and Hong Kong in 2007 were 71.7 percent and 69.9 percent respectively, ranking as the world's the ninth and thirteenth.¹¹ Second, the barriers to entry for new media applications have been drastically reduced. The United States has led in the development of Internet applications such as blogs, video-blogs, podcasting, and Wikipedia. This development has spread, and the growth of global blogosphere is phenomenal: a new blog is created less than every 8 seconds.¹² Innovative Internet applications have provided average citizens with affordable (often free), convenient, and user-friendly new media tools.

Despite this impressive development, as civil society actors consider the benefits of new media, they should equally bear in mind its constraints. Furthermore, just as a main lesson from the dot.com boom-to-bust phenomenon in 2000 was that the potential of information technologies as an economic driver must be understood in proper perspective, the capacity of new media to function as a driver for civil society development should not be viewed uncritically. The advantages and disadvantages of new media use by civil society are grouped into five inter-related thematic areas below.

Level playing field. Online and wireless media have been heralded as the people's media, through which individuals can enhance their civil liberties, including the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. This is because new media help to level the playing field between individual activists and large organizations, small operators and major players, and the rich and the poor, among other dichotomies. Today, new media tools can be used by individual activists or small groups to cheaply and easily advocate their beliefs, influence public views, disseminate information not distributed by the mainstream media, or simply to express their thoughts and emotions. Traditional advantages (and sometimes monopolies) enjoyed by the government and big organizations in access to mass media have become relative rather than absolute. That said, big players who are committed to a comprehensive new media strategy can use their ample resources to maintain a strong edge in developing IT systems and solutions, employing database and data-mining software, and sustaining relationships with online communities. As such, the playing field of politics and policy advocacy is not completely leveled in the new media environment; but players with few resources can join the game more easily and may succeed in advancing their policy agendas if they adopt effective new media strategies.

¹¹ *Internet World Stats website*, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/top25.htm>; data updated as of March 13, 2008.

¹² *Technorati website*, <http://www.technorati.com> (accessed 17.02.2006).

Outreach via alternative media. Small or new civil society players often lack access to the mainstream media. The new media provide a viable alternative for them to reach out broadly to local and global publics and to disseminate information and ideas, often much faster than through the traditional media. Airtime on major radio and television networks, and print space in leading newspapers and magazines are very scarce commodities. Attempts to set public agenda through the press and broadcast media are therefore extremely competitive and expensive, even in an ideal journalistic environment. But the reality is that the traditional mass media environment is not ideal in many parts of the world. It can be influenced by commercial considerations, fierce competition, business or political interest, editorial bias, self-censorship, bias toward the establishment, and other factors.

Many large organizations pour huge resources into media relations, a professional discipline designed to understand and take advantage of the sophisticated editorial policies, procedures, and hierarchies that each newsroom develops in order to determine what news and information is disseminated. Typically lacking the resources to navigate the complex politics of the mass media, smaller civil society players are often ignored by the mass media and are turning more and more to new media platforms. Nonetheless, the dominant position of the traditional media will not be overtaken in the foreseeable future because of the entrenched habits of news consumers and other market forces, as will be discussed further in Part 2.

Empowerment, mobilization, and participatory media. The interactivity and many-to-many nature of Internet and mobile media empowers civil society users to mobilize support and energize grassroots participation in public affairs, which is quite difficult to achieve through one-to-many traditional media. New media also form a versatile platform that allows users to tailor information for specific audiences. Such technical capabilities offer more choices to individuals and provide for the creation of self-selecting virtual communities of people who share similar values, interests, and beliefs. Individuals can be empowered to participate more fully in the decision-making process. People can also be mobilized quickly at critical moments of social movements, such as online signature campaigns or real world protests. However, the prospect of energetic virtual community participation faces two problems. First, since virtual communities are self-selecting by nature, they tend to preach to the choir, to be limited in membership, and to be more prone to extremism. Often, no single member, not even the initiators of such virtual communities, can control the decision-making and development of their groups.¹³ The second problem is sustainability. Virtual communities may not have sufficient resources and manpower (including volunteers) to maintain the long-term, active participation in politics necessary for effective advocacy.

Virtual organizing beyond physical and temporal limits. Speedy inter-connectivity allows civil society actors to organize networks and actions very quickly, and new communication tools have accelerated the globalization of the community of civil society organizations. People sharing similar interests, causes, and beliefs across

¹³ An in-depth examination of the limitations of virtual communities in civil life can be found in Galston, William A 2002. "The Impact of the Internet on Civil Life: An Early Assessment," in Kamarck and Nye (eds), 2002.

geographical boundaries and time zones can now quickly form virtual horizontal networks, which differ from traditional horizontal networks. But, again, there are challenges to effectively using these new capabilities. To organize online, civil society actors must begin with a good strategy to compete for public attention in the era of information overload. That strategy must include the right database to locate suitable audiences and the right content to attract them. Horizontal and virtual networks are decentralized and versatile, grow organically, and may expand rapidly within a short time. Such decentralized, and often self-selected, horizontal networks tend to operate effectively during ad hoc movements in which members share a common interest and goal on specific issues. However, unlike conventional hierarchical organizations, it is quite difficult for virtual networks to sustain long-term operations and unity, objectives, strategy, or day-to-day decision-making among members. In theory, big hierarchical organizations should have resource advantages to develop a new media strategy for sustaining virtual organization and horizontal networking. But such an effort by a large firm or government agency is likely to be impeded by the conflict of organizational cultures: the hierarchy is structured, centrally controlled, and inflexible; and the horizontal online network is self-driven, unpredictable, and more flexible.

The next generation of media. Statistics around the world suggest that younger generations are more willing to adopt new media.¹⁴ Any civil society actor with a vision for long-term advocacy must explore using the new media to appeal to the young so as to make a sustainable impact. There are two complications. First, younger generations, especially teenagers, have very different cultures and a more dynamic lifestyle than older new media users. A recent market research report shows that teenagers change their favorite social networking website roughly every two years — for example, moving from the popular MySpace.com to Facebook.com.¹⁵ An effective new media strategy for civil society actors, therefore, often requires a standalone website targeting the young adult demographic with frequently updated content and site design. This suggests that civil society groups will need additional resources, manpower, and expertise.

Another issue is the implication of the “digital divide.” This term refers to the disparity in access to information technology between, for example, rich and poor, young and elderly, or those with normal eyesight and the visually impaired. In most modern societies, the digital divide is diminishing due to the declining cost of computers and mobile devices, the availability of free or low-cost software, and community computer education. However, when it comes to civic participation, there is no doubt that active new media users are often confined to particular demographic groups, and not always the young generation. For instance, Americans who obtain election news from online media are most likely to be white males under the age of 49 who have above-average education and income.¹⁶

As discussed above, civil society actors face several challenges as they seek to leverage the potential of new media. Of paramount importance is a commitment to

¹⁴ Internet World Stats website

¹⁵ Noguchi, Yuki 2006. “In Teens’ Web World, MySpace Is So Last Year. Social Sites Find Fickle Audience,” *The Washington Post*, October 29, p. A1, A11.

¹⁶ Norris, 2002, p. 71-74.

searching for an effective new media strategy that is tailored to the organization's goals and resources. In mapping out their plans of action, civil society players face external constraints imposed by legislative-regulatory, social-cultural, and economic environments that determine how freely they can use new media. These external factors are examined in Part 2, with an emphasis on the specific situations in America and Hong Kong.

Part 2: General consideration of new media use in the American and Hong Kong civil societies

A less regulated media

All media can be regulated, in theory. The new media is no exception. It can be made subject to laws, regulations, and government control. A society's legislative-regulatory approach to media often reflects the nature of that society's government, degree of freedom of speech, and legal traditions. The Chinese government employs one of the world's most sophisticated Internet and mobile media surveillance and censorship regimes.¹⁷ Government crackdowns on political dissident websites and blogs, tightening of Internet regulations, and filtering of Internet chat-rooms and mobile messaging are frequent in China.¹⁸ However, new media poses special difficulties for government oversight programs, even when efforts to exert control are sustained and well-organized. First, governments must make substantial investments in expertise and technologies in order to keep pace with the fast-changing Internet. Second, the Internet is, by design, decentralized and composed of multiple networks, creating a challenge of scale for regulators and monitors.¹⁹

New media are lightly regulated in the United States and Hong Kong. Both societies have sophisticated legal-regulatory frameworks to govern the telecommunications and broadcasting industries, particularly in matters of licensing and competition. But the use of Internet and mobile media is subject to less government control than traditional broadcast media. The United States has made slightly more regulations to criminalize certain negative uses of the new media. In Hong Kong, until recently such efforts have been very minimal, if not absent. Besides the practical difficulties and large investment involved in regulating new media, the relative lack of governmental control is accompanied by constitutional protections and strong traditions of freedom of speech in both societies. Surveillance on the use and contents of new media in advance of publication, though technically possible, would potentially be challenged under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 27 of the Basic Law, the

¹⁷ The tracking of Internet control practices in China and some other countries can be found in <http://www.opennetinitiative.net>.

¹⁸ Examples of the surveillance and crackdown of dissident sites are documented in Chase, Michael and James Mulvenon 2002. *You've got dissent! : Chinese dissident use of the Internet and Beijing's counter-strategies*. Santa Monica, California: RAND, National Security Research Division, Center for Asia Pacific Policy.

¹⁹ A summary of the history of the Internet is in Castells, Manuel 2001. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hong Kong mini-constitution.²⁰ Hence, regulations considered for new media are not likely to exert control until after publication. That said, as Internet and mobile communications increasingly pervade every aspect of daily life, there is public demand for regulating inappropriate behaviors on the new media. In 2001, Robert Blendon and his colleagues concluded from surveys that many Americans believed the government should take actions to deal with negative Internet uses, such as dangerous strangers making contact with children, the availability to children of pornography and information about weapons, false advertising, invasion of privacy, hate speech, and discriminatory attacks.²¹ Questions arise, however, as to how to eradicate the ills in cyberspace without suffocating the new media, which can enrich freedom of speech and encourage citizen participation in legitimate public and commercial activities.

The following section discusses current and potential laws and regulations pertaining to new media use by civil society and political groups in the United States and Hong Kong.

Regulatory institutions for communications industries. In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), led by five commissioners appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate, is the media regulatory authority directly responsible to the Congress. The FCC's jurisdiction covers interstate and international communications by radio, television, satellite, wire and cable, as well as wireless communications including mobile phones. The FCC is mainly concerned with licensing, industry competition, public safety, and homeland security issues related to communications. Currently, the relevant Hong Kong regulatory agencies are the Office of Telecommunications Authority (OFTA), a government department, and the Broadcasting Authority (BA), a statutory board of mostly non-official members appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The BA regulates television and radio content but has no jurisdiction over the Internet. The OFTA oversees economic and technical aspects of the Internet in Hong Kong, but it does not regulate online content. In March 2006, the HKSAR started public consultations on merging the two agencies into a single Communications Authority (CA), in light of the increasing convergence between telecommunications and broadcasting technologies. The government proposal does not map out how the two different regulatory frameworks should be changed after the merger. Such uncertainty has led key industry players to oppose the merger,²² and has raised concerns that the CA might be empowered to regulate politically-sensitive Internet content such as Internet radio stations (see Part 3).²³ These fears were heightened by

²⁰ Article 27 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China reads: "Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of speech, of the press and publication..."

²¹ Blendon, Robert, John M Beson, Mollyann Brodie, Drew E Altman, Marcus D Rosenbaum, Rebecca Flournoy, and Minah Kim, 2001. "Whom to Protect and How: The Public, the Government and the Internet Revolution," *The Brookings Review*, Winter 2001 vol. 19 no.1, pp. 44-48 (<http://www.brookings.edu/press/review/winter2001/blendon.htm>).

²² See some of the submissions to the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR in response to the "Public Consultation on the Establishment of Communications Authority," <http://www.citb.gov.hk/ctb/eng/paper/submission4.htm>.

²³ Submission from the Internet and Telecom Association of Hong Kong, (<http://www.citb.gov.hk/ctb/submission/HKITA.pdf>); also press reports and commentaries, e.g. Mok, Charles P 2006. 電訊廣播規管合併拖得太久 (Merger of telecom and broadcasting has been delayed for Rikkie L K Yeung
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recent BA rulings on the content of television programs, such as a documentary on discrimination against homosexuals in Hong Kong. Many regarded these rulings as overly conservative.²⁴ Subsequent to the public consultation, the Hong Kong government has yet to merge the two regulatory agencies.

Data privacy. Broadly speaking, data privacy was already protected by law in the United States and Hong Kong when the Internet age began. One of the relevant American laws is the Privacy Act of 1974, which requires federal agencies to comply with fair information practices in collecting, maintaining, and disseminating personal data, and to grant individuals the right to access and amend their records. After 2001, a special challenge to Americans' personal data privacy has been the government's controversial intrusion into individuals' electronic communications in the name of anti-terrorism and homeland security. In Hong Kong, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data was established in 1996 to enforce the only data privacy legislation applicable to public and private organizations. Although legally protected, electronic data privacy has become difficult to enforce when digital databases and e-mail lists are easily collected, copied, bought, or leaked to the market.

Spamming. A closely related challenge is spamming, the sending of unsolicited advertisements or other content via e-mail or text message. Since the marginal cost of sending electronic messages is extremely low, spamming quickly became a popular marketing tool and a nuisance to many new media consumers. Enacting regulations against spam requires a careful balancing act to ensure that legitimate use of electronic marketing for business, political, and civil society purposes will not be jeopardized. In Hong Kong and the United States, anti-spamming laws are so far limited in scope or under cautious consideration. The U.S. Congress passed the CAN-SPAM Act in 2003 to criminalize certain types of unsolicited and/or deceptive commercial e-mail, such as messages with materially false header information, spam sent from a computer that the sender is not authorized to use, messages misrepresenting the sender identity, and unsolicited pornography.²⁵ In Hong Kong, a new anti-spamming law was enacted in May 2007 to control unsolicited electronic messages (UEM) by mandating an "opt-out" requirement on senders. The new law, like similar U.S. legislation, covers only commercial UEM. But the UEM legislation casts a wider technological net than in the United States and other jurisdictions by covering all forms of electronic communication, including e-mail, voice telephony, facsimile, and any future technologies.²⁶

too long), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, March 6, p. 33; Chiu, So-kwan (趙素君) 2006, 電管局廣管局擬合併 官商民三贏 (Merger of OFTA and Broadcasting Authority), *Hong Kong Economic Times*, March 4, pA09.

²⁴ The Broadcasting Authority ruled that a television documentary on discrimination against homosexuals produced by Radio Television Hong Kong gave too much airtime to the views of homosexuals and did not give sufficient coverage to people who are against them. In another ruling, the BA ruled that an old award-winning film features the use of foul language.

²⁵ See Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003

(<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>).

²⁶ Hong Kong SAR Government, Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau 2006. *Consultation Paper on Legislative Proposal to Contain the Problem of Unsolicited Electronic Messages*, Hong Kong, January.

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Scams and deception. Since 2005, the U.S. Congress has been considering the Anti-Phishing Act, which would criminalize “phishing,” an Internet scam to fraudulently obtain personal information, and the U.S. SAFE WEB Act which would enhance the Federal Trade Commission’s ability to enforce laws against spam, spyware and cross-border fraud.²⁷ In Hong Kong, there is no law on new media fraud yet, but individuals who engage in such activities can theoretically be charged under other criminal laws.

Copyright of digital publication and content is always a hot issue on the Internet and wireless media. In the common law tradition of the United States and Hong Kong, the concept of copyright is mainly economic protection of authors and content creators. Therefore copyright has so far been more a concern for the commercial sector. For example, the entertainment industry is concerned about downloading and uploading of pirated movies and music through bit torrent technology. At present, this is of lesser concern to the civil society or for political usage. However, political activists might still be affected if copyright laws are tightened in the future, and the possibility of political regulation cannot be discarded as well.

Online electioneering. On the whole, political campaigns enjoy more freedom in using new media than in using traditional media. In the United States, political advertising by candidates, political parties, and outside supporting groups on television, radio, and print media is a critical component of election strategies. Accordingly, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) enforces electoral laws and regulations that require disclosure of campaign expenses and contributions for political advertisements published in the mainstream media. In 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA, also known as the McCain-Feingold Act) to strengthen campaign finance regulations, especially those rules related to soft money and interest group financing.²⁸ However, when the FEC made detailed rules for election campaigns, Internet communication was expressly exempted from the definition of “public communication.” BCRA supporters considered this exemption to be a serious loophole. Republican congressman Christopher Shays, a sponsor of the bill, led a judicial challenge (*Shays v. FEC*). The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia rejected the FEC’s interpretation of the law. Another Republican Congressman, Jeb Hensarling, took an opposing view and tried, but failed, to pass a bill to relieve bloggers from BCRA provisions after the District Court’s ruling. In March 2006, the Commission tightened the rule slightly so that paid political advertisements on the Internet fall under the campaign law, but online campaign activities by uncompensated individuals or groups remain exempted.²⁹

Election campaigns in Hong Kong generally face more restrictions than those in the United States. In addition to an overall expenditure ceiling for each candidate in Hong Kong, no “advertisement of a political nature” is allowed on broadcast media (TV and

²⁷ <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>.

²⁸ Detailed implications of the BCRA is in Magleby, David B., Anthony Corrado, and Kelly D Patterson (eds) 2006, *Financing the 2004 Election*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

²⁹ US Federal Election Commission 2006. *Record: Shays Rulemaking Supplement*, Vol. 32, July.

radio).³⁰ This restriction is not applied to print media or the Internet. Nonetheless, all types of election ads, including “electronic messages and websites (excluding those discussion forums on websites)” are regulated and the financing of such activities must be disclosed, including those published by “a third party” with or without the consent of the candidate concerned.³¹

This overview shows that Internet activists and bloggers in America and Hong Kong are currently subject to far fewer legal and regulatory constraints than traditional journalists and other members of the mainstream media on their ability to express views, advocate beliefs, and develop innovative ideas. However, the future of new media regulation is uncertain, as briefly described above and as will be further discussed in Part 4.

Economic, social, and cultural environments

In their search for new media strategies within the confines of the law, civil society actors must identify the new media applications most appropriate to the social, cultural, and economic environments in their societies. Socio-cultural and market environments can be viewed from two dimensions: (a) the horizontal dimension across different societies; and (b) the vertical dimension of various demographic groupings within a society. This paper first considers the horizontal comparison of the economic, social, and cultural factors in the United States and Hong Kong, followed by a brief discussion of the relevance of vertical cultural differences in mapping out a new media strategy.

Different market economics. The United States and Hong Kong have long embraced information technology, and both societies contain a critical mass of Internet and mobile phone users. However, the relative popularity of the Internet versus mobile phones is different due to government policies on industry competition, technological standards, and market practices. The United States has concentrated more on the Internet whereas Hong Kong (like other Asian societies) has focused more on mobile media. The United States is a world leader in innovative online applications but its percentage of mobile phone users is lower than that of countries in Asia and Europe.³² Hong Kong had 152 mobile phone subscriptions for every 100 people in 2007, while the United States had only 77.4 subscriptions for every 100 people in 2006.³³ Despite its high mobile phone penetration rates, Hong Kong once lagged behind China and other Asian

³⁰ See HKSAR Electoral Affairs Commission, Guidelines on Election-Related Activities in Respect of Legislative Council Elections 2004 (http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/legco/2004lc_guide.htm).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Castells, Manuel, Mireia Fernandez-Ardevol, Jack Linchuan Qiu, Araba Sey 2004. The Mobile Communication Society: Across-Cultural Analysis of Available Evidence on the Social Uses of Wireless Communication Technology. A research report prepared for the International Workshop on Wireless Communication Policies and Prospects: A Global Perspective, held at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, October 8th and 9th 2004. Available: <http://arnic.info/workshop04/MCS.pdf> (accessed 15.02.2006).

³³ Hong Kong SAR Government, Office of Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) website 2008. “Key Telecommunications Statistics” (http://www.ofta.gov.hk/en/datastat/key_stat.html) (assessed 03/2008). International Telecommunications Union website, “Mobile subscribers” (http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reporting/ShowReportFrame.aspx?ReportName=/WTI/CellularSubscribersPublic&RP_intYear=2006&RP_intLanguageID=1).

economies in mobile text messaging because phone calls were far cheaper. But as competition has driven down the price of text messages, short message service (SMS) usage has skyrocketed in Hong Kong in recent years.

Money matters. When civil society actors choose technological platforms (Internet or mobile) and applications (blogs, online video, text messaging, etc.), their primary consideration is cost. Sustaining long-term new media operations can be expensive, especially for smaller civil society groups and individual activists. New media efforts can be financed by volunteers, donors or sponsors, business revenues, or any combination thereof. Civil society groups or activists usually initiate new media initiatives through volunteer efforts and donations. However, a model of pure volunteerism is not indefinitely sustainable. In theory, the more popular those websites, blogs, or web radio stations, the better their ability to enlist more volunteers, solicit new donations, or venture into online advertising and merchandise sales. In this regard, popular civil society websites or bloggers in America have a much higher chance of survival than in Hong Kong due to the ‘market’ size. In a large country such as the United States, a website that is able to attract even a tiny fraction of the Internet audience can draw quite a sufficient pool of potential volunteers, donors, and advertisers. In the relatively small Hong Kong market, it is very difficult to reach the critical mass for supporting a civil society website financially. Popular U.S. political blogs draw a daily audience that ranges in size from tens of thousands up to millions, whereas popular Hong Kong civil society sites have daily hit rates in the thousands at most. It is possible for a successful American blogger to make a living as a full-time blogger; but deriving one’s primary income from a civil society website in Hong Kong is quite unlikely, if not impossible.

Freedom of political expression. In developing an appropriate new media strategy, civil society actors must also take into account the social characteristics and cultural habits of their community. The American and Hong Kong cultures share some similarities but are distinct in many ways. Both are pluralistic societies, but America has greater ethnic diversity. Although Hong Kong lifestyles are westernized, they are also rooted in Southern Chinese (mainly Cantonese) values and cultural traits. American and Hong Kong citizens enjoy legally-protected freedoms of speech and expression, and both societies have high expectations for the quality of government and policy-making. However, there are cultural differences in the way they exercise their freedoms of expression in different types of political discourse.

First, in daily social discourse, Americans and Hong Kong citizens can be equally vocal in their criticism of political and government affairs. Hong Kong people often talk about current affairs. They express criticisms of the government, officials and politicians (of all ideologies) within personal circles, not in front of the public. The modern history of China, British colonial rule of Hong Kong, and the 1997 transition to Chinese governance, have caused Hong Kong people, who are mostly immigrants from China or the children of immigrants, to be skeptical about politics and cynical about the motives of politicians. The word for “politician” in Cantonese and Mandarin — *zhengke* — suggests a perception that people use politics to advance their self-interest and carries a stronger negative connotation than the English term. This attitude explains both the popularity of

humor and sarcasm in political discourse and the widespread political apathy in Hong Kong. Growing disinterest and alienation in (especially partisan) politics also exists in America (see elaboration in Part 3). But political cynicism in the United States probably does not exist to the degree that it does in Hong Kong, given America's more robust democracy and national pride in its system of representative government.

That relates closely to the second type of political discourse on ideology and partisan debates. In America, partisan, ideological debates between liberals and conservatives are common. Although in recent years Americans have grown increasingly dismayed with the polarized politics between Republican and Democrats, the culture of open challenge in politics remains strong, at least stronger than in Hong Kong. Political divisions in Hong Kong between the pro-democracy and pro-establishment camps have run deep since the political transition of the mid-1980s. However, Hong Kong people tend to feel alienated by partisan debates, partly due to the political skepticism and cynicism that derive from their history. Ironically, civil society actors in Hong Kong often find it necessary to affect political disinterest or political neutrality in order to advance their agendas on government, policy issues, or democracy, which are all plainly political affairs.

The third type of political discourse is open discussion, petition, and assembly that challenges government policies. In the United States, open debates in politics and open challenge to the government or politicians are fully accepted as part of civic life. While Hong Kong people can be as critical and vocal in private as Americans, they are more cautious, pragmatic, and polite about political expression in public, in particular if their identities need to be disclosed. Polite politics are even the norm when social movements and protests openly challenge the political establishment.³⁴ After the last riots in the 1960s, in protest of political, economic, and social issues, mass rallies and angry protests in the last three decades have all been peaceful and orderly.

Generally speaking, Hong Kong people are more open to criticize local politicians, especially those from the pro-democracy camps, than they are to criticizing the sovereign in Beijing. There is a perception that the public space for expressing harsh political criticisms of Beijing has shrunk. However, Hong Kong people are much bolder, more vociferous, or even rude in criticizing the local SAR government and politicians, especially if they do not need to expose their true identities. Hong Kong residents typically air their grievances in public fora that offer pseudonymity or anonymity, such as radio phone-in programs, Internet discussion boards, and mass rallies. In the popular Internet chat-rooms, such as Yahoo.com.hk, where bitter quarrels often erupt between conservatives (likely to be pro-establishment or pro-Beijing) and liberals (likely to be pro-democracy), users often employ fictitious names to mask the identities behind their rude comments. Also, though violent mass rallies are a thing of the past, there has been some petty violence and vandalism against politicians (often from the pro-democracy camp) by people who hide their real identities.

³⁴ A case study of polite politics and protests can be found in Ho, Kwok-leung 2000. *Polite politics : a sociological analysis of an urban protest in Hong Kong*, England: Aldershot, Hants; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate.

Self-censorship is also growing in Hong Kong's mainstream, a phenomenon that will be described in greater detail in the next section. Self-censorship may also exist in the American media under various circumstances, including market pressure, the media's close relationship with certain political groups, fear of losing authoritative sources of news, or national mood. Such factors may explain why the U.S. mainstream media, including those outfits reputed to be liberal, did not critically examine claims of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq before the invasion of that country in 2003. That said, possible self-censorship in the United States is not as big of a problem as in Hong Kong, which has an authoritarian sovereign.

Visual vs. textual culture. In addition to the cultural differences in political expression, Hong Kong people much prefer verbal or visual communication to written text as compared to Americans, Mainland Chinese, and Taiwanese. While the younger American demographic also exhibits a preference for visuals (photos, sounds, and movies), the visual culture seems to prevail across different ages and demographic segments in Hong Kong. All Hong Kong newspapers, including all mass circulation, financial, and intellectual papers, have a look and feel similar to *USA Today*. They are full of colorful pictures; graphics take up 30 to 50 percent of a typical page. Likewise, the Hong Kong blogosphere is rich in photos but short on words. This visual-heavy culture poses a special challenge to online political debate in Hong Kong, because rational political discourse requires the clear articulation of ideas and arguments in words. While there is a trend toward a visual culture in the United States and other parts of the world, as highlighted by the rise of YouTube.com, the American online community is large enough to sustain lively, literate, and text-based political debates in a vibrant blogosphere.

The horizontal socio-cultural differences noted above account for the major differences in online behavior in the United States versus Hong Kong. Civil society actors should also bear in mind that social trends in cyberspace often converge globally, because new media users usually have greater exposure to the world through the Internet.

Vertical cultural differences. Vertical socio-cultural differences exist among various demographic groups within a society according to age, education level, and ethnicity, among other variables. In developing new media strategies, civil society actors should consider setting different objectives for different demographic groups. For example, they may target young people in order to recruit volunteers, and target higher income groups for donations. The youth culture in the new media (such as a preference for visuals, social networking, and rapidly changing online behavior) is more likely to converge horizontally, across different societies, than vertically, across age groups. Finally, language is also an important factor when civil society actors target audiences of different ethnic groups.

“Over-commercialized and politicized” mass media

Despite the rise of new media as an alternative to the traditional media, the mass media (including television, radio, and newspapers) will continue to dominate. This is because the mass media reach nearly all citizens and maintain longstanding relationships with key

governance actors (particularly, governments and businesses). In addition, consumers habitually turn to mass media as their default source of information and entertainment. Traditional media play critical roles in politics by setting the public agenda, stimulating societal emotions with visuals and sounds, reinforcing selective perceptions, shaping public opinion, and in some cases propagandizing for the government, political groups, or certain ideologies. Today, most large media firms operate a mix of traditional and new media outlets, and some firms are globalizing their media enterprises. Therefore, the overall influence of big media is more likely to increase (or at least remain constant) rather than diminish, and its interaction with new media will become more complex.

The media markets in America and Hong Kong are highly competitive, under virtually no government censorship before publication, and are primarily market-directed rather than state-controlled, except for public broadcasting services in both societies and several Beijing-sponsored newspapers in Hong Kong. One important difference between the two media markets is the high degree of market fragmentation in the United States and the relative market concentration in Hong Kong, in terms of numbers of competitors and market share of each media operator. In both societies, the professional practice of journalism adheres to Western (mainly American or British) traditions.³⁵ The American and Hong Kong mass media also share the common criticisms of being too commercialized and politicized. However, the manifestation of such criticisms differs and so are the implications on the new media development in the two societies.

Polarized big media in America. In an environment of market fragmentation, American mass media firms operate under strong commercial pressures. The most successful media firms are conglomerates such as News Corporation and Time Warner that own assets in the television, publishing and digital media industries. American consumers have abundant choices in television stations, radio channels and publications. Competition in broadcasting is particularly strong since the rise of cable television, which opened up the market to hundreds of channels. Although American can choose among many different media outlets, intense competition for audience ratings has created a homogenization of content.

Since the mid-1990s, traditional media news sources have been challenged by online news for market share. From 1996 to 2006, regular consumers of newspapers, radio news, and nightly network TV news declined from 50 to 40 percent, from 44 to 36 percent, and from 42 to 28 percent respectively, according to the Pew Research Center's biennial tracking surveys.³⁶ Meanwhile, regular readers of online news surged from 2 to 31 percent in 1995-2006.³⁷ Nonetheless, the rise of Internet news readership stabilized in 2006 with a modest increase of only 2 percent after 2004. The Pew surveys also found

³⁵ Hong Kong journalism in the early days before the 1960s or 1950s was under stronger intellectual and nationalistic tradition originated from China in the 1920-30s when the press sought to promote national development and improve the culture of the people.

³⁶ Pew Research Center 2000. *Internet Sapping Broadcast News Audience*. June; Pew Research Center 2004. *News Consumption And Believability Study. Online News Audience Larger, More Diverse. News Audiences Increasingly Politicized*. June. Pew Research Center 2006. *News Consumption And Believability Study. Maturing Internet News Audience – Broader Than Deep. Online Papers Modestly Boost Newspaper Readership*. July. See also *Associated Press*, "Readers turn to web for political news," March 7, 2005.

³⁷ Pew Research Center, 2006.

that the online-only news audience is modest in size and that the online news readership broadened rather than deepened.³⁸ The past surveys consistently noted that the negative impact of online news on cable TV news is not serious, but that online news does take viewers away from network broadcasts.³⁹ In fact, the most popular online news websites are those operated by big traditional media such as *newyorktimes.com*, CNN, MSNBC, ABC, NBC, and CBS.⁴⁰ These statistical trends conclude that the important place of traditional media in daily life is being supplemented but not totally replaced by the new media. Moreover, big media operators are responding to the fierce expansion of the digital media by strengthening their online arms and sometimes reducing investment in the traditional media. For example, NBC decided to cut 5 percent of jobs and \$ 750 million from its television budget by 2008, and will increase investment in digital delivery through the Internet and mobile networks, despite the fact that its cable arm, MSNBC is relatively successful.⁴¹

U.S. mass media firms can be broadly divided into liberal (leaning toward the Democrats) and conservative (being sharply pro-Republican) categories. The political leanings of media outlets have become more noticeable in the last ten years with the rise of Fox News. Surveys have confirmed that such political-ideological polarization among television and online news audiences exists.⁴² But the causal relationship between the polarization of mass media and of American politics remains unclear. It is not known whether the mass media merely reflects polarized public opinion or if the media is to be blamed for increased partisanship in the political discourse.

Political science and communication professor Diana Mutz has identified four phenomena in the American mass media, especially on television, that may have contributed to political polarization, or at least reinforced the trend.⁴³ Two phenomena are driven by technological developments that have given audiences an abundant choice of political news and non-news entertainment during the same time slots. This has resulted in the creation of viewers who tend to select only those sources that reinforce and intensify their pre-existing political views, and the alienation of moderate viewers from political news altogether. The other two phenomena are content-related: the media's emphasis of interpreting election outcomes on tactics and strategy rather than substance, and confrontational, "in-your-face" programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Hardball*, and *Hannity & Colmes*.⁴⁴

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pew Research Center, 2000, 2004 and 2006.

⁴⁰ Norris, Pippa 2002. "Revolution, What Revolution? The Internet and U.S. Election, 1992-2000," in Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (eds) 2002. Norris quoted the sources of relevant surveys from Pew Research Center.

⁴¹ Ahrens, Frank 2006. "NBC Taking Big Step Back From Television: Old Media Undergoes A Digital Makeover," *The Washington Post*, October 20, Page A1, A12.

⁴² Pew Research Center, 2004.

⁴³ Mutz, Diana 2006. "How the mass media divide us," in Pietro S. Nivola and David W Brady (eds), *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics* Washington DC: Brookings, forthcoming.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Interestingly, Americans from both sides of the aisle have complained about the current state of political coverage in the mass media.⁴⁵ Republican leaders, including Vice President Dick Cheney and former White House advisor Karl Rove, have charged that the old media are unfair to them.⁴⁶ Famous conservative TV host Bill O'Reilly has described his occupation as a "culture warrior" against the liberal media.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Democratic heavyweights such as former President Bill Clinton, however, considered the media favorable to the Republicans.⁴⁸ Prominent liberal bloggers such as Markos Moulitsas Zúniga and Jerome Armstrong have described many mass media outlets as the Republican "noise machine."⁴⁹

When examined closely, the political-ideological landscape of the American mass media cannot be accurately described in simple partisan terms. Many American journalists may share a liberal outlook due to their professional training, and therefore they tend to be more critical of the government and those in power. Republicans have controlled Congress (often both chambers) from 1995 until recently, and, except for 12 years, have occupied the White House since 1969. Some conservative media tend to behave conservatively not only ideologically but also support Republicans in a partisan manner.

The political landscapes of different media are also varied. In the press, the biggest newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are regarded as broadly liberal; the *Wall Street Journal*, an influential business paper, is regarded as fiscally conservative; and the smaller but influential *Washington Times* receives support from conservative Republicans. In radio broadcasting, the conservatives are more influential due to successful efforts in establishing a network of conservative voices over the decades.⁵⁰ Many of the most popular radio talk hosts are conservative and enjoy good relationships with Republican leaders.⁵¹ Liberal radio stations, on the other hand, are struggling for financial survival. In 2006, Air America, dubbed as a "lonely voice from talk radio's left," went bankrupt partly because big corporations declined to advertise on the station.⁵² In television broadcasting,⁵³ among the numerous news channels, conservative Fox News has topped the audience ratings in the last ten years, though its edge over other news channels has come down significantly.⁵⁴ While other prominent

⁴⁵ Harris, John 2006. "New Media, an Weapon in New World Politics," *The Washington Post*, October 6, Page A1, A10.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ O'Reilly, Bill 2006. *Cultural Warrior*, New York: Broadway Books.

⁴⁸ Harris 2006.

⁴⁹ Armstrong, Jerome and Markos Moulitsas Zúniga 2006. *Crashing The Gate. Netroots, Grassroots and the Rise of People-Powered Politics*, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, p. 114-8.

⁵⁰ Baker, Peter 2006. "The GOP Leans on A Proven Strategy: White House Courts Conservative Base," *The Washington Post*, October 25, Page A1, A7.

⁵¹ See an example of the close relationship between conservative radio hosts and the White House in Kurtz, Howard 2006. "Radio Hosts Get Closer to the White House – If Only Physically," *The Washington Post*, October 25, Page A7.

⁵² Aspan, Maria 2006. "Some Advertisers Shun Air America, A Lonely Voice From Talk Radio's Left," *The New York Times*, November 6.

⁵³ See also Pew Research Center, 2004 for the political preferences of audiences of different news channels.

⁵⁴ Poniewozik, James 2006. "What Hath Fox Wrought? Fox News, which is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary, has changed the face of television. You're watching it, even if you don't think you are," *Time*

news channels such as CNN and MSNBC are regarded liberal in general, they hire a few conservative hosts such as Glenn Beck (CNN Headline News) and former Republican congressman Joe Scarborough (MSNBC). Having said that, due to market fragmentation even the most popular news and public affairs programs reach only small audiences. The top-rated news/commentary program in the U.S., *The O'Reilly Factor*, has an audience of only about one million viewers, while many popular television programs in Hong Kong (with only 2.3 percent the population of the U.S.) may easily achieve that number.

In the American online media, the political landscape is different. Pro-Democrat liberal bloggers attract a much larger share of attention in cyberspace than conservative bloggers. Part 3 will elaborate on this trend.

Hong Kong media under the shadow of self-censorship. The Hong Kong mass media is also market-driven and competitive, but there is a higher degree of market concentration than in the United States. The audience therefore has a much more limited choice in television and radio channels. As noted earlier, Hong Kong media operate under a growing shadow of self-censorship.

Hong Kong has a more restrictive broadcasting policy than the United States. Non-pay television dominates the market, though television viewership has been under strong competition from the Internet and other forms of entertainment in recent years. The two non-pay television companies offer four free channels (in Chinese and English). Another four pay television operators offer over 100 channels (most content of which is bought from overseas, except for news programs) via a variety of cable and Internet technologies. Only in 2000 did the government open up the pay TV market that accounts for a much smaller market share than free television service. The largest and oldest, Hong Kong Cable TV, had less than 740,000 pay TV subscribers in 2005.⁵⁵ In radio broadcasting, there are only three local stations, one of which is the government-run public service broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong. Despite years of public demand for an “open air” policy, the government has refused to franchise more radio frequencies. Introduction of digital audio broadcasting may expand radio audience’s choices but the government has not committed to a policy timetable.⁵⁶

The print press is more competitive. Hong Kong is among the world leaders in the number of local newspapers per capita, including two English-language papers and more than 15 Chinese-language papers, including three free dailies. The mass newspapers are commercially successful in terms of circulation and advertisement, but they resemble tabloids in style and content, and do not enjoy high credibility. Only a few newspapers such as *Mingpao* and the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* (HKEJ) are regarded as reliable and appealing to educated readers.

Magazine, October 6; Poniewozik, James 2002. “The NASCAR of News: Fox goes from upstart to cable-news ratings leader with punditry, pizzazz and a little populism,” *Time Magazine*, February 11.

⁵⁵ Hong Kong i-Cable Communications Limited website, “Operating information” (<http://www.i-cablecomm.com/it/operating/index.php>)

⁵⁶ Booz Allen and Hamilton 2000. *Final Consultancy Report – Digital Audio Broadcasting in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong SAR Government Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau

As in the United States, the political landscape of the Hong Kong mass media can be crudely divided into two groups: pro-establishment (pro-Beijing and Hong Kong governments) and pro-democracy. Three pro-government newspapers are directly sponsored by Beijing. The local media is generally more critical of the Hong Kong government than the Beijing government; indeed, sometimes criticisms of local officials or civil servants can be brutal. Meanwhile, the tendency to self-censor, with regard to commenting or reporting on Beijing or local business tycoons, has grown since 1997.⁵⁷ This trend has become even more pronounced since 2003, when Beijing began to take a more proactive approach in managing Hong Kong affairs in response to that year's July 1 rally against the HKSAR government and national security legislation (see also Part 3).⁵⁸ Since then, the majority of Hong Kong media can be regarded as friendly to the government. Today, only one Chinese paper (*Apple Daily*) is regarded as a staunch supporter of the democracy movement. Other papers are either strongly supportive of the HKSAR government (notably the Sing Tao Group) or hostile to the pro-democracy, liberal camp (notably, the largest papers *Oriental Daily* and the *Sun*). In the television sector, non-pay Asia Television (ATV), which is owned by a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and has refocused its programming to the mainland market, is noticeably supportive of the incumbent Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang. The largest non-pay station, Television Broadcasts (TVB), owned by a business guru with excellent Beijing connections, has also been re-orientating to the mainland market.

Self-censorship is becoming pervasive, and examples are both subtle and dramatic. First, there is very little investigative reporting on corporate fraud and other business problems. Second, in its news reports and commentaries, the press usually adopts government formulations or pro-establishment discourse; for example, by using the term "opposition party" when describing pro-democracy politicians. Almost every newspaper publishes articles authored by government officials upon request. In one instance, a former secretary for information technology (and now the financial secretary) wrote an article to rebut critics on the Cyberport project. He asked all newspapers to publish his article unedited and uncut on a particular date. All local newspapers except one English paper complied.⁵⁹ The chief editor of that particular paper explained in an editorial why he refused the request to defend freedom of journalism. Later, that editor left the paper. Third, some newspapers are willing to comply with other government demands, extraordinary from the standpoint of independent journalism, in order to obtain news. In one case, the government selectively invited a number of newspapers to a briefing on the controversial issue of introducing a Goods and Services Tax, on the condition that the papers should only report on the government line and should not cover comments from others. Most newspapers complied with those conditions. Forth, the ownership of several media operators, including HKEJ, was transferred to pro-Beijing and pro-government businessmen after the 1997 handover, and more notably after 2003.

⁵⁷ Cheung, S Y Anne 2003. *Self-Censorship and the Struggle for Press Freedom in Hong Kong*. The Hague: Kluwer International.

⁵⁸ For more on post-2003 trends, see Yeung, Rikkie 2006. Presentation at the Brookings Institution: "Post-2003 Hong Kong: Rise of Civil Society vs. Decline of Autonomy," Brookings Institution, Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2006/1115northeast-asia.aspx>.

⁵⁹ That paper was Hong Kong Standard.

A more dramatic example leading to public concern over self-censorship were the sudden departures, and later terminations, of popular radio talk show hosts in mid-2004. Radio talk shows, especially the morning show on Commercial Radio I, have been very influential in shaping public opinion in Hong Kong, and have been very important means for the public to make instant complaints about the government and public bodies. Of those talk show hosts who were regarded as strongly critical of the previous Chief Executive, C.H. Tung, the three most famous ones suddenly left their shows in mid-2004. Later, Commercial Radio terminated their contracts; and then a few other hosts of moderate styles also resigned. One radio host, who is also a member of China's National People's Congress, claimed that he quit because of subtle intimidation from Beijing.⁶⁰ Although the accused intimidator denied that that was his intention, many talk shows toned down their programming. Observers have noted that the opinions expressed by some talk show hosts were considered to favor pro-democracy candidates in the election for Hong Kong's Legislative Council, which took place four months after this incident.⁶¹ The fear of self-censorship was reinforced by the recent case of Ching Cheong, a former Hong Kong journalist and well-known patriot who used to work for a Beijing-sponsored newspaper. Ching was arrested by China, held without trial for over a year, and then charged with espionage without specific accusations regarding his activities.⁶² Many Hong Kong press reports were unsympathetic, and a few published reports smearing Ching's integrity. These reports were later proven to rely on falsehoods, many of which allegedly came from Chinese officials.⁶³

The looming shadow of self-censorship and Beijing's influence in the mass media has disappointed the Hong Kong public, especially those of liberal and democratic persuasions. Civil society groups often find it difficult to advocate their social and political causes through the overly commercialized and increasingly politicized Hong Kong media. So some have turned to the new media, which explains the surge of Internet radio and online publications to be chronicled next, in Part 3.

⁶⁰ Hogg, Chris 2004. "HK radio host 'quit over threats,'" *BBC News*, May 27 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/3752223.stm>).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch 2004. *A Question of Patriotism: Human Rights and Democratization in Hong Kong*, A Human Rights Watch briefing paper, 4 September, United States. Available: <http://www.hrw.org> (accessed 02.05.2005).

⁶² Mingpao 2006. 程翔上訴失敗求赦刑責 (Ching Cheong's appeal in Beijing failed), November 25.

⁶³ Most main media kept a low profile on this case. A few newspapers used anonymous mainland sources from Beijing to smear Ching and such reporting was subsequently proven wrong on facts. Some press editorial commented that Ching asked for the punishment if he wanted to fulfill his journalistic duties and ventured into dangers. See *Oriental Daily* 2006. 明知山有虎 勿向虎山行 (Ching ventured into dangerous zone and should be prepared to pay for it), November 25.

Part 3: New media and political participation: the United States vs. Hong Kong

After examining in Part 2 the general factors (legal, socio-economic, and mass media environments) that civil society actors must consider in order to formulate a new media strategy, this section examines the use of new media in political participation in the United States and Hong Kong. Part 3 begins with discussion of the characteristics of the two different political systems and political cultures, and then describes some examples of how activists and ordinary citizens have used the new media in different political combats.

American democratic participation

America is a mature democratic republic with a two-party tradition. Every adult citizen has a basic right to political participation through an equal voting right in all elections. The American democracy is built upon a system of checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. In practice, however, there are imperfections in American democracy due to issues of social power structure, money politics, government policy, quality of politicians, problematic administration of elections, and other factors. Recently, U.S. democracy has been criticized as failing to perform properly. The approval rating of President Bush plunged from the 80 to 90 percent range immediately after the September 11 attacks to 30 percent or below amid the unpopular war on Iraq, a conflict that lacks a clear exit strategy.⁶⁴ The U.S. Congress — in which the House of Representatives was controlled by a Republican majority for twelve years (from 1995 until 2007) — has been described as “the broken branch”⁶⁵ that failed to oversee properly the executive branch and ran into the danger of institutional corruption. Some feared that the two-party system might be heading toward political monopoly of a “one-party country,”⁶⁶ due to the superior party machinery, strategies and financial resources of the Republicans. Other scholars found that U.S. elections at all levels have become increasingly uncompetitive in the last twelve years or so.⁶⁷ For example, the number of competitive House elections dropped from 98 in 1994 to 51 in 2006. The lack of competitive races, possibly due to a combination of gerrymandering that escaped most people’s attention, and traditional incumbent advantage, is a major reason for decreased voter turnout.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, many voters perceive that the

⁶⁴ President Bush’s job approval rating was 35 percent before the mid-term elections. See, CNN.com, *Poll: Bush approval rating dips to 35 percent*, November 6, 2006.

⁶⁵ Mann, Thomas J, and Ornstein, Norman J 2006. *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get it Back on Track*, New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁶ Hamburger, Tom and Peter Wallsten, 2006. *One Party Country: The Republican Plan for Dominance in the 21st Century*, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

⁶⁷ McDonald, Michael 2006. “The competitive problem of voter turnout,” *Washington.com*, October 31.

⁶⁸ A survey in October 2006 found that 51 per cent of interviewed respondents did not know about the debate on redistricting of constituencies. Pew Research Center 2006, *Most Have Heard Little or Nothing about Redistricting Debate. Lack of Competition in Elections Fails to Stir Public. A Survey Conducted in Association with the Brookings Institution and Cato Institute*, October 27.

candidates in competitive races focus only on campaigns but do not work hard for their constituencies while in office.⁶⁹

The election system is meant to be one of the major self-correcting mechanisms in a democracy. This means an American citizen's active participation in all forms of the democratic electoral process — from casting a vote, to monitoring the performance of office holders, making political donations, campaigning for candidates, and running for office — can make a substantial difference on the political process and its outcomes. The latest example was the mid-term election in November 2006 when a majority of the American electorate voted for change in Congress, state legislatures, and governorships in order to express their disapproval of the incumbent party's leadership and policies. Under the democratic system, the American people's political participation has a bigger impact on the political outcomes than in a non-democracy such as Hong Kong. Nonetheless, the state of political participation in the United States is far from ideal, as in many other modern democracies. Growth of political apathy is a key concern. Voter registration and election turnout have been in continual decline since the mid-1960s. The percentage of eligible citizens who registered to vote fell from 74.3 in 1968 to 65.9 in 1996, and voter turnout in presidential elections dropped from 69.3 percent in 1964 to 54.2 percent in 1996.⁷⁰ Analysts have offered various theories to explain this decline. Public policy scholar Robert Putnam noted that civil participation in elections began to shrink after the 1960s as American society became individualistic.⁷¹ Brookings Institution senior fellow E.J. Dionne is concerned about “the flight from politics” and suggests a new civility for politics that demands a vigorous, honest, and mutually respectful debate and a new engagement in democratic government.⁷² Others are concerned about the general decline of civil society.⁷³

Civil society scholars and advocates have been searching for practical solutions to revive American civic spirit and political participation, and the use of new media is considered part of the package to address the imbalances of influence in the electoral process.⁷⁴ Former Senator Bill Bradley called for strengthening American citizenship by enhancing family life, creating quality civic space, demanding a civic-minded media, and ending special interest financing of elections.⁷⁵ Political theorist Benjamin Barber has proposed specific legislative and government actions to support civil society by way of enlarging public spaces, democratizing the global economy, enhancing national and

⁶⁹ 61 percent of respondents had such perception according to the Pew Research Center survey, October 27, 2006.

⁷⁰ Conway 2000, p.7, footnote 65.

⁷¹ Putnam, Robert D 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York : Simon & Schuster.

⁷² Dionne Jr., E. J. 1998. “Introduction” in E. J. Dionne Jr. (ed) 1998.

⁷³ O'Connell, Brian 1999; Bradley, Bill, 1998, “America's challenge. Revitalizing our national community;” and Wolfe, Alan, 1998, “Is civil society obsolete? Revisiting predictions of the decline of civil society in *Whose Keeper?*” in E. J. Dionne Jr. (ed) 1998.

⁷⁴ See the works of some of the most influential sociologists and political philosophers, for examples, Etzioni, Amitai 2000. *The Third Way to a Good Society*, London: Demos; Etzioni, Amitai 2001. *Next: The Road to the Good Society*, New York: Basic Books; Bell, Daniel, “‘American exceptionalism’ revisited: The role of civil society,” in Don E. Eberly (ed) 2000.

⁷⁵ Bradley 1998.

community service, cultivating the arts and humanities, and fostering civic uses of information technologies.⁷⁶ Journalist Kevin O’Leary recommended using the Internet to formalize online town hall meetings, increase citizen engagement in deliberative policies, and supplement inadequate representation by the House of Representatives.⁷⁷ Others have proposed interactive online voter guides and online platforms for candidate-to-candidate and candidate-to-citizen debates so as to partially mitigate the effects of uneven funding among candidates.⁷⁸

Political participation in America can be broadly categorized into non-partisan and partisan participation. While the influence of online media has been felt in both categories, the partisan new media have made a bigger impact on the political process and outcomes. Pioneers of non-partisan political websites can be found in the 2000 presidential election, coinciding with the dot.com boom at that time. Prominent examples included *Voter.com*, *grassroots.com*, *DNet*,⁷⁹ and *Freedom Channel*.⁸⁰ Most of the non-partisan websites started off as non-profit initiatives, with some being sponsored by philanthropy trust funds such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York.⁸¹ A few such as the Grassroots Enterprise (*grassroots.com*) ventured into the public affairs business. The non-partisan political websites usually aimed at promoting informed and rational voting by publishing candidate information and election news, or by providing interactive learning tools about the elections. As such, the content of many non-partisan websites is similar to major newspaper or news channel websites. After the 2000 elections, many such websites closed. Since then, non-partisan political websites received less public attention. In the 2004 presidential election, the more prominent non-partisan websites included *Democracy Net*, *e.thePeople* and *Project Voter Smart*.⁸² In the 2006 mid-term elections, *DontVote.com*, a voter-education project organized by the advocacy group AARP, advertised itself on television but the election information featured on its website was less than what most newspaper websites provided.

In comparison, new media initiatives for partisan purposes have been more vibrant and have made more significant impacts in recent elections. This may be because partisan activists have greater incentives than non-partisans to influence the political outcomes. It is more straightforward to evaluate success or failure in partisan campaigns. Before the new media based partisan campaigns are discussed, electoral politics in recent

⁷⁶ Barber, Benjamin R 1998. *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*. New York : Hill and Wang.

⁷⁷ Kevin O’Leary proposed to use E-assemblies to supplement the inadequate representation of the House. See, O’Leary, Kevin 2006. *Saving Democracy: A Plan for Real Representation in America*. Stanford University Press. Experiments of e-Town Hall Meetings are also found in states such as Oregon. See also discussion on direct online deliberation in Coleman, Stephen, 1999. “Cutting out the middle man: from virtual representation to direct deliberation,” in Hague, Barry N. and Brian D. Loader (eds) 1999.

⁷⁸ Docter, Sharon and Dutton, William, 1999. “The social shaping of the Democracy Network,” in Hague, Barry N. and Brian D. Loader (eds) 1999.

⁷⁹ A case study of DNet can be found in Docter, Sharon and Dutton, William, 1999.

⁸⁰ Institute for Politics, Democracy & Internet 2005. *Pioneers in Online Politics: Non-partisan Political Websites in the 2000 Campaign*. Washington DC: The George Washington University (www.ipdi.org).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

years must be broadly surveyed in order to understand the political environment confronting the American activists.

In 1994, after decades of concerted strategizing and investment, the Republican Party (in particular the conservative wing) began to dominate the U.S. political power structure. The Democratic Party establishment is often perceived, even among its supporters,⁸³ as a loose alliance of liberals, issue advocates and anti-Republicans. Therefore, many observers believe, the Democratic Party often fails to unite, invest in policy ideas, and win in elections. The surge of online media interest around 1998-2000 incidentally coincided with power consolidation by the Republicans. The Democrats lost the White House and seats in Congress in the 2000 elections, and thereby lost a tremendous of influence in shaping policy.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States rallied the nation around President Bush's leadership. Bush and the Republican administration enjoyed high popular support. After 2000, the partisan electoral politics can be described as a competition between the two un-equals — in political power and electoral competence. The incumbent Republican Party is considered far stronger than the Democrats in unity, money, organization, electoral strategy and tactics, training of the next generation of party members, communications network and propaganda, think-tank influence, in addition to dominance in government policies.⁸⁴ However, by the 2006 election cycle, the tide turned against the Republican leadership due to great national disappointment about the war in Iraq, corruption in the government and in Congress, and other policy problems.

Online media in U.S. elections

Partisan civil society activists in the United States face drastically different challenges depending on their party affiliation, and accordingly need to formulate different strategies for the use of new media in election campaigns. The following case studies examine four aspects of the development of new media — mainly the Internet — in election campaigns from the mid-1990s to 2006: (a) an overview of candidates' online campaigns; (b) the impact of three influential new media applications (online fundraising, political web-logs or "blogs," and YouTube); (c) the Republican use of new media; and (d) the netroots progressive movement in the 2006 mid-term elections. It is not easy to evaluate the

⁸³ Armstrong and Moulitsas, 2006.

⁸⁴ The organizational and strategic advantages of the GOP in elections were extensively discussed in the press before the mid-term elections in November 2006. Examples can be found in: Allen, Mike and James Carney 2006. "The GOP's Secret Weapon: You think the Republicans are sure to lose big in November? They aren't. Here's why things don't look so bad to them," *Time Magazine*, October 1; Toner, Robin 2006. "Democrats Have Intensity, but G.O.P. Has Machine," *The New York Times*, October 15; Rutenberg, Jim 2006. "As Talk Radio Wavers, Bush Moves to Firm Up Support," *New York Times*, October 17; Birnbaum, Jeffery H. and Zachary A Goldfarb 2006. "Close House Races, GOP Incumbents Hold Advantage in Funds," *The Washington Post*, October 17, Page A5; Baker, Peter 2006. "The GOP Leans on A Proven Strategy: White House Courts Conservative Base," *The Washington Post*, October 25, Page A1, A7; Baker, Peter 2006. "The GOP Leans on A Proven Strategy: White House Courts Conservative Base," *The Washington Post*, October 25, Page A1, A7; Christopher Drew 2006. "New Telemarketing Ploy Steers Voters on Republican Path," *The New York Times*, November 6.

precise impact of the Internet on the elections because of the difficulty of isolating any one of the multiple factors that affect the dynamics and outcome of an election. Ideally, in any election, fundamental substance (the demands of constituencies and the quality of candidates) should matter the most, but often it does not. In modern politics, campaign strategies are critical; this is where new media can play an important role. To examine the impact of online initiatives, this paper tries to look at two proxies. First, how prevalent is online media use in campaigns, and in what ways is online media used? Second, are there any electoral victories that can be attributed, at least in part, to online initiatives? In addressing the second question, some amount of subjective judgment is required.

Online campaigns: from hype to a new political force. Since the early 1990s, many people have talked about the prospect of using online media to invigorate elections. However, the actual development was more gradual and less dramatic than enthusiasts had predicted. Only after 2000 did the Internet become part of the election campaign routines,⁸⁵ but even so, few electoral victories could be attributed to online efforts until 2006. In the 2006 mid-term elections, a number of significant victories were quite clearly related to Internet campaign initiatives.

From 1992 to 2000, the Internet's role in elections was mainly one of reinforcement rather than mobilization.⁸⁶ Only a small percentage of Americans, mainly youths, used the Internet to learn about the candidates.⁸⁷ During that period, Internet political activists and general online users were two distinct groups. A 1998 survey found that over 80 percent of those most interested in politics had engaged in online political discussion and e-mailing others on political issues. But their activities did not seem to mobilize general Internet users, who used the web mainly for obtaining news (over 76 percent), entertainment information (59 percent), general e-mail communications (over 50 percent) or online shopping (49 percent).⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the potential of online campaigns grew because 64 percent of all voters became Internet users and 90 percent of American Internet users were registered voters by 2000.⁸⁹ As a result, Elaine Kamarck found, the numbers of candidate websites surged between the 1998 and 2000 election cycles: in Senate races the percentage of candidates having a website increased from 72 to 91 percent, in the House races the rate increased from 35 to 66 percent; and in gubernatorial races it stayed even at 95 percent; the gaps between different races could be explained by the level of competition and the number of open races.⁹⁰ However, most candidate websites before 2000 were unimaginative, essentially online reproductions of printed campaign materials — what new media researchers call “electronic brochures.”⁹¹ At that time, most candidates considered the Internet only as one of the many channels to disseminate campaign messages, and did not explore the potential of interactivity and mobilization.

⁸⁵ Kamarck, Elaine Ciulla 2002. “Political Campaigning on the Internet: Business as Usual?” in Kamarck and Nye (Eds) 2002, p.85.

⁸⁶ Norris, 2002.

⁸⁷ Jenkins, Henry and David Thorburn 2003. “Introduction,” in Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (eds) 2003, p.2.

⁸⁸ Norris, 2002, p. 67.

⁸⁹ Jenkins, Henry and David Thorburn 2003, p.1.

⁹⁰ Kamarck, 2002, p.85-89.

⁹¹ Such as Kamarck 2002, Jenkins and Thorburn 2003.

Since the 2000 presidential election, several innovative online campaigns caught the public's attention and inspired strategic use of new media in subsequent elections. One example is Senator John McCain's bid for the Republican nomination in 2000. The senator raised about \$5 million via the Internet from small donors, a quarter of his total funds.⁹² McCain's campaign also employed the technique of "meta-jacking" to drive traffic to his website by putting words about his opponents in the HTML (programming language) of his own website; these words were then picked up by Internet search engines when users sought information on his opponents.⁹³ Similarly, Democratic primary candidate Bill Bradley raised a significant sum of donations from the Internet. The Bush and Gore campaign websites issued rebuttals on each other's performance.⁹⁴ A more creative case was the "vote sweeping" campaign launched by supporters of Ralph Nader, the Green Party candidate for president in 2000, through online exchange websites.⁹⁵ This strategic voting campaign (which Nader did not personally endorse) sought votes for Nader from Gore's supporters in swing states where Gore would win or lose by a narrow margin.

The 2004 presidential election represents an important turning point in online campaign development. Former Vermont governor Howard Dean's primary campaign for the Democratic nomination is considered a milestone in Internet campaign history. Led by new media strategist Joe Trippi, Dean's people-based online campaign generated excitement about four Internet elements: the rise of the political blogosphere, the power of Internet donations, the efficiency of organizing meet-ups online, and the mobilization of volunteers. Trippi's "Blog for America" (previously the "Call for Action Blog") generated hundreds of discussion threads and attracted many netizens who felt fed up with the war in Iraq and "television-centered" politics.⁹⁶ Supportive bloggers and readers were actively engaged in Dean's campaign and defended Dean whenever they thought the mainstream media treated him unfairly. The mass media was most impressed by Dean's online fundraising prowess. He raised \$51 million, surpassing his closest competitor by \$16 million, mainly through online donation from mostly (58 percent) small contributions of \$200 or less.⁹⁷ Through partnerships with Meetup.com and MoveOn.org, Dean recruited 160,000 eager campaign volunteers. Through the Internet, the campaign lined up a few thousand attendees for Dean's speeches with only ten days' notice.⁹⁸

⁹² Magleby, David B. (ed) 2002. *Financing the 2000 Election*, Washington D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, p. 63.

⁹³ Karmarck, 2002, p. 91.

⁹⁴ Jenkins and Thorburn 2003, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Many of the vote exchange websites in 2000 had been closed. See an example of those few still available that claims to not endorsing any specific candidate in the election at <http://www.votexchange2000.com/questionnaire.html>; see also Jenkins and Thorburn 2003, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Kerbel, Matthew Robert 2005. "The media: The Challenge and promise of Internet politics," in Michael Nelson (ed), *The Elections of 2004*, Washington D. C.: CQ Press, p. 88.

⁹⁷ Magleby, David B., Anthony Corrado, and Kelly D Patterson (eds) 2006, *Financing the 2004 Election*, Washington D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, p. 80-81, 103-107.

⁹⁸ Kerbel, 2005.

Despite the success stories in 2000 and 2004, innovative online campaigns did not, for the most part, translate into electoral victories. McCain, Bradley, and Dean all lost in their party primaries. Nader, who had no chance of winning the election, was subsequently accused by Democrats of splitting Gore's votes and thus facilitating Bush's marginal victory in 2000. The earliest victory that analysts link to an online campaign is Reform Party candidate Jesse Ventura's win in the 1999 Minnesota gubernatorial election.⁹⁹ Ventura, who was weaker in resources and political experience than his Republican and Democrat opponents, turned his website in an online office-cum-communications-center to disseminate his positions and recruit volunteers.

In the 2006 mid-term elections, the Internet was finally recognized as a powerful political force that could deliver electoral victories and political changes. The people-based online campaigns (the "netroots movement," which will be explained shortly) returned victories of netroots-supported candidates to a number of races in the Democratic primaries, the House, and surprise wins in the Senate that ultimately tipped the political balance to Democrats in both chambers of Congress. It is too early to conclude if the political force of the Internet will continue to favor the Democrats in future elections, or if the boost to the Democratic Party in 2006 was due mainly to the strong national tide against the Republican incumbents. At any rate, using the Internet to interact with voters had become almost a must in candidate campaigns by 2006. A survey by the Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet (IPDI) in May 2006 found that 97 percent of all the U.S. Senate candidate websites allow online donations, 70 percent provide online videos and 63 percent feature blogs.¹⁰⁰

Online donation, political blogging, and online video. In addition to conventional e-mails and online member subscription for volunteer recruitment, the three applications mentioned above — online fundraising, political blogs, and homemade online videos posted on YouTube.com (video logs, or "vlogging") — have profound influence on the election environment in the United States.

Since campaign finance is a decisive factor in American elections, online fundraising was an early priority for exploration by pioneering new media strategists. The traditional media often reports the amount of funds raised on the Internet as an indicator of how successful an online campaign is. Online fund raising has three conceptual advantages. First, the cost of soliciting donations from a large number of people is relatively low compared to offline methods such as direct mail or phone. Middleman fees to gateway companies and banks may raise the total cost, however. Second, online donations are appealing to individual contributors of small amounts who find Internet payments more convenient. It may, therefore, broaden people-based participation in campaign financing and diffuse the effect of big money politics, to some extent. Third, online donations can help "political insurgents" break through the hurdles of campaign financing to challenge establishment candidates who enjoy far better access to big donors, thereby leveling the political playing-field. The American experience appears to confirm these three theoretical benefits. Online fundraising has become routine and is reshaping

⁹⁹ Jenkins, Henry and David Thorburn (eds) 2003, p. 85.

¹⁰⁰ Berman, Dori 2006. "Political candidates using Internet for fund-raising, networking," *The Daily Record*, August 18.

the dynamics of campaign financing. “Insurgent” candidates (McCain, Bradley, and Dean) had early success stories in the 2000 and 2004 elections, which encouraged other candidates to use the Internet for fundraising.¹⁰¹ In the 2006 elections, online fundraising gave momentum to a number of Democrat candidates, and was also employed by outside support groups, such as the progressive *MoveOn.org*, to boost the Democrat campaign.

The Internet and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) created a mutual reinforcement effect of promoting small campaign donations. In the 2004 election cycle, individual contributions grew from 12 to 16 percent of total campaign contributions.¹⁰² It is difficult to determine the actual number of online small donors (contribution of less than \$200 to a single candidate) because the law does not require itemization of such contributions. A 2005 survey by the Institute for Politics, Democracy, and the Internet (IPDI) on online political giving supports the general impression that a majority of small donations to the elections were given online.¹⁰³ IPDI also found that online donors in the 2004 elections were more likely to be young, to donate without being asked, and to support Democrats.¹⁰⁴

While the rise of political blogging has received great attention, it must be noted that as of July 2006 the political blogging community constitutes only a small fraction of the entire American blogosphere of about 12 million bloggers and 57 million blog readers.¹⁰⁵ Most blog content is devoted to social networking and personal entertainment purposes. In 2006 an IPDI survey found that daily political blog readers accounted for only 9 percent of its sample; that subset gravitated to a small number of political blogs, in particular liberal blogs.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the influence of political blogs does not come from its sheer quantitative impact (as in online fundraising) but from bloggers’ political activism. Who are political blog readers? The IPDI survey confirmed the conventional belief that daily political blog readers are mostly men who have higher household income and more education than the average Internet user, and who are very critical of the mainstream media. But they are mostly middle-aged and not as young as many assumed. As expected, political blogs attract readers with stronger political views on either end of the political spectrum, but one-fifth of responding readers claimed to be independent in their partisan orientation. Also as speculated, many more readers in the political blogosphere strongly favor Democrats (32 percent) to Republicans (19 percent). The IPDI survey lends support to the conventional observation that the American political blogosphere is largely liberal. The most influential liberal blogs include *MyDD*, *Daily Kos* and syndicated blogs such as the *Huffington Post*. In particular, *Daily Kos* attracts nearly a million daily readers and is

¹⁰¹ Institute for Politics, Democracy & Internet (IPDI) 2005. *Small Donors and Online Giving. A Study of Donors to the 2004 Presidential Campaigns*. Washington DC: The George Washington University (www.ipdi.org).

¹⁰² Magleby, Corrado and Patterson 2006, p.79.

¹⁰³ Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet 2005.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Lenhart, Amanda and Susannah Fox, 2006. “Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet’s New Storytellers,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, July 19, 2006,

<http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Graf, Joseph 2006. *The Audience for Political Blogs. New Research on Blog Readership*. Washington DC: The George Washington University, Institute for Politics, Democracy & Internet (www.ipdi.org).

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always among the top two or three of all blogs worldwide in traffic and links.¹⁰⁷ Popular conservative blogs such as *Redstate* attract much lower traffic and fewer online comments. The profile of regular political blog readers suggests a ready pool of online political activists who can be pragmatic strategists and effective networkers among middle-class citizens, not just young enthusiasts with little practical experience as many would have assumed. Generally speaking, it is time-consuming and difficult for part-time bloggers to sustain an active political blog. Given the large absolute size of the U.S. blogosphere, however, it is possible for the most successful bloggers to work full-time on their blogs and become political advocates. Markos Moulitsas, founder of *Daily Kos*, said he earns a comfortable living of \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year from his blogs.¹⁰⁸

The American blogosphere facilitates political participation in three specific ways. First, a new generation of political opinion leaders can be self-groomed to influence politics outside the traditional media. In this regard, both progressive and conservative bloggers have had some victories. Republican Senator Trent Lott resigned as majority leader in 2002 after a racially insensitive comment on the 100th birthday of Senator Strom Thurmond fueled furious commentary in the liberal blogosphere.¹⁰⁹ Later, famous CBS news anchor Dan Rather and newsroom chief Eason Jordan resigned after attacks from conservative bloggers on their discredited news reports about President Bush's National Guard service during the Vietnam War. Second, the blogosphere is an engaging and galvanizing forum, where political bloggers and their readers interact and mobilize each other for political activism. The political blogosphere thus became the soil for netroots campaigns.

Third, blogs can be an alternative source of news, opinions, gossip or scandals ignored by the main media for reasons legitimate or otherwise. Many journalists read blogs as an information source. Popular news or views on the Internet may be reported back in the mainstream media to catch wider national attention. The first example of this, when the *Drudge Report* broke the Monica Lewinsky story in 1998, occurred even before blog software was available. In the 2006 elections, the Foley scandal, the last straw on the Republican failure shortly before the elections, was first exposed online. The *Stop Sex Predators* blog, which was set up by Democrat supporter Lane Hudson to exchange information about sex predators in July 2006,¹¹⁰ posted in late September suspicious (though not sexually explicit) instant messages between Republican Representative Mark Foley and former Congressional pages.¹¹¹ Information about the scandal had in fact been circulated among several newspapers for months. But the case was either not followed up or the press decided that the story was not substantially founded. *Stop Sex Predators* attracted national attention and was noticed by journalists. In October 2006, ABC followed up the story with concrete and explicit evidence. Foley resigned, and the

¹⁰⁷ See tracking by Technorati (www.technorati.com) and the TTLB Blogosphere Ecosystem (<http://truthlaidbear.com/TrafficRanking.php>).

¹⁰⁸ The Hotline 2006. "Blogometer; Censure and Sensibility," March 15.

¹⁰⁹ Shirky, Craig *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution Is Changing Politics, Business and Culture* <http://zhaoyang.rave.ac.uk/~ian/copyrightvs/wethemedia.pdf>, p. 44-5.

¹¹⁰ Grossman, Lev 2006. "Lane Hudson. The Washington whistle-blogger," *Time Magazine*. December 16.

¹¹¹ <http://stopsexpredators.blogspot.com/>.

scandal became the talk of town for weeks and intensified public dismay at the Republican leadership.¹¹²

Video blogging in the YouTube era, “vlogging,” was a new star in the 2006 elections. The use of homemade Internet videos in election campaigns, notably negative campaigns, is not totally novel. In the 2004 Presidential campaigns, IPDI collected 75 Internet political videos produced by groups and individuals and circulated by e-mails.¹¹³ Those videos included edited TV news footage, homemade animation, and slideshows. Many videos were humorous seeking to mock, embarrass, or criticize candidates. The two most popular online videos in 2004 were “Bush in 30 Seconds” and “Swiftboat Veteran.”¹¹⁴ A commercial similar to the latter was shown on television and has been widely regarded as a factor leading to Democratic candidate John Kerry’s defeat. That was before the YouTube era, when the use of online video was limited by technology issues. Video producers needed to be technologically savvy enough to use flash or other editing software. Uploading and storage of large-size online video files required powerful and secure servers. Circulation was mostly done by e-mails with links, because the large file size of videos prohibited e-mailing them as attachments. These technical issues created a catch — the impact of online videos was either limited in reach or popular videos would risk jamming the servers.

All those technical issues have been resolved with the founding of YouTube.com in February 2005 and the rising popularity of mobile phones with video-camera functionality.¹¹⁵ YouTube.com is a website backed by powerful servers that allows anyone to post and share online videos free of charge. Although YouTube, now owned by Google, is commercial by nature and mostly used for personal entertainment purposes, it has incidentally created a new political platform. It is now much easier for non-tech savvy people to create and post online videos, for viewers to watch the videos and leave comments, and for researchers to quantify the popularity of individual videos and to measure trends. YouTube is a very low-cost and convenient alternative to buying expensive television timeslots for political advertisements.

Online videos can be used for positive and negative campaigning. Candidates often include video of positive messages on their websites and their supporters can post positive videos on YouTube. But the impact of vlogging is far more obvious in negative campaigning. In the 2006 elections, the public performance of candidates was captured on camera non-stop. In a strategy known as trailing, supporters or employees of opposing candidates attended and filmed every public appearance in order to capture “gotcha” moments of mistakes, and then posted the clips on YouTube. Both Democrats and Republicans used vlogging and trailing. A clip making fun of Democrat leader Nancy

¹¹² Grunwald, Michael and Chris Cillizza 2006. “Foley Consuming GOP as Elections Draw Near,” *The Washington Post*, October 8. Page A1, A9.

¹¹³ IPDI 2004. “Under the radar and over the top: Online political videos in the 2004 election.” Washington DC: The George Washington University (www.ipdi.org).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Youtube.com, “About us.”

Pelosi and Senator Harry Reid was posted.¹¹⁶ A few days before the election, a dozen television clips of Democratic Senator John Kerry's bad joke about U.S. troops attracted over 22,000 views on YouTube. Since Kerry was not running in the race, however, the political impact on Democrats was minimal. But the "gotcha" videos badly hurt a few Republican candidates, as will be described shortly in the "netroots movement" section.

New media and the Republican Party. The Republican Party and conservatives have used most of the aforementioned major new media applications in their election campaigns. However, except for a few campaigns such as McCain's in 2000, the Republicans' online effort has been less prominent as compared to that of the progressive liberals. The Republican Party spent a lot of resources on new technologies, but focused mainly on micro-targeting voter databases in get-out-the-vote operations. The conservative blogosphere is less influential than the liberal netroots. In campaign communications, the Republicans regarded the online media as secondary channel to disseminate their messages. This may be because the conservatives already had secured strong influence in the mass media, including the high-rating Fox News Channel and popular radio talk shows (by famous hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Laura Ingraham, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Michael Savage, and Bill O'Reilly). Most of the famous conservative radio hosts offer podcasts on their websites. The Republicans sometimes use the online media for those messages that are considered inappropriate for official release. For example, as the Virginia Senate race became very close in the final days of the campaign, Republican candidate George Allen's team released to the Drudge Report selected excerpts from Democrat opponent Jim Webb's best-selling books and accused Webb of containing in his works sex scenes that were demeaning to women.¹¹⁷ The story was later picked up in the traditional media. However, this last-ditch tactic did little to turn around Allen's campaign.

Netroots progressives in the 2006 mid-term elections. The netroots progressive movement has had greater influence in elections than their conservative counterparts. The term "netroots," coined by *MyDD.com* founder Jerome Armstrong, refers broadly to the Internet grassroots community. Netroots progressives believe in using the Internet strategically to rejuvenate people-based democracy. They are not a unified political voice, but hold in common a broadly liberal orientation, strong disapproval of the recent Republican domination of politics, and the common goal of taking back the reins of government from the Republicans. The netroots progressives are highly critical of the Democratic Party leadership's poor electoral performance and policy positions, especially the votes by many Democrats in Congress to authorize and fund the use of military force in Iraq. Although the mass media often portrays netroots progressives as radicals, surveys such as those by IPDI and *BlogPac* indicate that they are rather pragmatic political activists.¹¹⁸ The surveys do not suggest that the netroots tend toward extremism, but that

¹¹⁶ Reed, Tina 2006. "Youtube puts political lives online," *Las Vegas Review-Journal (Nevada)*, October 30.

¹¹⁷ Shear, Michael D and Tim Craig 2006. "Allen Blasts Webb Novels For Sex Scenes. Veteran Says Works Reflect Trauma of War," *The Washington Post*, October 28, Page A1.

¹¹⁸ BlogPac, 2006 "Netroots study," June 15 (www.mydd.com/study/2006/6/15/20449/2622); see also a similar analysis in Farrell, Henry, 2006 "Bloggers and parties: Can the Netroots Reshape American Democracy?" *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*, Vol. 31, No. 5 September/October.

they are exceptionally politically active relative to average Americans. The netroots are well-educated, quite well-off, intensive consumers of news media, and are not necessarily young. They participate in politics by signing petitions, donating to campaigns or causes, attending political rallies, and writing letters to editors, among other activities. Their political attitudes do not seem to differ much from an average moderate-liberal—they wish that the Democrats would articulate a positive agenda and not just attack the Republicans, take a clear stand on key issues rather than being inconsistent in their messages, and inspire the American public. But many members of the netroots opposed the war in Iraq earlier and more strongly than Americans in general.

Netroots movements are organized around either liberal netroots groups or derivative organizations of progressive blogs. The liberal netroots group *MoveOn.org* was founded in 1998 by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, who were deeply frustrated with the partisan politics and waste of national focus on the impeachment of President Clinton. They launched an online petition to urge censure of the President and then let the country move on. Since then, the *MoveOn.Org Civic Action*, *MoveOn Political Action Committee (PAC)* and *MoveOn Peace Campaign* have become some of the largest Internet-based liberal civil society groups in America. With over 3.3 million members, the *MoveOn* organizations are famous for high-profile online civil and political campaigns and impressive online fundraising. In 2005, they raised over \$9 million for election candidates and sponsored political ads on television. *Daily Kos* and *MyDD.com* have grown from blogs to activist groups. The two founder bloggers, Markos and Armstrong, set up netroots groups such as *BlogPac* and *SwingStateProject*, a campaign and election news site. *BlogPac* was originally set up to raise funds for netroots-supported Democratic candidates and was reorganized in 2006 to focus on defending the quality of online activism.¹¹⁹ There have been other groups inspired by the netroots bloggers. *ActBlue* was established in 2004 to facilitate people-based online fundraising campaigns for Democrats. *ActBlue* acts as a clearinghouse, allowing everyone who wants to raise funds for Democratic candidates to use its online donation tools; the site thus replaced the original fundraising function of *BlogPac*. *Crashing the State* is an online documentary project in which bloggers Gary Abramson and Dante Atkins traveled across the country to connect with local blogging communities in their campaigns for the netroots-supported candidates. *PoliticsTV.com* was launched in 2006 to link readers to the YouTube video coverage of political events in Washington.¹²⁰ The netroots community went expanded to offline networking when they held the first Yearly Kos convention for liberal bloggers in Las Vegas in summer 2006.¹²¹

Through organic networks, various netroots groups have built up an effective, Internet-facilitated electoral infrastructure that covers key campaign functions for their preferred Democratic candidates. The rising influence of the netroots in Howard Dean's 2004 campaign was obvious, and the Democratic Party establishment realized it could not afford to ignore their new, valuable role in elections, despite netroots criticism of party leadership. The netroots simultaneously sought to “crash” the Democratic party and

¹¹⁹ <http://www.mydd.com>.

¹²⁰ http://www.politicstv.com/blg/?page_id=1176.

¹²¹ Shepard, Scott 2006, “Bloggers flex their political muscles at Las Vegas convention,” Cox News Service, June 9.

to be integrated into the party establishment.¹²² The party-netroots relationship has, not surprisingly, been “an uneasy alliance.”¹²³ The netroots were able to influence the choice of party leaders and strategy through vociferous blogging. Netroots-backed Howard Dean won over party establishment-supported Tom Vilsack and John Kerry to become the Democratic National Committee (DNC) chairman, even though the netroots do not have a vote.¹²⁴ As a result, the netroots’ favored strategy of contesting every Republican in the elections appears to have been successful in 2006, even though many in the party establishment preferred a more focused use of resources. Not being part of the party hierarchy, the netroots sometimes caused internal conflict by supporting their own favorite candidates to contest the party establishment’s choices in the Democratic primaries.

2006 saw the first string of victories for the netroots. Various netroots groups endorsed about 19 Democratic candidates in Congressional races,¹²⁵ including three Senate candidates against the Republican or independent incumbents selected as case studies in this section. They are the Senate races in Virginia, George Allen (R) versus Jim Webb (D); Montana, Conrad Burns (R) versus Jon Tester (D); and Connecticut, former Democrat Joe Lieberman (now Independent) versus Ned Lamont (D). In the end, about one-third of the netroots-backed candidates won the House and Senate seats, including the Montana and Virginia races that tipped the Senate balance to a slim Democratic majority.

Judging from the outcomes, the netroots made both right and wrong strategic decisions. They instinctively picked the right national theme—the losing war in Iraq—and used it as the single most important criterion in picking favorite candidates. Two staunch anti-war but otherwise quite conservative democrats, Webb and Tester, were drafted into candidacy by the netroots. Former Republican and Secretary of the Navy Webb, a decorated Vietnam veteran and famous author, was reluctant to run until online petitions urged him to do so.¹²⁶ Moulitsas and Armstrong were impressed when they met Tester, a Montana state senator and small organic farmer with a grassroots anti-war orientation, and encouraged him to run. The anti-war criterion, however, proved not to be decisive in all races, notably in Connecticut. The netroots successfully helped anti-war millionaire Lamont to win the Democratic Party primary against Lieberman, a long-time Democratic Senator who strongly supported the war and enjoyed high popularity in his constituency. But the netroots victory was short-lived and created bitterness within the party when Lieberman later ran as an independent and won over Lamont in the general statewide race.

Despite problems with certain political choices, the netroots were rather successful in implementing an online campaign strategy combined with offline

¹²² Armstrong and Moulitsas, 2006; Chaudhry, Lakshmi 2006. “Can Blogs Revolutionize Progressive Politics?” *In These Times*, February 6.

¹²³ Confessore, Nicholas 2006, “Bloggers and the Democrats. An Uneasy Alliance,” *The New York Times*, November 12.

¹²⁴ Armstrong and Moulitsas 2006. p.146-151.

¹²⁵ Various groups’ lists of netroots candidates largely overlapped but were not entirely the same.

¹²⁶ Shear, Michael 2006. “In blogs, an early, passionate turnout,” *The Washington Post*, March 23.

elements.¹²⁷ The network of people-based Internet campaign infrastructure functioned well in online fundraising, blogging, as an election news center, and for vlogging. *ActBlue* raised over \$5 million for 19 netroots candidates.¹²⁸ According to Fox News, *MoveOn* spent \$27 million supporting Democratic candidates in the 2006 election cycle.¹²⁹ The two novice Senate candidates started the race at a great financial disadvantage. Webb's opponent in the Democratic primary was Harris Miller, a wealthy candidate supported by the party establishment. He later went up against Republican incumbent George Allen, who was originally considered a sure-win and a potential candidate for the 2008 presidential election.¹³⁰ Tester, who taught music part-time to help cover his living expenses,¹³¹ ran a primary campaign against John Morrison, who was close to the Democratic Leadership Council, and then against the Republican incumbent Conrad Burns, who had a huge financial advantage in the general race. Online fundraising made it possible for Webb and Tester to kick-start their campaigns. When Webb's campaign momentum picked up in October, about one-third of his new donations came from the Internet.¹³²

Synergy of online and offline strategies was obvious. All three netroots Senate candidates began with big disadvantages in obtaining media attention. The liberal blogosphere promoted the candidates within the netroots community and drew the mainstream media's attention. The netroots also used the Internet to organize local, offline meetings in support for their favored candidates and other volunteer-based campaign initiatives. *MoveOn* mobilized a "phone party" campaign asking supporters to use the *MoveOn* database to call voters to get out their votes for the Democrats. Some 7 million calls were placed before election day.¹³³

The YouTube element of the netroots strategy was remarkably successful. Netroots were heavily involved in the "gotcha" video tracking of Republican opponents in public occasions. In particular, the YouTube videos of Allen's "macaca incident" and of Burns dozing off during a public debate attracted over hundreds of thousands viewers.¹³⁴ The "macaca" incident was a turning point of Allen's campaign, from the sure-win candidate to a defeat in November. In addition, the netroots employed the ethically controversial technique of "Google bombing," by manipulating meta-tags (keywords embedded in HTML programming and read by the Google search engine). By using Google bombs, negative articles about the opponents would come up at the top of

¹²⁷ Bacon, Perry Jr 2006. "The Netroots Hit Their Limits: Liberal online activists are finding you can't move elections with just modems and IM," *Time Magazine*, October 2.

¹²⁸ <http://www.actblue.com/page/netrootscandidates>.

¹²⁹ Major, Garrett 2007. "*MoveOn* Gravy Train Makes and Breaks Political Candidates," Fox News, September 18, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,297133,00.html>.

¹³⁰ Shear, Michael 2006. "Webb wins Democratic nomination in Virginia: Ex-Republican to face Allen for US Senate," *The Washington Post*, June 15; The Hotline 2006. "Virginia: He who wins over nova Dems," March 23.

¹³¹ Egan, Timothy 2006. "Fresh off the farm in Montana, a Senator to be," *The New York Times*, November 13; Continetti, Matthew 2006. "How the West was won; Is Montana Senate candidate Jon Tester the new face of the Democratic Party," *The Weekly Standard*, October 30.

¹³² Craig, Tim 2006. "Webb Has Profitable Quarter, but Allen Still Leads," *The Washington Post*, October 14, Page B5.

¹³³ "Democracy in action," www.moveon.org.

¹³⁴ By the number of viewership shown on Youtube.

the list of results of a search about the candidate. Undecided voters looking for information through Google thus were exposed first and most to negative stories about the netroots' opponents.¹³⁵

Finally, political novices Tester and Webb pushed their strong and experienced Republican opponents into the two closest Senate races by Election Day, 7 November 2006. Both won by narrow margins and tipped the balance in the Senate to 51-49 in favor of the Democrats. The victories might not have been possible without the netroots' vigorous online and offline campaigns.

The netroots' experience and the brief history of online campaigning in American elections as explained above has confirmed the key theoretical benefits of new media use in modern politics. First, it reduces the frictions in political mobilization, especially in the areas of fundraising, organization of volunteers, and voting, and by doing so helps to energize people-based politics and alleviate political apathy. Second, it helps break the oligopoly of the traditional media in political information and agenda setting. In a way, the netroots strategy showed the potential of mutual reinforcement, using the new media to influence the mass media and thereby multiplying the political impact. Third, the use of new media in politics is tied to the basic political infrastructure—in the American case, the adversarial two-party system. The strategic use of new media can help to increase competitiveness in the elections, as shown in the cases of Webb and Tester. Fourth, so far political insurgents have successfully and creatively used the new media to level the playing field against candidates supported by the traditional establishment, and who have better access to money and media attention. Last but not least, the American experience shows how important it is for civil society activists in politics to plan a quality new media strategy and build a strong network-based infrastructure in advance if they wish to affect the political outcomes effectively.

To what extent are the above elements applicable to a free, modern city with an incomplete democracy, a city such as Hong Kong?

Sisyphian struggle for Hong Kong democracy

Hong Kong, a former British colony that is now a special administrative region of China, is a free, pluralistic, semi-autonomous, modern society that is not yet democratic. The Hong Kong political system, which seeks to institutionalize vested interests, is very different from the political system in the United States. There are three superficially similar political phenomena in the United States and Hong Kong: political polarization, apathy, and competition between two unequal camps. But the substance and reasons behind these phenomena are very different in the two polities.

The Hong Kong political system bears a strong legacy of colonial administration, which China deliberately preserved when it designed the mini-constitution, the Basic Law, during the run-up to the transfer of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China in 1997. Some aspects of the old system were strengthened in the Basic Law, for example

¹³⁵ *Technology Daily* 2006. "Campaigns: Bloggers coordinate 'Google bombs' to sway voters," October 24. Rikkie L K Yeung
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further weakening of the legislature's powers and re-introduction of the appointment system to district-level councils. The Central Government ultimately controls the appointment of the SAR Chief Executive, who is in effect handpicked by Beijing, and other principal officials. The political system differs from the U.S. political system in two fundamental respects: (1) unequal representation, and (2) institutionalized executive dominance with relatively few checks and balances.

First, Hong Kong citizens do not have a uniform voting right in elections. Businessmen, and select professional and rural elites, enjoy a greater franchise than other citizens. Through the "functional constituency" system, they are given additional votes in the Legislative Council (LegCo) elections,¹³⁶ and have the right to elect representatives to the Election Committee that indirectly selects the SAR Chief Executive.¹³⁷ Even within the functional constituencies, tycoons who control multiple firms have more votes than individual professionals. The composition and electoral arrangements of the LegCo are designed to protect pro-Beijing factions. As a result, although in direct elections over 60 percent of votes consistently goes to pro-democracy candidates, less than 40 percent of the seats in the legislature are held by pro-democracy politicians. Second, China rejected the concept of checks and balances among the Hong Kong SAR executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and emphasized the continuation of an "executive-led" government, as in the colonial era. Since 1997, the legislature has had practically no power to introduce legislation and can only approve or disapprove government-sponsored bills. Although the judiciary is independent and enjoys strong public confidence, its rulings on interpretations of the Basic Law (that covers almost every aspect of citizen life) can be overridden by Beijing through "interpretation" by the National People's Congress.¹³⁸

Americans may find their practice of democracy problematic but never doubt the value of democracy, no matter what political ideology one has. In Hong Kong, however, democracy is not necessarily welcome by all, in particular those with vested interests and political power, or those who are pro-establishment conservatives. In a crude analogy, the word "democrat" carries as negative a connotation for a Hong Kong conservative as "liberal" might for an American conservative. From the pattern of past direct election results, hard-core conservatives account for roughly 20 to 30 percent of the public, depending on the political mood at the time. Accordingly, the Hong Kong civil society is politically divided into two broad camps of pro-establishment conservatives and pro-democrats. The conservative political parties and associated organizations are mostly sponsored by, linked to, or otherwise close to Beijing and the SAR government. They enjoy tremendously stronger political, organizational, and resource advantages, and can easily obtain business sponsorship.

¹³⁶ The Hong Kong Legislative Council is composed of 60 members: 30 elected through direct elections of geographical constituencies and 30 through indirect elections of functional constituencies.

¹³⁷ There are currently 800 Election Committee members who either are elected from certain functional constituencies or automatically become members by default of other capacities such as being a Hong Kong delegate of National People's Congress or as a Legislative Council member.

¹³⁸ From the handover of sovereignty in 1997 to 2006, there were three interpretations of the Basic Law from the National People's Congress that contrasted with the Hong Kong interpretation. The first interpretation was invited by the Hong Kong SAR Administration and the other two were Beijing initiated.

This situation might appear similar to the power advantage of the Republicans over the Democrats, but is quite different indeed. First, the power gap is much bigger in Hong Kong. The pro-democracy camp and their supporters are far weaker in organization and resources than the Democrats in the United States.¹³⁹ The democrats in Hong Kong comprise very loose networks of small political parties, advocacy groups, liberal trade unions, ideologues, and individual activists, who have little in common except the goal of achieving universal adult suffrage as soon as possible. They are not united under any umbrella organization, do not agree on a common strategy or similar policy positions, and do not even have common ideas about how specific aspects of the political system should undergo democratic reforms. Second, although the local media talks a lot about “partisan politics” between the pro-government and pro-democracy parties, partisan competition matters less in real Hong Kong politics. Partisan victories are at most translated into limited powers in the legislature, not into any executive powers. It is, therefore, not surprising that political party development has been slow in Hong Kong. The largest party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), which was formed by the merger of two pro-Beijing grassroots and business parties, has less than 10,000 members. The Democratic Party of Hong Kong, the biggest pro-democracy party, has only a few hundred members.

The Hong Kong political system contains traits of an authoritarian government. However, it definitely cannot afford complete authoritarianism or totalitarianism in such a highly modernized and pluralistic society. Hong Kong citizens are largely well-educated and sophisticated, and they travel around the world. The city survives upon an open economy with freedom of speech and information. It is impossible for the government not to heed the public voice. Ironically, the design of a strong executive-led government produced an SAR government with weak governing capacity that has suffered from many governance problems, a severe public confidence crisis, and a rise of civil society movements leading to the resignation of unpopular Chief Executive C.H. Tung in March 2005. Incumbent Chief Executive Donald Tsang resorted to a strategy of “legitimacy from polls but not votes.”¹⁴⁰ The current administration aims to maintain acceptable popularity ratings by avoiding controversial policies or necessary policy reforms, thereby running the risk of becoming a do-nothing government. This strategy gradually began to harm the popularity of Tsang and the government.¹⁴¹

This peculiar political system in a modern, first-world city has created the paradoxical characteristics of civic participation in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the Hong Kong civil society, derived from its civil liberties, has always been vibrant in most

¹³⁹ See also the discussion of the weaknesses of the pro-democracy groups in Lo, Shiu-hing, 2001. *Governing Hong Kong: legitimacy, communication and political decay*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Chapter 5; and *The politics of democratization in Hong Kong*, foreword by Paddy Ashdown. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997. The relationship between political party development and elections in Hong Kong can be found in Ma, Ngok and Choy, Ivan, 2003. *Xuanju zhidu de zhengzhi xiaoguo: Gangshi bili daibiaozhi de jingyan / Ma Yue, Cai Ziqiang. 選舉制度的政治效果：港式比例代表制的經驗 / 馬嶽, 蔡子強*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong City University Publisher.

¹⁴⁰ Yeung, 2006.

¹⁴¹ After an initial period of strong approval rating for about a year, the popularity ratings of Chief Executive Mr. Donald Tsang declined gradually and continuously after July 2006.

aspects of civic life including social services, education, professional development, and charity. On the other hand, there is little incentive for political participation. Ordinary Hong Kong citizens who wish to change politics find the cost of participation high but the chance of making a real difference low (much lower than in the United States). The personal stakes for civil society activists seeking democratization are even higher and the chances of success are slimmer because such activists ultimately challenge the powerful regime in Beijing. If American politics in the last decade have been characterized by two political parties of unequal power, the Hong Kong democracy movement since the 1980s has been a battle between David and Goliath, only David has no stones in hand. As a result, public participation in politics has been exceptionally gradual in Hong Kong. Hong Kong people are often thought of as being only interested in making money and as totally political apathetic. This is not quite right. Politics have always been a key element in Hong Kong life. But the road to democratic participation in Hong Kong has been particularly difficult and thus frustrating to many citizens.

Before the 1960s, political participation in Hong Kong was mainly affected by Chinese politics, the struggle between the mainland Communists and the Nationalist regime on Taiwan. Local breeds of social movements started after the 1970s with the rise of pressure groups that sought to improve standards of living, eradicate corruption, and change unpopular colonial policies. In the mid-1990s, during the final years of British rule, the human rights and equal opportunity movements produced some policy changes under a more enlightened colonial leadership. After 1997, environmental advocacy emerged after several successful campaigns and legal challenges to the government and public bodies. Many active pressure groups, human rights groups, and green groups share the broad pro-democracy ideology.

Pro-democracy activists started their Sisyphean struggle for democratic reforms in the 1980s, when China decided to take back the city and promised “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” after 1997. The first generation of democratic political parties was mostly formed by active pressure groups in the 1980s. Today, pro-democracy activists face an extremely unfavorable environment in advancing their cause due to the political system constraints and Beijing-Hong Kong dynamics. As described, such groups remain small in size, poor in resources, and weak in organization, and rely greatly on ad hoc alliances with other civil society groups in order to make some impact. Their best bet is to appeal for as much public support as possible so as to indirectly influence the two governments. However, the political realities and history, as described, have bred a sense of helplessness and the appearance of political apathy, because most Hong Kong people do not believe they can change their collective destiny.

In Hong Kong, the line between partisan and non-partisan political participation is not distinct, as it is in America. In elections, pro-democracy activists and supporters compete with pro-establishment political parties supported by the machinery of the establishment. Whether such political challenges should be defined as “partisan” or “non-partisan” is therefore unclear.

New media for post-1997 activism

In the United States, the strategic use of new media has partly overcome some of the major obstacles in achieving people-based democracy, in particular political apathy and unequal competition (between the Republicans and Democrats). Although the source and substance of these two kinds of obstacles to political participation are different in Hong Kong, as explained above, new media have still proven useful in modern Asian society since Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule in 1997. In fact, all the constraints on Hong Kong civil society activists that have been described—Beijing's position, the unequal elections system, poor resources, and a less-than-friendly mass media environment—imply that affordable and easily accessible new media tools should hold great potential to reach out and mobilize public support in democracy and social movements. Furthermore, it so happens that the rapid expansion of digital technologies since the late 1990s has coincided with the rise of political activism in Hong Kong after 1997. Indeed, the use of new media is emerging in political participation, especially since 2003. New media have facilitated the revival of civic spirit and the sense of “doing something to make a difference,” but much of the potential of new media has not yet been realized, and progress lags far behind than that seen in the United States.

Soon after 1997, Hong Kong experienced many painful crises—a financial crisis, economic recessions, a property market bust, and epidemic outbreaks—aggravated by the SAR government's failures in governance and policy-making. Anger at government performance grew. Public trust in the non-democratically formed leadership was low. Hong Kong became “A City of Protests,” as the foreign press reported. Many felt that the city was going backward on all fronts: economic, cultural and political. A new sense of civil society activism, however, gradually grew out of the mood of desperation, disappointment, and care for the future of Hong Kong, and has been manifested in various themes including: green causes (such as banning environmentally harmful government or corporate projects), cultural and heritage conservation (particularly opposition to demolition of historical architecture and cultural sites), upholding core universal values (democracy, the rule of law, transparency, fairness, freedoms of expression, human rights, etc.),¹⁴² and social justice issues (anti-poverty, minimum labor wage, etc). These themes do not represent an entirely new agenda, but rather a new focus and novel mode of participation.

In the past, social movements were mostly focused on sectoral interests, livelihood, or rights issues and participation was mostly limited to activists. The new activism transcends traditional classes or sectors. It is often value-driven and public participation can be across sectors. A common thread that runs through various civil society causes is the stronger demand for democracy and civic participation in government policy-making, as part of a solution to the inadequate legitimacy of the SAR government. Such activism is characterized by small advocacy groups challenging the government or big business. Cyber power has emerged in this new activism in a bottom-

¹⁴² The core values proposed in the “Hong Kong core values” campaign by some 300 academics and professionals are: democracy, human rights, rule of law, fairness, social justice, peace and compassion, integrity and transparency, plurality, respect for individuals, and upholding professionalism.

up, grassroots, and often spontaneous fashion. The turning point was the anti-government protest by over 500,000 people on July 1, 2003, the commemoration day of the handover to China. The event took political participation in Hong Kong to the next level and stimulated further use of new media in civil society activism.

Spontaneous online mobilization in the anti-Article 23 movement. Under exceptional circumstances, the Internet became an “accidental hero” in the July 1st rally. In the spring of 2003, the mysterious SARS epidemic, which originated in China, broke out in Hong Kong. From March to mid-June, the vibrant city almost stood still behind surgical masks. All classes in schools and universities were closed. Business activities were dramatically reduced. Many citizens, young people in particular, stayed at home. They spent more time listening to radio and watching television, and relied more on the Internet to communicate with each other. The SARS outbreak provided a period of silence before a political storm in which the Internet would play an important role.

Before the SARS outbreak, a mass opposition campaign against the government’s national security bill was already in the making. The unpopular legislation was to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law and outlaw activities such as subversion, succession, and treason. The provisions proposed were criticized as vaguely defined, giving too much power to the law enforcement authorities and too broad a scope of interpretation to the Chinese authorities. In short, the national security bill triggered the worst fear of Hong Kong citizens, especially middle-class professionals and educated people: the fear that they would lose their freedoms. The community also detested the way that the government handled the legislative process, which was criticized as “bulldozing” the bill without genuine, proper, public consultation and siding too much with the pro-Beijing groups in the debate. An anti-23 campaign, led by barristers, democratic politicians, human rights activists, religious leaders, and journalists, started in late 2002. On 15 December 2002, about 50,000 people (as estimated by the organizer) participated in the first peaceful mass protest against Article 23.¹⁴³

During the SARS outbreak, public campaign activities against Article 23 could hardly be conducted. Campaigners originally planned another protest in early 2003. But they had to postpone it to July 1, just a few days before the Article 23 bill would most likely be passed by the pro-establishment majority in the legislature. During the silent SARS period, nonetheless, anger toward the Hong Kong government built up faster than ever. In addition to the national security law, people were angry at the government’s failure to contain the spread of the epidemic from the mainland. SARS claimed more lives in Hong Kong (299) than in any other city in the world, including medical professionals. Public discontent was vented through the Internet. People exchanged many jokes and criticisms of the local administration, and participated in Internet chat-rooms to discuss Article 23. When the SARS outbreak eased in June, many people e-mailed their personal networks of family, friends and colleagues, urging them to join the July 1st protest.

¹⁴³ The number of demonstrators is always a subject of contention in Hong Kong. The Police said only 12,000 protesters participated on 15 December 2002. *Apple Daily*, “反對 23 條我們去遊行” (We took to the streets to oppose Article 23), 15 December 2002; *Apple Daily*, “上周遊行祥和昨日集會爆粗” (The protest last week was peaceful but this week was rude), 23 December 2002.

Spontaneous virtual campaigns against Chief Executive Tung and the Article 23 legislation flourished, but there was only one well-known activist-organized website focused on the issue. *Article23.org.hk* was set up by former legislator Cyd Ho to provide information and research to “counter official misinformation and misrepresentation”¹⁴⁴ on the national security law. Other online campaigns were almost exclusively efforts of ordinary citizens and political unknowns. Two examples are introduced here.

An influential Internet initiative at the time was *RebuildHK.com*.¹⁴⁵ An individual commercial website designer, who found himself with plenty of free time during SARS, built the website to express disappointment at the government. The *RebuildHK* website contained games and jokes about Tung’s administration. He also produced a music video that struck a common chord for many Hong Kong citizens.¹⁴⁶ Using the classic 1970s Canto-pop song, “Under the Lion Rock,” the video flashed back to many sad post-1997 incidents, such as SARS and provocative quotations from officials on the national security bill. The video clip encouraged viewers to take to the streets on July 1. It became an instant Internet hit, and even in those pre-YouTube days it quickly snowballed through cyberspace via e-mail, and was downloaded thousands of times before the protests. The video became a popular tool for citizens to mobilize their personal networks to join for the July 1st protest. Other new cyber grassroots networks were formed during this time, such as the “Anti-23 Newsgroup,” a popular chat-room hosted on a commercial website.¹⁴⁷ The newsgroup members came to know each other through the chat-room. They joined the mass protest on July 1 and met in person for the first time there; they then participated in subsequent mass rallies together.

The surprisingly large and peaceful turnout on 1st July did not immediately curb the government’s determination to pass the national security law, which was regarded by the Central Government as a patriotic mission. This led to a very tense week for Hong Kong, as people feared the government’s defiance of the popular will might result in non-peaceful outcomes as the sentiment heated up between the opposing camps (anti-Article 23 vs. pro-Beijing.) Some believed that the only chance of resolving the deadlock was for a pro-government party to retract support for the law. That could only be the Liberal Party, which is pro-government and pro-business but not of traditional “leftist” roots. So many middle-class professionals e-mailed the Liberal Party to make the request that its server crashed. Soon, the Liberal Party chairman resigned from Mr. Tung’s top advisory cabinet, indicating his party’s decision not to vote for Article 23. Consequently, the Hong Kong government withdrew the bill without a timetable for re-introduction.

¹⁴⁴ As stated in the website which is still accessible as of February 27, 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Information about the Rebuild.com is based on personal interviews with the webmaster in February 2005 and follow-up personal communications with him up to November 2006.

¹⁴⁶ The background music of the video was a local song about spirit of unity of Hong Kong people.

¹⁴⁷ The information of “e-Politics 21” is based on Interview with web-activist from e-Politics on 21 February 2005 and the website.

The impact of spontaneous online mobilization in the July 1st rally can not be quantified. However, it was clear that the unprecedented scale of political participation¹⁴⁸ was a result of spontaneity, not organization.¹⁴⁹ The rally organizers admitted that although they had good experience in protest logistics (booking venues, complying with local regulations, liaison with the police, recruiting voluntary patrols, etc.), they simply did not have the network to mobilize beyond a few hundred people.¹⁵⁰ The huge turnout was the product of spontaneous mobilization spurred on by the societal mood of the time (and further provoked by statements from government officials). And the Internet was a convenient and cost-free tool for all in the spontaneous mobilization.

After July 1, the *RebuildHK* webmaster became an active supporter of the democracy movement and pro-democracy politicians. The popular *RebuildHK* became a symbol of the new utility of cyberpower, and thus a target of technical sabotage by opponents. Just before the LegCo elections in 2004, *RebuildHK* was attacked by an untraceable remote attack of sudden upsurge of traffic. The webmaster closed it down and later decided to maintain only a small operation due to his limited time and resources. As for the “Anti-23 Newsgroup,” the commercial hosting company decided to close it down for unknown reasons. In August 2003, some of the newsgroup members bought their own server to set up a group called “e-Politics 21” (www.e-politics21.org) to sustain their e-community. The group was subsequently registered under Hong Kong law and sought donations to continue support for democracy and other social movements such as the annual July 1st demonstrations. e-Politics 21 continued operation and set up a new blog in 2006. The chat-room remains active. However, the organizers have not expanded their influence much beyond the group, as indicated by very few comments on the blog.

Online and mobile mobilization in democracy movements. The examples above show that it is difficult to sustain new media initiatives in the Hong Kong democracy movement. Nonetheless, spontaneous mobilization via new technologies in mass campaigns has become standard practice. The tools used have expanded from the Internet (e-mail, chat-rooms and websites) to mobile text messaging (SMS).

The July 1, 2003 march added new momentum to the democracy movement. Mass rallies for universal suffrage were joined by tens of thousands of citizens in January and July 2004. July 1st mass rallies became an annual ritual, though the turnout dropped to thousands after the unpopular Mr. Tung’s March 2005 resignation. In late 2005, his successor Mr. Tsang put forward a conservative constitutional reform package for 2007-

¹⁴⁸ The last largest rallies were those in support of the democratic movement in Beijing in 1989. The government reported participation by over a million in those rallies. However, they were about the events in China, not aimed at opposing the Hong Kong (then colonial) government.

¹⁴⁹ This is also confirmed by a survey on the rally participants. See, Chan, Joseph Man, and Robert Chung 2003. Who could mobilise 500,000 people to take to the streets? The impact of the grand march on political communications in Hong Kong, HKU POP Site, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Public Opinion Programme. Available: <http://hkupop.hku.hk/> (accessed on 01.08.2005).

¹⁵⁰ Based on interviews with current and former spokesmen two organizers: the Civil Human Rights Front and the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor in February 2005.

2008.¹⁵¹ Although the package might benefit the electoral prospects for pro-democracy parties, people demanding real democratic reforms concluded that it would twist the system further. Once again, the community reacted strongly to a time-critical event. Activists aimed not so much at persuading Mr. Tsang to offer more reform but to ensure that the pro-democracy legislators would not vote for the proposals. On December 14, 2005, tens of thousands participated in a pro-democracy protest to oppose the government package.

In all these rallies, spontaneous mobilization via e-mail and SMS was increasingly used. In some of the July 1 rallies, banners reading “Netizens for Democracy” were seen on the streets. Pro-democracy campaigners and civil society groups also began to expand their use of digital mobilization. Groups with a membership database (such as trade and teacher unions), could easily use e-mail or SMS to mobilize members to participate. This was a problem, however, for new organizations with few or no members. Some groups were (overly) worried about the privacy issues of collecting e-mail addresses and mobile phone numbers.¹⁵² Some individual supporters overcame the issue by launching their own SMS campaigns. They designed attractive slogans and interesting short text messages to encourage participation in the movements or rallies, and then sent them to their personal circles for further forwarding via mobile phones. The use of such SMS was particularly apparent in the December 2005 rally.

Emergence of Internet radio and activist journalism. Beyond pro-democracy and social movements, the emergence of digital democracy in Hong Kong is also manifested in the emergence of Internet radio and activist journalism, in response to the dissatisfaction of increasing media self-censorship and narrowing public space for alternative political views.

The first and most popular Internet radio site in Hong Kong is *Hiradio.net*, established in April 2000.¹⁵³ It was set up by several young people who are interested in new media and disappointed with the mainstream media. *Hiradio* is a non-profit website of independent music, cultural news, and talk shows for young people, with many up-to-date online functions such as podcasting. The radio content is provided by regular hosts and the website is administered by a single volunteer. Although most programs are non-political, *Hiradio* makes no secret of its active support for the democracy movement and human rights issues. It produces and broadcasts annual June 4th memorial programs, promotes pro-democracy rallies, posts news about the anti-Article 23 campaign and other social movements, and conducts live webcasts of pro-democracy events. The daily hit rate grew from about 300 in April 2000 to over 20,000 recently. This is already exceptionally high among local web-radio and civic society websites, probably due to its longer history and niche appeal to young people with cultural interests.

¹⁵¹ The package proposed to add a small and equal number of seats to the legislature from both direct elections and functional constituencies. The composition of the later would include electors appointed by the government.

¹⁵² The information was based on personal communication with leaders of those groups.

¹⁵³ Information about the *Hiradio.net* is based on personal interviews with the webmaster in February 2005 and follow-up personal communications with her up to December 2006.

After the sudden departure of certain traditional radio hosts in 2004 (see Part 2 of this paper), more Internet radio stations were founded. Prominent examples include *Radio 7-1*, *People's Radio Hong Kong* (PRHK), and *Radio A45* (recently renamed *CP web-radio*). All these are pro-democracy Internet radio sites established in light of self-censorship by the mainstream broadcasting media. Named for the July 1st rally, *Radio 7-1* was set up in November 2004 by a group of middle-age professionals and businessmen who have been active in social movements since the early 1980s.¹⁵⁴ The website includes weekly political commentaries, soft culture programs and discussions of niche social issues. *Radio 7-1* also provides the technical platform for live-casting *Radio Pigeon*, the Internet radio arm of the Democratic Party. *PRHK* was established by people with similar backgrounds whose political views are more progressive and overtly critical of Beijing and Hong Kong governments. *PRHK* stopped operation after 2007.

Radio A45, the forerunner to *CP web-radio*, part of the Civic Party's new media arm, was set up by the former Article 45 Concern Group (A45) in 2004. A45 was composed of top-notch barristers and lawyers who became politically active in the anti-Article 23 movement. (The former Article 23 Concern Group was regarded as very influential in the national security law debate). A45 barristers are a new political force in the post-2003 pro-democracy movement. The four key A45 barristers got elected into the LegCo in 2004. The *Radio A45* programs hosted by those political stars attracted fairly wide mass media coverage. Later, the A45 members formed the Civic Party, a new pro-democracy political party that has consolidated civil society activists from different policy areas sharing a common vision for democracy. Apart from running an Internet radio site, the A45 barristers also founded a free, small-circulation monthly paper (with an online edition) in 2005. The average daily hit rate of A45 Monthly is less than 500 but some of its headline interviews have attracted follow-up coverage in the mainstream press.

The regular hit rates of the political Internet radio sites are not high. The average daily hit rate of *Radio 7-1* was about 600, below 1,000 for *PRHK*, and even less for *CP web-radio*. The download rates for popular programs were better. The more successful *Radio 7-1* programs were downloaded 2,500 times per week, on average. A few high-profile interviews on the former Radio A45 attracted over 10,000 downloads, often after the mainstream press had covered the stories. Except for *CP web-radio*, all other Internet radio sites in Hong Kong cannot afford regular program marketing. For example, *Hiradio* only e-mails members about special events such as democracy rallies or June 4th memorial activities.

The idea of Internet-based people journalism, which has succeeded in the South Korean case of *Ohmynews*, is also being experimented with in Hong Kong. The *Inmediahk* website is an activist version of people journalism—the members participate, comment, and report on social issues and movements. *Inmediahk* has no organizational linkage to the international umbrella of independent media centers (“indymedia”),¹⁵⁵ which became famous after reporting on and participating in the protests against the

¹⁵⁴ The information about Radio 7-1 is based on email interviews with a founding member of the website.

¹⁵⁵ See the international independent media (<http://www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml>).

World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999. But the Hong Kong version shares the ideological tendencies of other indymedia. They promote grassroots democracy, criticize globalization, and are concerned about labor, human rights, and social justice issues. *Inmediahk* is considered relatively “radical left” in economically and socially-conservative Hong Kong. *Inmediahk* members covered the last WTO meeting held in Hong Kong in December 2005 and participated in the anti-WTO protests. Recently, it was a leading group in a protest against the government demolition of the Star Ferry clock tower, which most Hong Kong citizens wished to preserve as part of their local heritage.¹⁵⁶ During the protest, they resisted arrest by the police. The clock tower was eventually taken down,¹⁵⁷ but the group later continued the struggle by protesting the government’s next target for demolition, the Queen’s Pier.¹⁵⁸ This militant protest, however, also could not stop the demolition.

Slow progress of political blogging. The influence of political blogging in Hong Kong is much weaker than in the United States, even though social blogging is equally popular. As explained in Part 2, an inadequate textual culture is one reason for the slow development of political blogging in the city. There are few public affairs blogs and no influential political bloggers as there are in the States, but there are a few worth mentioning. In June 2005, *Civic Express* was established as a joint project of the civil society think-tank Civic Exchange and an IT company, as an early experiment to introduce public affairs blogs to Hong Kong.¹⁵⁹ It has syndicated 10 regular bloggers, including a few well-known commentators and other occasional contributors, to write for the blog. In the first eighteen months or so, the growth of readership was steady but slow, at below 1,000 hits per day. More recently, and especially around the time of the March 2007 Chief Executive election, the average daily hit rate rose to 4,000 or more. After mid-2007, *Civic Express* bloggers became quite inactive, however.

As suggested earlier, political cynicism in Hong Kong creates a market for humor in political discourse. Humorous political blogs have therefore received more attention than serious political blogs in Hong Kong. In *Civic Express*, one fairly popular blogger was “Sir Donald,” a fictitious character imitating incumbent Chief Executive Donald Tsang.¹⁶⁰ Another recent example that caught the press attention was *TongTong Henry*, a funny blog imitating former Financial Secretary Henry Tong after he put forward an unpopular goods and services tax (GST) proposal for public consideration. Using a satirical approach of pretending to read the minds of those top government leaders, the two fictional blogs indirectly criticized the officials and government policies. Since 2007, a liberal political blogger *Lam Kei* has become fairly famous for his satirical lyrics, set to

¹⁵⁶ *Inmediahk*, 記十二月六至十三日的天星運動起承 (The diary of Star Ferry movement – 6 to 13 December) http://inmediahk.net/public/article?item_id=179295&group_id=11.

¹⁵⁷ Ming Pao, “與警激烈抵抗 示威者被抬走”(Protestors resisted and were removed by the Police), December 18, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ See article at *InmediaHK*, http://www.inmediahk.net/public/article?item_id=178938.

¹⁵⁹ The author is a team member of the *Civic Express* project. Information about the site is obtained from the website administrator.

¹⁶⁰ Mr. Tsang accepted British knighthood just before 1997. But the title “Sir” is not officially used because of political inappropriateness after the handover of Hong Kong’s sovereignty to China.

Canto-pop tunes, that mock government officials and criticize the lack of progress in democratic development.

Gradual rise in elections. Whereas the use of the Internet is already routine in American election campaigns, new media have been only sporadically used in Hong Kong elections. A gradual rise in online campaigning is expected in future elections, though it will likely be less sophisticated than online campaigning in the United States. Similar to the American experience, new media in Hong Kong have been more often used in competitive races and races in which insurgent candidates challenging opponents with superior resources or support from the establishment find stronger incentives to use the new media.

In Hong Kong, all of the major political parties have websites, but interactive functions on these sites are limited. None of the parties accept online donations. Some provide e-newsletter subscriptions and chat-rooms, but these features have not been very popular. Two democratic parties provide Internet radio. The Pro-Beijing party DAB spent a lot of money on its website, which contains a great deal of content including official music and video downloads, but there is little interactivity except for an online forum and e-member registration. During the past elections, no political party used its website for active online electioneering. Nor did all the candidates have election websites. For those who did, their websites were mainly “e-brochures”. Some candidates used e-mail in the campaigns. The paltry use of new media in Hong Kong elections is partly the result of slow recognition and little imagination by most candidates.

More significantly, the electoral system and campaign rules impose structural constraints. Most functional constituencies, especially those composed of several dozen or a few hundred corporate voters, are designed to be uncompetitive. Many candidates do not even need e-mail in order to reach their small constituencies. It also makes little sense for those candidates to spend money on new media efforts to contact voters when they either run unopposed or meet their voters in golf or yacht clubs. Only in those few constituencies composed of individual professionals such as the Education or Information Technology constituencies would the use of e-mail, SMS, or websites be meaningful. As regards the electoral regulations, all content on the candidates’ websites, e-mail messages, and supporters’ websites are subject to declaration, filing, and expense caps, thereby creating administrative burdens and disincentives for the candidates to initiate online electioneering in addition to conventional campaigns.

After 2003, some civil society actors and candidates explored using new media in elections. During the 2004 LegCo elections, more candidates than ever before posted websites. But these were mostly e-brochures with minimal interactivity, except for a few sites such as that of Sin Chung-kai (Democratic Party) from the IT constituency, who wrote blogs on his website. There was also a non-partisan website *Vote04.hk*, another Civic Exchange project, seeking to motivate voting on the basis of informed choices. The now-defunct *Vote04.hk* provided election surveys by district constituencies, facts about the electoral system, a forum, and cartoons, and initiated an SMS slogan competition for get-out-the-vote (GOTV) purposes. The pilot project was self-assessed as modestly successful given the limited resources, publicity, and time for implementation, according

to an internal evaluation.¹⁶¹ The average daily hit rate grew to over 1,020 in the week before the election. SMS was also used in 2004 to mobilize voting.

Voter turnout in the 2004 election was a record-breaking 55.6 percent. There were special political incentives to use new media to mobilize voters in the 2004 elections as part of the democracy movement. The election was an opportunity for the silent majority in the community to express its demand for a faster pace of democratization. According to the Basic Law, that election opened six more directly elected seats, thus making it theoretically possible for the pro-democracy camp to take half of the legislative chamber. That was also the first election after the July 1, 2003 rally and Beijing's formal rejection (through an interpretation of the Basic Law) of the possible implementation of universal suffrage by 2007-2008. However, in spite of the rather successful vote mobilization and the fact that over 60 percent of the popular votes went to pro-democracy candidates, they could only maintain some 40 percent of seats under the political system.

In December 2006, online campaigning and SMS-based GOTV efforts were used in several competitive constituencies in the subsector elections for the 800-member Election Committee. The public used to pay very minimal attention to this small-circle game, in which only 220,000 individuals or corporate representatives are qualified to vote to elect an Election Committee for selecting the Chief Executive, who in any case would ultimately be handpicked by Beijing. Except for the first election held in 1996, before the handover, the Chief Executive was returned unopposed in all the past elections. Voter turnout in the subsector elections was thus very low (below 20 percent). The 2006 subsector elections were slightly different, however. Alan Leong of the Civic Party declared to run for Chief Executive in order to create competition, despite a zero chance of his victory under the current system, in which the winner is, *de facto*, Beijing's choice. The first hurdle for Leong to join the race was to obtain at least 100 nominations from the Election Committee. The pro-democracy effort to reach that milestone gave political significance to the subsector elections. However, only constituencies composed of individual voters were competitive such as the IT, Accountancy, and Education subsectors. Accordingly, new media tools were used only in those constituencies. In the IT race, all of the candidates posted websites, and some launched e-mail campaigns and blogs.¹⁶² In the accountancy constituencies, SMS was used on election day to get out the vote.¹⁶³ Consequently, the overall voter turnout (27 percent) was higher than before.¹⁶⁴ 83 percent of the candidates supported by the pro-democracy camp won their races and obtained 114 seats in the Election Committee, in spite of the system bias.¹⁶⁵ In quite a number of subsectors, totally new faces endorsed by the pro-democracy camp beat conservative veterans. The rather successful voter mobilization efforts for the subsector elections gave Alan Leong an entry ticket to the Chief Executive election in March 2007.

¹⁶¹ Civic Exchange 2005. Vote 04 Pilot Project Evaluation Report.

¹⁶² See examples of two groups of candidates, Itvoice (<http://www.itvoice.hk/>) and IT20 (<http://www.it20.hk/>).

¹⁶³ Ming Pao, "SMS拉票" (Get-out-the-vote by SMS), December 11, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Ming Pao 選委選舉 27%投票勝上屆 (Election Committee Voter turn out at 27%, better than last elections), December 11, 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Ming Pao 泛民大勝勢奪入場券 (Pan-democrats won by landslide and secured sufficient nominations (for CE Election), December 12, 2006.

Compared to the U.S. experience, the adoption of online and SMS electioneering in the 2004 and 2006 elections in Hong Kong was not very strategic and was limited in scale and scope. Even so, the Hong Kong cases confirm two important functions of new media in modern politics (albeit in an incomplete democracy). First, new media may reduce friction in political mobilization and GOTV efforts, and thus enhance civic participation and alleviate the negative impact of political apathy. In the context of the Hong Kong political culture explained in Part 2, the use of e-mail and mobile phones for mobilization has an added advantage. People may choose not to be public about their political preference. Nor do they need to sacrifice much time or energy for political participation. They only need to send an e-mail or SMS to mobilize their own family and friends so as to make a difference in elections and mass rallies. Second, where the races are competitive, candidates have a stronger incentive to use all kinds of campaign tactics, including employing online and SMS means to mobilize voters. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the political outcomes of the elections in 2004 and 2006 were largely due to the community's strong demand for a more equal, competitive and fair political system. Hong Kong citizens and voters do not want to give up the few chances they have to speak up.

Following the positive experience in the 2004 and 2006 elections, there are clear signs that more candidates and groups will use new media for election campaigning and GOTV purposes, particularly in competitive races. In 2007, three elections were held: the "selection" of the chief executive in March 2007, District Council elections, and a LegCo by-election in December 2007. New media initiatives were actively adopted by candidates in the chief executive "selection" and LegCo by-election, which were either prominent or competitive races.

In the March 2007 chief executive election, democrat Alan Leong's participation in a losing game was meant to be part of the democracy movement. Although no one ever doubted that current Chief Executive Donald Tsang, supported by Beijing, would win the election (and he did), a certain degree of "competition" was created for publicity and the two candidates' performances were positively received by the public. This little element of competition encouraged Tsang and Leong to make some effort to use new media.

As a doomed-to-fail challenger to incumbent Donald Tsang, Alan Leong launched an election website with online videos and photos in December 2006 and started to blog about his participation in the race.¹⁶⁶ Mr. Tsang's campaign responded by incorporating videos into his election website, and he also blogged for the first time.¹⁶⁷ This was in contrast to the 2005 chief executive election, in which Tsang ran unopposed and his election website was a bare-bones e-brochure that was closed right after the election. In 2007, Leong's blog was the more popular of the two. It achieved a total hit count of over 760,000, with a daily average of a few thousand hits, and attracted many reader comments. Leong's website is slightly more interactive than Tsang's, but still did not contain important functions such as online fundraising. As soon as the election was over,

¹⁶⁶ Leong's election website is at <http://www.competitionforce.hk/> and his blog at <http://hk.myblog.yahoo.com/alanleong-force>.

¹⁶⁷ Tsang's election website is at http://www.donald-tsang.com/home_c.html.

Tsang closed his website, but Leong still maintains his as part of the continued movement for universal suffrage. The experience in the chief executive election may be a positive sign for political blog development in Hong Kong, in particular for blogs that cover major public issues. This has no doubt encouraged further development of new media strategies in the coming elections, as happened in the LegCo bye-election for the Hong Kong Island constituency between two former senior government officials in December 2007.

The race between former chief secretary Mrs. Anson Chan, who has always enjoyed high popularity even after her retirement, and former security secretary Mrs. Regina Ip, who was severely criticized in the national security legislation controversy and resigned after the July 1st rally—in addition to six other candidates who were mostly political unknowns—was regarded the most competitive in recent history of Hong Kong elections. Interestingly, the race between the two establishment figures whose policy platforms were strikingly similar and moderate represented another symbolic ‘battle’ between pro-democracy values (Chan was supported by almost all democrats) and pro-Beijing values (Ip was backed by China’s Liaison Office in Hong Kong, all pro-Beijing groups and, as an open secret, the Tsang administration.) The two main candidates employed many new media tools in their campaigns, particularly to reach out young voters. Both launched websites and blogs, joined the Facebook community, and used SMS in order to get out the vote. Ip was arguably more proactively involved in her online campaign, due to her personal interest in information technology policy matters. But Chan finally won the race, which featured good voter turnout. The new media initiatives bore relatively little significance on the election outcome but were of demonstrative value for future elections, as it was the first time when the candidates from both camps actively employed a wide range of new media tools in their campaigns. The result of the election was largely determined by the Hong Kong people’s political values.

However, in the District Council elections that took place shortly before the LegCo by-election, very little new media strategy was seen. The district constituencies are so small that virtual efforts are irrelevant; personal networks in the neighborhoods are far more important. In these elections, the pro-Beijing DAB and associated candidates won a majority of seats largely due to their superior resources that have been put into building much better district networks, and long years of neighborhood service. As such, the development of new media campaigns in Hong Kong will likely be confined to competitive races or large constituencies.

Special challenges. The use of the Internet by Hong Kong civil society groups, notably pro-democracy activists, faces special hurdles that are seldom reported in the United States. First, many well-known websites containing information about either democracy or democratic politicians are blocked from access in mainland China. Even Hiradio, which is mainly an online music channel, has been blocked since it aired a June 4th memorial program in 2004. Second, the online initiatives of pro-democracy groups and parties have experienced cases of sabotage, fraud, and hacking whereas few, if any, cases of have been reported by pro-Beijing groups. For example, in addition to the aforementioned sabotage of RebuildHK, the Civic Party complained about individuals hacking into their e-mail accounts, sending defamatory scam emails, setting up websites

using the party's name, and releasing internal party documents while claiming to be party members.¹⁶⁸ One can only speculate as to the sources and motives of such Internet attacks. The prevalence of such attacks, however, also indicates that many pro-democracy groups have not paid sufficient attention to ensure basic Internet security, nor do they have adequate resources to do so.

Part 4: Strategies, impacts, and future issues

The American and Hong Kong case studies presented in Part 3 illustrate similar and dissimilar experiences of using new media in political participation and shed light on its positive and negative impacts. It is beyond doubt that the American netroots movement has advanced far ahead of Hong Kong's civil society and pro-democracy leaders in the strategic formulation, organization, and creative use of new media, and has made a more significant impact on political and electoral outcomes. The gap in progress can be explained by the differences in political systems, social and cultural environments, and the nature of civil society, in addition to the larger relative number of strategic-minded and committed new media activists in the United States. That said, the spontaneous but less organized use of the Internet and mobile technologies in the Hong Kong democracy and social movements has also proven highly effective in political mobilization and has illustrated the collective power and wisdom of ordinary citizens at critical moments. The experiences of both societies have confirmed the key theoretical benefits of new media in enhancing political participation in modern democracy, as explained in Part 1.

In this final Part, the common themes in the American and Hong Kong cases will be analyzed first. This is followed by a discussion of the contrasting approaches and divergent impacts of the use of new media in the political participation of the two societies. Then, several issues of concern will be raised before we look briefly into the future prospects of new media in modern politics in the United States and Hong Kong.

Common themes

In all cases, the potential efficacy of new media use in politics rises with the level of societal grievance. New media is most influential when the public is angry with the current state of political affairs—whether the government, the political elite, or the political system—and when the desire of ordinary people for change is strong. In the United States, the precipitating factor was the general grievances against the Bush administration's policy of the war in Iraq and the unsatisfactory performance of the Republican-dominated Congress, among others. In Hong Kong, it was the anger toward the poor performance of the SAR administration, the growing bias and self-censorship of the mainstream media, and above all, the denial of any progress towards a reasonable political system for a modern free city.

In the American and Hong Kong experiences, the major benefits of new media in modern politics are: (a) reduction of frictions in political mobilization; (b) empowerment

¹⁶⁸ The information is from personal communications with Civic Party staff and press reports.
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of ordinary citizens and reduction of political apathy; (c) serving as an alternative to the (often biased) oligopoly of traditional media; (d) reduction of biases in an uneven political playing field by enabling political insurgents to compete more effectively; and (f) rapid formation of effective civil society networks in the absence of formal organization.

Reduce frictions and alleviate apathy. The use of new media has been proven to reduce frictions in political mobilization, whether in elections or social movements. In America, online electioneering has been fully established as a standard component of election campaigns, especially in the areas of fundraising, organization of volunteers, and voter mobilization. In addition, the advanced development of political blogging and the emergence of vlogging have been instrumental in both positive campaigning (setting new agendas, introducing lesser known candidates, online interaction with voters) and negative campaigning (exposing scandals, attacking or smearing opponents), as illustrated in the 2006 mid-term elections. In Hong Kong, the use of the Internet and SMS communications has also been highly effective and timely for mobilizing participation in mass protests and voting, even though other beneficial uses of new media (especially online donations and political blogging) have yet to be fully developed.

In both societies, technological developments have empowered ordinary citizens to participate more in politics via convenient and low-cost new media. With one click, anyone can forward an e-mail or SMS mobilization message to encourage their family and friends to vote in an election (as in the U.S. and Hong Kong cases) or to join a protest rally (as in the Hong Kong democracy rallies). In a few minutes, anyone can make a small donation to support a candidate (as in the American case). In a non-democratic society such as Hong Kong, where political participation against the government or the current political system entails a higher personal cost, new media provides an opportunity for people to engage in a limited amount of activism with relative anonymity. In short, the use of new media can reduce the cost of political participation to each individual and thus alleviate political apathy. In cases where mobilization facilitated by new media is successful (as in the netroots movement in the United States and the mass rallies in Hong Kong), participants are further encouraged to take action again in the future. The result is a self-sustaining energization of people-based politics and renewal of civic spirit.

Alternative to biased mainstream media. The American and Hong Kong experiences have also confirmed that new media can be used as an alternative to the traditional media as suggested in Part 1. The mainstream media in the United States and Hong Kong is often an oligopoly of big businesses biased toward commercial interest and mainstream politics, and possibly political biased in favor of those in power. In Hong Kong, to a much greater extent than in the United States, there is also the problem of media self-censorship. Through creative use of the Internet and wireless networks, civil society activists may—to a degree—alleviate this censorship by providing independent political information and setting an alternative agenda. Furthermore, the netroots movement showed in the 2006 U.S. mid-term elections that an effective strategy should leverage the potential of new media to influence mass media coverage, so as to multiply the political impacts.

A tool for insurgent politics and reducing bias in competition. Another common theme in the United States and Hong Kong is that new media have proven to be a suitable tool for people-based political insurgency that challenges the establishment. Through the use of new media, structural biases in political competition can be reduced or bypassed. By strategically and creatively using new media, political insurgents or activists who have limited power and resources can compete better with those who enjoy stronger political power, better access to money, and more media attention. In America, the netroots successfully launched internal opposition to the Democratic Party leadership and external challenges against Republican incumbents. In Hong Kong, pro-democracy groups and supporters sought to overturn unpopular policies and demand democratic reforms. In both cases, new media were used effectively to mobilize people and organize public support. As such, new media helped to level the playing field between the grassroots and the establishment in political competition, whether within a political party, in elections in a democratic system, or in elections and movements in an incomplete democracy.

This is not to say that the establishment cannot use the new media effectively. Perhaps, the establishment can use it even better given greater resources, manpower, and ability to attract talented individuals. Nonetheless, as the case studies show, those in power (whether the Republicans in the United States, or the SAR government or pro-Beijing parties in Hong Kong) have more cards to play and better access to (or relationships with) the mainstream media. Therefore, they often have less incentive to use new media and tend to regard it as only one of many viable communication channels. Moreover, establishment politicians are usually bound by bureaucracy and a rigid organizational culture, which are often at odds with the versatility required for a new media strategy.

Effective networking at critical times. American netroots and Hong Kong pro-democracy supporters have used the Internet and mobile communications to establish powerful networks in the absence of traditional organizational hierarchies, especially at critical moments. Networks did not develop in exactly the same way in the two societies, however. The comprehensive and effective netroots networks in the United States were established under deliberate strategies of collective wisdom (elaboration below). The cyber-networks for pro-democracy and social movements in Hong Kong were formed spontaneously on a base of social and personal networks. In the anti-Article-23 case, the Internet provided an alternate platform for organizing civil society actions during the SARS outbreak, when other ways of organizing became difficult. The virtual campaigns filled the gaps when the civil society found it impossible to launch physical campaigns. Through the Internet, efforts of single persons were maximized even without formal collective organization.

Contrasting approaches

While they share common themes, the American and Hong Kong case studies present very different scenarios of new media use in politics. As explained, the adoption of new media in U.S. elections has been more strategic, comprehensive, and creative than in Hong Kong, where new media tools have been spontaneously used in political

mobilization. The primary reason for this difference lies in the contrasting political systems, infrastructures, social-cultural factors, and the state of the traditional media of the two societies. There are stronger incentives for American citizens to actively participate in the political game so as to directly make a difference in the formation of their republican government even when there are imbalances and imperfections in the democratic system. In Hong Kong's semi-colonial political system, however, the impact of political mobilization (such as mass protests and voting) on real politics is indirect and limited, even if the mobilization is very successful. In the following section, the approaches and impacts of new media in U.S. and Hong Kong politics are highlighted.

Strategic use and concrete impact in America. The American experience shows how a good new media strategy and plans for a robust network-based infrastructure can be instrumental in effective political mobilization. After the 2006 mid-term elections, many pundits cited the macaca incident, Foley scandal, “gotcha” YouTube videos, and Internet fundraising as the decisive new media-related factors in the defeat of many Republican incumbents. In particular, the macaca incident, and Allen’s clumsy handling of the controversy it raised, was considered critical in that particular race and ultimately in tipping the balance in the Senate. What has been ignored in the analysis, however, is that all these political mistakes were not accidentally captured—it was because of the effective operation of a comprehensive and well-networked election infrastructure based on new media.

This tech-savvy electoral machine was built over several election cycles since 2000 through a collective trial-and-error process by various candidates and netroots campaigners. By 2006, the netroots’ electoral infrastructure contained all the key elements of a nation-wide campaign: financing, mobilizing volunteers, organizing events, publicizing campaign messages, shaping opinions, negative campaigning, trailing and tracking opponents’ mistakes, and getting out the votes. All these activities were managed by a complex web of voluntary, horizontal networks rather than through a party hierarchy, as elaborated in Part 3. This strategy is not purely new media-based, but is a mix of online and offline means (such as blogger conventions and volunteer meet-ups) that maximizes the chances of success. In particular, new media activists leveraged mass media coverage to magnify the national impact of stories such as the macaca and Foley scandals, as explained above.

After cycles of learning from past electoral failures, by 2006 the new media impact on political outcomes was direct and clear. In the two-party contests, new media facilitated electoral victories, especially when the national mood and choice of candidates was right. Within the Democratic Party, the netroots rose as a significant voice to influence the leadership and direction of the party.

Spontaneous use and indirect impact in Hong Kong. In stark contrast to the United States, the use of new media in pro-democracy and social movements in Hong Kong was characterized by spontaneity and a lack of comprehensive strategy. The new media infrastructure for the Hong Kong movements is far from complete. Most pro-democracy groups do not even accept online donations or maintain a comprehensive e-mail database. Even without a clear strategy, new media were still a significant

mobilizing tool at critical moments. The political impact, though, has been indirect, abstract, and difficult to quantify, due to the fundamental characteristics of the Hong Kong political system described earlier.

In addition, there are external and internal factors from the perspective of civil society actors. First is the leadership factor. Hong Kong lacks a large pool of new media political strategists comparable to the influential political bloggers and netroots activists in America. In a way, ordinary people are ahead of civil society leaders in Hong Kong. Most prominent pro-democracy leaders and politicians have limited exposure to new media, and some are skeptical about adapting to new methods. Many only came to slowly recognize the power of modern technologies after 2003. The last few years have seen younger and more tech-savvy activists joining the movements, but they are much less experienced in politics and strategizing. As such, inadequate exposure, limited experience, and insufficient commitment have been some of the hindrances to new media-based political participation in Hong Kong. Apart from the people factors, there are more serious resource problems to sustain new media efforts in the civil society than in the United States, as will be described in the “Issues of concern” section.

In the absence of comprehensive new media machinery in the civil society, the spontaneous use of the Internet and mobile messaging in Hong Kong politics has been most effective in mobilizing participants in social movements and voters in significant elections. Though difficult to quantify, the high turnouts in the pro-democracy rallies since 2003 and the record-breaking voter turnout in the 2004 and 2006 elections can be partly attributed to new media. Under the current political system and executive dominance, however, even successful mobilization can only have an indirect impact on government policies and democratic reforms.

In Hong Kong, the abstract impact of new media—its ability to energize civic spirit and to empower public participation—is more evident than any direct impact on policy. For instance, during the demonstration on July 1, 2003, new media allowed many people who would otherwise have stayed silent to make small contributions to the movement. When the next critical moment comes, Hong Kong citizens know they can easily turn to the Internet or mobile phones to act again. New media have also enabled novel, small groups such as e-Politics 21 to keep their voluntary efforts going. In addition, the emergence of Internet radio and citizen journalism has been a partial response to the self-censorship of the mainstream media. Although they have yet to exercise much influence on public opinion, the new media at least provide channels for expressing alternative views in the narrowing space for public discourse in Hong Kong.

Choices of new media applications. The American and Hong Kong experiences also differ in the choice of new media tools used for political activism (e-mail is the only tool common to both civil societies.) The differences are largely due to the unique economic, cultural, and political characteristics in each society. Hong Kong lags far behind the United States in political blogging and online fundraising, whereas Americans have not used SMS and mobile phones for political mobilization as often as Hong Kong citizens. Even though podcasting is popular in America, the use of podcasts and Internet radio for political purposes is less prevalent than in Hong Kong. Online video use also

varies by society. Hong Kong moved slightly ahead of the United States in using online visuals for political purposes with the RebuildHK site in 2003. In the YouTube era, however, Americans have gone much further in their use of online videos for negative campaigning, as was seen in the 2006 midterm elections. Hong Kong has yet to embrace vlogging as a campaign strategy.

Issues of concern: present and future

The American and Hong Kong experiences shed light on certain issues of concern in the continued development of new media in political participation. Some are common concerns. Others are specific to the political and social situations of the two societies.

Net ethics, abuses, and security. Both societies face common issues of ethics and security, manifested in different ways. Accountability of online fundraising can be an issue, in particular when Internet scams are not uncommon. Even for genuine fundraising by activists on behalf of candidates, how the funds raised are used and accounted for is an issue. For instance, supporters of potential candidates for the 2008 presidential election have formed “draft committees” and launched websites to raise funds and collect names of supporters. By January 2007, the ActBlue website had collected over US\$610,000 for John Edwards and more than US\$14,000 for Barack Obama, before either had announced his candidacy. The question now is how the money collected can be transferred into the candidates’ accounts in accordance with federal campaign finance rules.¹⁶⁹

Spreading rumors, smearing opponents, and sending unsolicited messages is far easier through the Internet, especially in blogs, than through the mass media because of an absence of commonly adopted and enforced Internet editorial rules. In cyberspace, monitoring of information accuracy can only rely on the collective vigilance of all users. In Hong Kong, examples of hacking, fraudulent websites, and malicious spam e-mails using the names of pro-democracy groups, are described in Part 3. Civil society activists must do their part to invest in basic Internet security measures and comply with good usage protocol. Hong Kong pro-democracy activists also face a unique challenge of new media sabotage or manipulation by tech-savvy individuals in mainland China. There have been cases where mainland ghost-writers are recruited by state organizations to post political opinions on the Hong Kong Internet chat-rooms.¹⁷⁰

If the mass media are accused of exaggerating minor mistakes by politician to attract ratings, vlogging, as used in the 2006 U.S. mid-term elections, had the similarly undesirable effect of repeating not-so-important mistakes of the candidates (such as dozing off in public). In particular, many negative online videos were produced with partisan intent. “Google bombing” is another ethically controversial technique that has been used in the election campaigns. Recently, Google decided to change its search

¹⁶⁹ Mosk, Mathew, 2006. “When a Draft Group’s Candidate Announces, What Comes Next?” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2007.

¹⁷⁰ The author’s personal communication with an Internet ghost-writer from mainland China.
Rikkie L K Yeung
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algorithm to prevent such search bombs.¹⁷¹ Negative campaigning is a given in elections, but how far one should go is an issue of moral judgment.

Professional bloggers and net activists. Another controversial phenomenon in America is the employment of bloggers by candidates. In the 2006 Virginia Senate race, the Democratic and Republican candidates hired bloggers to set up blogs to support their campaigns or to serve as new media campaign advisers.¹⁷² Some criticized this practice as a violation of independent personal journalism. But candidate hiring of bloggers should not be worrisome per se, so long as there is sufficient transparency. If the bloggers fully disclose their financial ties to candidates, the public will be able to take this conflict of interest into account when reading their blogs. This setup is no different from journalists employed by media outlets that take a political stand. In the small circle of Hong Kong new media activists, many have worked for pro-democracy groups and politicians on a volunteer or pro-bono basis, or for reduced fees. Ideally, new media development in civil society should benefit if many more new media activists and bloggers go professional, provided that they declare their political ties when giving opinions in cyberspace. However, while professional new media activism may be viable in America, it may also be difficult to achieve in Hong Kong, where resources are more limited.

Tightening the law? Part 2 of this paper suggested that the current regulatory regime for new media is quite relaxed. The future direction of new media regulation is less certain, however. American Internet activists have expressed concerns about a potential threat to the almost unfettered freedom they now enjoy. In fact, tightening the laws on new media is likely for reasons practical and political. First, the public expects—indeed it demands—the prohibition of online activities that violate basic ethical and social norms, such as fraud, phishing, and child pornography. But with regard to laws on Internet copyright issues, anti-spamming, political campaigning, and data privacy, the public interest and public opinion are far from clear. Second, as new media publications become more influential, people will ask why certain laws pertaining to traditional media—privacy, libel, decency and copyright laws—should not also apply to bloggers and Internet activists.

Since the United States and Hong Kong are common law jurisdictions, it is always possible to use lawsuits to test whether existing civil law covers Internet publications. In the recent suit filed by Apple Computer that accused a blogger of disclosing trade secrets,¹⁷³ the American blogging community raised a red flag about the possible end of the “freewheeling days of political blogging and online punditry.”¹⁷⁴ In

¹⁷¹ Goo, Sar Kehaulani, 2006. “Google Moves to Disarm Search ‘Bombs,’” *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2007, Page D3.

¹⁷² Shear Michael D. and Tim Craig 2006. “Blog Chatter Resonates in Va. Senate Campaigns,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, Page C.1.

¹⁷³ Redherring.com 2005. “Bloggers Face the Law: As blogging matures, participants are learning—sometimes the hard way—about the liabilities,” September 23.

(<http://www.redherring.com/Article.aspx?a=13715&hed=Bloggers%20Face%20the%20Law>)

¹⁷⁴ McCullagh, Declan 2003. “The coming crackdown on blogging,” news.com.com, March. (http://news.com.com/The+coming+crackdown+on+blogging/2008-1028_3-5597079.html).

this regard, American bloggers and website operators already enjoy certain legal privileges over traditional journalists. For example, it has been interpreted that website operators (including online content publishers and bloggers) are exempted from liability under the U.S. Communications Decency Act;¹⁷⁵ and are protected from third-party copyright infringement in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (simply by paying \$20 and submitting a form to the U.S. Copyright Office). Moreover, the Congress is considering an Internet Non-Discrimination Act to prohibit network operators from interfering with the content on their networks and hence to protect bloggers' publication from interruption by their internet service providers (ISPs).¹⁷⁶

Hong Kong citizens lack this type of legal protection for their online activities. As explained in Part 2, the Hong Kong government is tightening its spamming law, which might impact the electronic distribution of political messages. The Internet community is also concerned about the possible extension of the new regulatory authority's jurisdiction over Internet radio sites, which are often critical of the Hong Kong and Beijing governments. Meanwhile, there is no government initiative to strengthen the rights of Internet users or prohibit ISPs from interfering with user content. Recently, there was a suspicious case in which a blogger posted sarcastic comments about the owners of the hosting ISP and found his blog blocked for many days, until he complained to the press.¹⁷⁷ Contrary to promoting the creative use of new technologies in political affairs, Hong Kong's Electoral Affairs Commission has recently stated in the electoral rules for the next LegCo election, in September 2008, that the use of SMS for vote canvassing would cause nuisance and is "unwise." The commission urged voters who do not like receiving such SMS to report to the police to "take action against the sender."¹⁷⁸

Further polarization of politics? The mass media have been criticized for accelerating political polarization in the United States, as discussed in Part 2. How about the new media? There are concerns that the American political blogosphere has contributed to polarized, factional politics. Self-selected blog readers often create "echo chambers" that reinforce extreme views. Blogs may thus increase the risk of political polarization, at least within a particular party. But the impact on the wider public is probably not high because blog readers tend to be the most politically active people.¹⁷⁹ Although there is no conclusive evidence that blogs breed extremism, political blogs did intensify a split in the Democratic Party over the war in Iraq. The liberal netroots, which firmly opposed the war, initiated challenges to pro-war Democrat candidates such as Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman. In that case the netroots' political choice did not win in the statewide general election, but other netroots victories in Virginia and Montana solidified their position inside the Democratic Party. The netroots may become a faction that can be influential but not necessarily accountable; it will be a challenge for

¹⁷⁵ see footnote 171.

¹⁷⁶ <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>.

¹⁷⁷ This case was reported in Inmedihk:

http://www.inmedihk.net/public/article?item_id=152831&group_id=31). The blog concerned is on <http://www.ntscmp.com/>.

¹⁷⁸ Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedure) (Legislative Council) (Amendment) Regulation 2008, Chapter 9, published in the L.S. No. 2 to Hong Kong Gazette No. 12/2008, L.N. 66 of 2008.

¹⁷⁹ See also comments from Gerry McGovern in an interview with *CIO Insight* in "How the web polarized politics," November 6, 2006.

Democratic Party leaders to balance liberal netroots views with mainstream national sentiment, should there be any conflict.

Untapped potential and sustainability. The full potential of new media has not been realized by Hong Kong civil society actors, who have found it difficult to sustain worthwhile new media initiatives. It has been suggested that inadequate strategic thinking, imagination, and commitment are obstacles to developing bolder new media strategies in the area of political participation. These barriers to successful new media use are due in part to external constraints.

First, it is difficult to identify a self-sustaining formula for ongoing new media efforts by the Hong Kong civil society. For small groups or individual activists, even basic applications such as online fundraising or bulk e-mail programs are costly to maintain. As noted above, the prospect of blogging as a full-time career is quite remote in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong market is too small for self-financing new media initiatives. The audience size for even relatively successful civil society websites is too small to attract enough online donations or merchandise sales to turn a profit, as possible in the United States. Therefore, the new media initiatives to promote civic participation in Hong Kong are now almost entirely dependent on the voluntary contribution of money and effort. Such volunteerism might dry out in the long term.

Second, the more visual and less textual culture in Hong Kong makes it difficult to popularize political discussion in the cyberspace. Most importantly, the political system discourages political participation and party development. People are willing to contribute a little sometimes and display some enthusiasm at critical moments, but the system provides no incentive for long-term sacrifices. The political reality is that the Sisyphean struggle for a more democratic political system will probably roll on a lot longer. Hong Kong civil society continues to face difficulties in recruiting resources and manpower, and in sustaining enthusiasm for pro-democracy and social movements in the long term, whether such efforts are new media-based or not.

Into the Future

This paper makes no attempt to predict the future of new media in politics, but there are several trends that will be interesting to follow in the next couple of years.

The first trend to watch is how the power of vlogging in politics will be used. The impact of online videos on YouTube resembles that of television, which transformed politics worldwide after the 1950s. Images can be more powerful than words in forging an emotional connection between a candidate and voters. The impact of vlogging may linger even longer than television, as viewers can watch the videos weeks and months after the first showing. This impact can be reinforced when television programs replay YouTube clips, thus driving more traffic to the original online videos. Whether the recent takeover of YouTube by Google will result in any change to YouTube's current lack of editorial control and free-of-charge use, and whether other free Internet video platforms similar to YouTube appear will determine the next steps in the use of political vlogging,

Second, both the United States and Hong Kong are holding elections in 2008. New media are playing an important role in the U.S. presidential election; given the success of new media in the 2006 U.S. midterm elections, many candidates have beefed up their online electioneering infrastructures and initiatives. This is particularly true among the candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination. John Edwards, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton all announced their formation of exploratory committees or their candidacies on the Internet.¹⁸⁰ Edwards made his announcement via online video, while Obama e-mailed his decision to supporters. Clinton announced her intention via a professionally produced online video, held several live web chats to interact with Internet users, and has used her election website as an online mobilization office.¹⁸¹ All these candidates have launched fully-fledged online campaigns using blogs, online fund raising, YouTube / online videos, MySpace communities, online volunteer recruitment, and other activities. Initially, Edwards (who has exited from the race) was the netroots' favorite and was described by the virtual community as having "the most prolific web presence" among the Democratic candidates.

As the election continues, however, Obama's charisma has championed in the cyberspace (perhaps even more so than in the offline world) particularly because of his overwhelming appeal to younger voters. The Internet presence of Obama's "Yes We Can" movement has given a big push to his bid for presidential nomination. He has garnered support from progressive netroots groups such as *Moveon.com* and many influential technology bloggers, and many in his online campaign team are committed netroots volunteers rather than paid personnel as in Clinton's team.¹⁸² One famous IT activist (who happens to support Clinton) went so far to speculate that Obama might become the first candidate elected by the Internet.¹⁸³ He was able to raise a very impressive amount of campaign fund from (mainly small) online donations. In February 2008, he obtained \$45 million from the Internet out of the total of \$55 million he had raised.¹⁸⁴ But the Internet has proved to be equally important for the establishment candidate, Senator Clinton. In February 2008, Clinton, who was trailing Obama especially in cyberspace, raised about \$30 million from small online donations out of the total \$35 million she collected that month.

On the Republican side, online fund raising has also become important. "Insurgent" Ron Paul was able to stay in the Republican primaries even after stronger candidates such as Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee had left the race and John McCain's nomination became inevitable, because of Paul's ability to raise significant funds

¹⁸⁰ See a relevant report: Cillizza, Chris and Balz, Dan, 2006. "On the Electronic Campaign Trail." *The Washington Post*, January 22, 2007. Page A1 and A6.

¹⁸¹ See www.hillaryclinton.com.

¹⁸² Sifry, Micah, 2008. "Obama, the Internet and the decline of big money and big media." *Techpresident.com*, February 6, 2008.

(http://www.techpresident.com/blog/entry/21320/obama_the_internet_and_the_decline_of_big_money_and_big_media).

¹⁸³ Jarvis, Jeff, 2008. "Obama, the Internet Victor?" *BuffMachine*, January 8, 2008.

(<http://www.buzzmachine.com/2008/01/08/obama-the-internet-victor/>).

¹⁸⁴ Luo, Michael, 2008. "Clinton sees rise in online donation." *The New York Times*, March 22, 2008.

online.¹⁸⁵ Apart from the impact of new media election machinery and strategies, how the netroots faction will affect the Democratic Party's political and policy position will be a factor in both the primary nominations and national election. The impact of changing virtual political dynamics on the outcome of primaries (especially for the Democratic Party) and then the presidential election will be most interesting to observe.

In Hong Kong, the next LegCo elections will be held in September 2008. As discussed in the previous section, more candidates and groups will likely use new media for election campaigning and GOTV purposes in competitive races or large constituencies. Although no clear new media strategy from political parties can be observed yet, a few potential candidates are keeping close touch with their potential online supporters. In direct elections, Alan Leong has launched a new personal website and blog. Regina Ip who lost in the 2007 LegCo by-election but vowed to come back in 2008, maintains her blog on public affairs and her Facebook community. In the Information Technology functional constituency, two potential candidates from the pro-democracy and pro-establishment camps respectively are building their virtual communities through blogs, Facebook, and e-newsletters.

It will also be interesting to see if and how “the empire will strike back” in new media politics —whether the resource-rich political establishment will invest more effort into new media initiatives and win over their challengers. So far the political establishments in the United States and Hong Kong have not paid as much attention to the new media as have the political insurgents. But as the full potential new media is recognized, the establishment (especially in the United States) may spend much more on new media initiatives. It is easy to copy some of the successful netroots strategies; the Republican supporters have already used the netroots' Google-bomb technique.¹⁸⁶ The more difficult part is to adjust to the bottom-up and less predictable culture of virtual communities. Hillary Clinton's professional implementation of her online presidential campaign and online fund raising also suggests the great potential of an establishment candidate who wages a high-quality new media political battle.

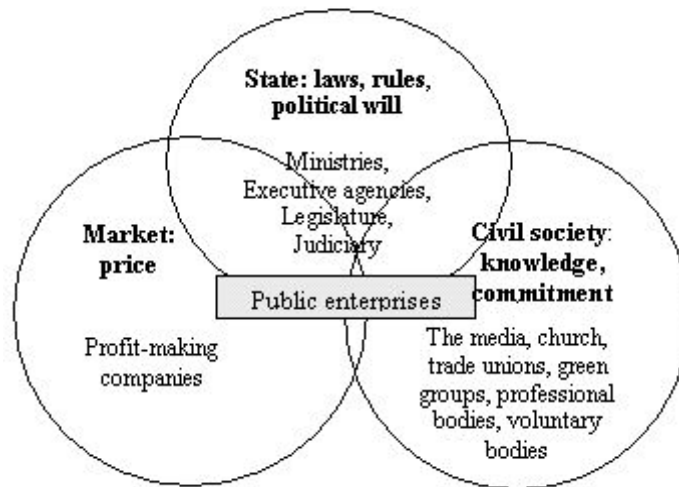
A recipe for success. The experiences of advancing digital democracy in America and Hong Kong prove that the potential of new media in modern politics is not merely theoretical. With creativity and commitment, civil society actors can use digital technologies to boost political participation. The contrasting experiences of two societies at a similar level of technological sophistication, however, also show that there is no single recipe for success. There are many lessons for civil society actors to learn. Regardless of whether the external environment is favorable or restrictive, there is always some way to develop new media-based political participation. That new media strategy will need to take into account the specific political, legal, social, economic, and cultural factors in the society. There needs to be a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different technological means. There should be a mix of online and offline methods, as well as a plan to leverage the mass media to multiply the impact of new

¹⁸⁵ Vargas, Jose Antonio, 2008. “Ron Paul's record online haul.” *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2007. (http://blog.washingtonpost.com/the-trail/2007/11/05/post_179.html).

¹⁸⁶ *Technology Daily*, October 24, 2006.

media. There needs to be a versatile strategy that targets diverse audiences and supporters. There must be experimentation and patience when things go wrong. The recipe for success requires dedication, focus, consistency, and commitment in the search for the right strategy. The prospect of digital democracy derives its potency from the belief that “You” are the ultimate source of political power and imagination.

Figure 1. Three Domains of Governance



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