YES WE CAN:
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN FACILITATING AND ENHANCING POLITICAL ORGANIZING

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Presented to the
Committee on Degrees in American Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Honors

Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

April 24, 2012
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter I: Organizing and its Relationship to Social Media

Chapter II: 2008 Obama Campaign and Social Media

Chapter III: Data and Methods

Chapter IV: Analysis

Conclusion

Acknowledgments

Bibliography

Appendix A

Appendix B
Organizing power begins with the commitment by the first person who wants to make it happen. Without this commitment, there are no resources with which to begin. Commitment is observable as action. The work of organizers begins with their acceptance of the responsibility to challenge others to do the same.

--Marshall Ganz

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1 Ganz, Organizing Notes, 19-20.
Introduction

Dave was a lifelong registered Republican—his father voted Republican, his mother voted Republican, and he always voted Republican. For his entire adult life, he had made his living working part-time in construction. When he looked into the future, he was glad to have things all figured out.

Then there was an accident. A small wrecking ball rolled over his hand, crushing all of his bones. That was the end of construction for Dave—and the end of his life, as he knew it.

Due to his part-time employment status, Dave did not have the correct healthcare coverage to get the treatment he needed for his crushed hand. Between his emergency room visit and his subsequent hospital bills, Dave became swamped in medical debt. He didn’t understand how this had happened to him. He had been working in construction for over a decade, he had been told he had medical coverage—but now, in the first major time he needed it, he was discovering that he was not covered? The confusion, pain, and anger boiled inside Dave, and he decided that it was time “to rock the boat a little bit.”

Meanwhile, then-Senator Barack Obama was taking the national stage and embarking on his campaign for the United States presidency. One day, Dave saw him on television, giving a speech that mentioned the problems with America’s healthcare system; these words struck a chord with Dave. He began to follow news coverage of Barack Obama; more and more, he liked what he was hearing. Soon enough, his enthusiasm for the candidate—and his lack of job prospects—led him to the Obama campaign’s local field office to see how he could help out.

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2 Dave Interview. Personal interview. February 20, 2012.
Dave had never before volunteered for a political campaign. When asked, he was hesitant to venture into canvassing, feeling intimidated by the thought of speaking face-to-face with voters. He agreed to begin with phone calls, however, so after a bit of training by a Field Organizer, he sat down with a phone banking script and a call sheet. By the end of his first day, he had made over a hundred phone calls—the record for a single person in the field office that day. Dave was surprised by his triumph and returned home that night with a smile. He later recalled, "I remember the funny thing about my first day on the campaign: I was just making calls and making calls. I thought I was doing what I was supposed to do; I had no idea that I was making way more calls than normal!"\(^3\)

Motivated by his success, Dave returned the next day with a neighbor. The two of them stayed in the field office all day, making one call after the next. Their efforts, combined with the work of the other volunteers on their team, landed them on the statewide Leaderboard, a listing of the highest numbers in the various categories that the Obama campaign was tracking in Ohio. Their team was being recognized on the Leaderboard that night for the Most Number of Calls made in a day. That category was one of many metrics by which the Obama campaign measured its progress in the field. Indeed, the Obama campaign was innovative in its implementation of social media to facilitate organizing efforts, especially the reporting of field data. These technological tools allowed volunteers, field organizers, and other campaign staffers to see statewide field data, allowing them to track their efforts in real time.

Reading the Leaderboard that night, Dave and his teammates were ecstatic; they could not believe that a wealthy, Republican-leaning suburb in Dayton, OH had surpassed the likes of Cleveland or other urban, liberal-leaning regions. Full of exuberance, Dave said, "Damn, I guess

\(^3\) Dave Interview. Personal interview. February 20, 2012.
I'm pretty good at this!” He returned the following day to make more calls. By the end of that week, Dave was ready to go canvassing.

Dave initially came to the campaign field office simply looking for a way to help out his preferred candidate—but Dave returned day after day because of his success. He later explained, “I was kind of down and out those days... I was out of a job, my hand was f*cked up, I was out of shape... the Obama campaign gave me purpose, but it also made me feel good about myself again. I mean, who doesn’t love winning?”

Dave became one of the top volunteer leaders in his region, recruiting a neighborhood team that repeatedly beat many statewide records. In so doing, Dave transformed his anger about his hand, his restlessness, and his fear of the future into optimism, confidence, and enthusiasm. Indeed, it was the Obama campaign’s emphasis on organizing that enabled the candidate’s supporters to engage with their communities. For Dave, organizing served as the springboard that propelled him to a new life—new friends, new interests, and most of all, a new sense of self. He owed all of this to the power of organizing, to the gift of becoming a part of this cause in which he deeply believed and for which he truly made a difference.

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In this thesis, I focus on the intersection of political organizing and social media. I aim to answer the question of how social media tools have changed and augmented the process of political organizing. In order to fully understand both the question and the answer, it is necessary first to understand political organizing and social media. Chapter One therefore provides an overview of both. What is organizing, and why is it important to political campaigns? Organizing

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4 Dave Interview. Personal interview, February 20, 2012.
is the effort to mobilize people to work towards achieving a specific outcome. It begins by building a team of leaders who then engage with their communities. Through the development of these relationships and the telling of the narrative of the cause, it is possible to create an interconnected web of people who come together by sharing the same goal and working to reach it. Social media are the ubiquitous Internet-based platforms that allow people to share personalized content and develop an online social network. It is now easier than ever before for individuals to voice their opinions, communicate with friends, and connect with like-minded people. These traits make social media a natural tool for political organizing.

Chapter Two focuses on one historic example of the use of social media to facilitate political organizing: the 2008 Obama Campaign. What was unique about the way that the campaign used social media with its organizing practices? The campaign wielded a wide variety of social media in its efforts to reach millions of voters. I discuss the campaign's two main social media implementations: My.BarackObama.com and NationalField. My thesis focuses on the latter. I will explain what NationalField is, how it works, and what type of data was collected by NationalField during the 2008 elections.

Chapter Three offers my data and methods. It explains the reasoning behind my choice of specific datasets, and it elaborates on my approach to interviews. It also acknowledges potential biases and weaknesses in my data and interviews.

My final chapter analyzes the quantitative data from NationalField in conjunction with interviews I conducted with Field Organizers and volunteers from the 2008 Obama Campaign in Ohio, as well as with NationalField staff. From these sources, I deduce why social media was so successful at improving the campaign's organizing outcomes in Ohio. Besides the more obvious reasons—that social media enables efficiency and fosters camaraderie—my evidence points to
the fact that the social media platform NationalField created an environment that encouraged
competition amongst the organizers, thereby driving them to work even harder and to set higher
goals for themselves. The emotional and psychological impact of seeing one’s name on the
NationalField Leaderboard—as Dave’s experience aptly demonstrates—played a large role in
motivating staffers and volunteers alike to become better organizers. The sharing of best
practices via NationalField’s ups and downs tool likewise fueled the competition to adapt and
innovate, and ultimately, to strive to become the most skilled organizers possible.

Finally, I conclude by reflecting on my own experiences as a Field Organizer in Ohio on
the Obama campaign. I ponder how all of this information sets the stage for the role of social
media in political organizing for the upcoming 2012 Presidential elections.

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Organizing and its Relationship to Social Media

What Is Organizing? And what makes a good organizer?

Organizing refers to the effort to mobilize people around a cause in order to achieve a specific goal. It is more than simply a group of like-minded people. Organizing “is rapidly emerging as a vital new force for revitalizing democracy at the ground level. It represents a serious effort to reverse . . . the decline of social capital, that is, the steady deterioration in the social fabric and civic life of American communities.” Effective organizing requires a certain framework to shape its efforts, and in that way, it can be regarded as a sort of science; there are basic principles that make for good organizing outcomes. A significant component of organizing, however, stems from an intangible emotional place—made of such feelings as love, determination, hope—that is difficult to supply or to quantify. In that way, organizing can be regarded as an art.

Historic examples of organizing often focus on the shining leader of the cause. The Civil Rights movement is one such example, as it is often described in the same breath as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the cause and the leader seem inextricably linked. No one denies the powerful appeal of a compelling leader. But it would be an oversimplification to believe that change comes solely from unique individuals who possess seemingly magical powers to lead the masses to victory. For example, in the California Farm Worker movement of the 1960s and 70s:

Most popular accounts attribute the UFW’s success to the charismatic leadership of Cesar Chavez. It is true that, in times of crisis, particularly talented leaders may become symbols of hope, sources of inspiration for their constituents. But this is not the same thing as achieving successful outcomes. And although the effects

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5 Warren, 9.
attributed to charismatic leaders—attracting followers, enhancing their sense of self-esteem, and inspiring them to exert extra effort—can be invaluable organizational resources, they are not the same as outcomes either. . . . many groups have charismatic leaders, but few achieve stability, much less become successful social movement organizations.6

In other words, change comes not from the charisma of special leaders but from the power of organizing as it is harnessed to mobilize a large group of people to work towards a shared goal.

As famed organizer Marshall Ganz explains, “Organizers challenge people to take the responsibility to act. Empowerment for a person begins with taking responsibility. Empowerment for an organization begins with commitment, the responsibility its members take for it. Responsibility begins with choosing to act. Organizers challenge people to understand, as well as to commit, to act, and to learn how to act effectively.”7

There are several structural and organizational needs that must be met before a group can truly harness the power of organizing. Ganz describes the practical steps for good organizing as consisting of “just three practices: (1) identifying, recruiting, and developing leaders; (2) building community around those leaders; and (3) building power from that community.”8 These three steps, in turn, require three ingredients: “(1) the actors who do the work . . . (2) the processes we use to do the work: building relationships, telling stories, devising strategy, and taking action; and (3) the structures we use to create the space within which we can do the work: campaigns (time) and organizations (space).”9

In putting together an effective organizing team, it is crucial that the group’s leaders possess the ability to innovate and adapt, to be flexible enough to make decisions as new situations arise. Ganz describes the mistakes that AWOC made during the California Farm

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6 Ganz, Why David, 8.
7 Ganz, Organizing Notes, 1.
8 Ganz, Organizing Notes, 6.
9 Ganz, Organizing Notes, 6.
Worker movement, as poor strategy that "reflected political compromises among labor leaders who knew nothing of farm labor, relied on familiar organizing models, and had a very modest commitment to the whole enterprise. . . . AWOC succeeded neither at organizing a base among farm workers nor at devising a way to strengthen the limited local labor market power that had crippled earlier organizing attempts."\textsuperscript{10} As this example demonstrates, sticking to familiar methods while refusing to consider innovation will eventually lead to failure. It is flexibility and adaptability that give an organizing group its true strength because organizers need "the ability to capitalize on opportunities by turning the resources one has into the power one needs which transforms possibility into results . . . The foundation, as we have seen, is depth of commitment . . . David's commitment to challenge Goliath did not depend on figuring out a good strategy. On the contrary, good strategy grew out of his commitment to fight."\textsuperscript{11} The relative size or seeming strength of an opposing organization is never insurmountable, as long as the organizing team can figure out how to maximize its own strengths in any given situation.

This sort of flexibility and adaptability provides the skeleton upon which the flesh and blood of the organization can grow and flourish. For example, upon founding the FWA, Chavez and his collaborators:

structured their work in such a way as to develop the capacity to keep adapting their strategy until they found a way to deal with the limited labor market power, the marginal political influence, and the racial isolation that had bedeviled almost every previous organizing attempt. Unlike most of the AWOC and Teamster organizers, they did not think they had the answers; they knew they would have to learn how to get the answers to accomplish the goal they had set for themselves.\textsuperscript{12}

By recognizing their weaknesses, the FWA team turned that self-awareness into a strength that allowed them to muster the courage to risk making mistakes and trying new approaches. Their

\textsuperscript{10} Ganz, Why David, 63.
\textsuperscript{11} Ganz, Why David, 252.
\textsuperscript{12} Ganz, Why David, 82-83.
embrace of learning is a prime example of the importance of recognizing a situation and responding in a way that harnesses the group’s strengths. It is important not to be too wedded to a particular strategy or approach; flexibility and adaptation are necessary for long-term survival.

Another example of adaptation and innovation that led to victory:

The NFWA had no picketing tradition; it was something to be learned. . . . The NFWA leaders realized that, for their strike to be effective, grower production would have to be disrupted. This would require the participation of many more workers from many more farms than 200 people could picket AWOC-style. The improvised result was the roving picket line tactic. Strikers set out in car caravans, arrived at grape fields waving flags and banners, called the workers out of the fields, and then moved on to the next location. . . . They continued to come up with new, invented-on-the-spot tactics to do so. Are the people in the fields working far from the road? Let’s try using loudspeakers to reach them. Are employers bringing out their own loudspeakers to shout us down? Let’s get there before they do. Someone came up with the idea of pressuring the labor contractors to take their workers elsewhere. Someone else created the idea of picketing in front of the contractors’ homes. Yet another person came up with the idea of picketers saying masses in front of the contractors’ homes. With these inventive ways of picketing, it turned out that a relatively small core of NFWA activists could sustain a strike longer, at more farms, and for less money than anyone expected. What is more, the regular participants in the roving picket line turned into the core of a full-time cadre, many of whom would become organizers. Thus, the NFWA’s capacity to creatively adapt to unforeseen challenges enabled it to deepen its capacity further by developing more leaders, who then learned to devise strategies and tactics in their own right.13

These seemingly simple changes to their picketing strategy allowed the NFWA to succeed despite the obstacles thrown in their path.

The lesson from these examples is that there is no Goliath too large to be defeated, as long as the organizing team recognizes its own strengths and advantages in an ever-changing situation. Ganz explains:

Changing environments generate opportunities and challenges. The significance of these opportunities emerges, however, from the hearts, heads, and hands of the actors who develop the means of putting them to work. People can generate the power to resolve grievances not by relying on those who hold power to use it on their behalf, but by developing the capacity to outthink—and outlast—their

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13 Ganz, Why David, 129-130.
opponents; these are matters of leadership and organization. As students of street
smarts have long understood, resourcefulness can sometimes compensate for a
lack of resources. Although learning how the environment influences our choices
can help us to understand the world, learning how our choices influence the
environment can help us to change it. 14

In organizing, there is no need to be the underdog; it’s possible to overcome that status, find new
strengths, and achieve victory. In other words, as Ganz reminisces, “When Cesar Chavez used to
say ‘power makes you stupid,’ this is what he meant: you come to rely on an overwhelming
resource advantage, which is exactly what creates opportunity for the Davids of the world. . . .
Chavez took particular pleasure in getting people together to figure things out, to respond to
moves with countermoves, to find ways, as he would say, to ‘kill two birds with one stone and
keep the stone.’” 15 It is crucial for an organizing team to guard against complacency, even—or
especially—after achieving successes and reaching goals.

Building a strong community around the leadership team is vital because it forms the
foundation upon which all other efforts stand. Ganz points to the attention that Chavez and other
FWA leaders “devoted to getting the structure of their organization ‘right’ [which] reveals their
depth commitment to organizing itself as a means of economic, political, and cultural
empowerment and their mindfulness that they were doing something quite new.” 16 It is crucial
for the members of an organizing team to feel invested in the group and the cause. The most
effective organizing comes not from simply achieving a laundry list of goals, but rather from
empowering people to take matters into their own hands and forge change. For example, “as
Chavez later said, ‘A union is not simply getting enough workers to stage a strike. A union is

14 Ganz, Why David, 254.
15 Ganz, Why David, 253.
16 Ganz, Why David, 89.
building a group with a spirit and an existence all its own . . . a union must be built around the idea that people must do things by themselves, in order to help themselves."

It is also important that the leadership team be personally invested in creating successful outcomes. Although this statement may sound obvious, in practice, group leaders are not always invested in achieving victory. Ganz describes Chavez and his collaborators' frustration in April 1962 as they were “convinced that the AFL-CIO would never stick with the task of organizing farm workers.” In response, they created the FWA, and “their story was not only new; it was rooted in their own experience as Mexican immigrants and in their depth of commitment and clarity of understanding, all of which set the FWA leadership apart.” The personal background of the FWA team as Mexican immigrants and as farm workers ensured a greater level of commitment and an unwavering determination to create change. After all, “Chavez and his collaborators understood the farm worker world better than Green did, and they cared more about it.” From this heartfelt dedication stems a willingness to keep trying, to learn on the go, and to persist until success is achieved. Ganz points out that “strategic capacity is a matter not only of information and motivation, but also of capacity to learn. NFWA leaders continually examined their successes and their failures to learn how strikes worked, while AWOC leaders did not.” By learning from their mistakes, the FWA enhanced the strength of their organization.

It is also important for the leadership team to be composed of individuals who hail from a variety of backgrounds. This enhances the number of perspectives that contribute to making major decisions, and help to ensure that the most innovative and open-minded solutions are chosen. Chavez and the other leaders of the FWA made a very diverse team, and therefore “it

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17 Ganz, Why David, 89.
18 Ganz, Why David, 82-83.
19 Ganz, Why David, 82-83.
20 Ganz, Why David, 117-118.
21 Ganz, Why David, 117-118.
could draw on an unusual combination of identities, social networks, and organizing experiences . . . These networks combined strong ties to the farm worker community and the religious community with weak ties to many other groups that would play important roles in the organizing." The diversity of opinions was particularly effective at one moment during the California Farm Worker movement, where AFL-CIO lawyers had no solutions because they:

saw what they expected to see. By contrast, the fresh eyes of the UFWOC leaders, who had used the law creatively during 10 years of administrative hearings, saw new opportunities. Their young civil rights-oriented lawyer looked at the situation freshly as well. Chavez told Cohen, ‘That was a fabulous thing you told me. That’s going to change our power. . . . Don’t worry that you don’t know. You knew something that Van Bourg didn’t know.’

This example shows how crucial it is to constantly bring in new ideas and new people to renew the diversity—and therefore, the strength—of an organizing team.

Although the diversity of individuals in leadership roles is important, the core of good organizing is teamwork. It is crucial to cultivate a strong team dynamic by forging bonds between those stellar individuals; star power alone is not sufficient, and in some cases, it can be detrimental. Ganz highlights Chavez’s understanding of this important organizing principle:

Critical to [Chavez’s] leadership in this period was his ability to identify, recruit, and develop other leaders, while holding his team together so that its diversity could become a source of strength and not of division or paralysis. Chavez, who modeled the depth of personal commitment required to fulfill this mission, was a virtuoso in the craft of organizing: gifted in building relationships, possessed of a rich strategic imagination, but firmly anchored in the practical reality of what does and does not work. He set a high standard for the organization. Yet during the years of this account, the FWA never became a one-man show, nor did Chavez want it to become one.

Individual excellence and team excellence both matter, and their combination is more powerful and effective than each part alone. As the NFWA grew into a larger organization, one key leader

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22. Ganz, Why David, 90.
"designed a campaign that relied far less on the Alinsky style of the hotshot solo performer than on an organizing team, shaped by training, learning, and development. It resembled nothing so much as a school for organizers."25 This example shows the NFWA team's willingness to deviate from other tried-and-true practices—even those of a legendary organizer like Alinsky—choosing instead to develop and tailor approaches that best suited their own group.

But effective organizing comes not simply from checking all the boxes on a list of ingredients. Setting up a diverse leadership team composed of members who are eager to be flexible and innovative, to take risks, and to learn from their mistakes, is not enough. The heart of good organizing comes from the strength of the relationships built between people. For example, in the early, struggling days of the FWA, Cesar Chavez's cousin Manuel Chavez—who had been elected secretary-treasurer of the FWA's leadership team—was arrested for forging checks; he was convicted and went to prison for 18 months. Ganz notes, "The scandal could have been devastating to this fragile new organization had its leaders and their constituency not shared the trust, relationships, and history to get through these events with no further repercussions."26 Indeed, it is inevitable during any long fight to promote a cause or reach a goal that unexpected setbacks and difficulties will arise. It is all the more critical, therefore, that an organizing team have strong bonds to each other in order to weather such storms.

One effective way to intensify an organizing team's bonds of trust and commitment, to each other and to the cause, is by sharing and sacrificing together. For example, "The NFWA had no strike fund, so there would be no financial support for strikers or salaries for the leaders—who would have to share in the economic sacrifices of their members . . . A choice made out of

25 Ganz, Why David, 190.
26 Ganz, Why David, 102.
necessity soon became a source of solidarity. 27 The hardship of choosing this difficult financial path enabled the team to remember their shared goals and their determination to reach them, no matter the cost. The emotional force of this kind of shared sacrifice is incalculable. In fact, “the decision to make this personal commitment, which Chavez called the spirit of ‘servanthood,’ brought the NFWA officers to Delano. Once there, it deepened their commitment to winning the strike. It also gave union leaders the moral authority to attract similar levels of commitment from others.” 28 Beyond gluing a team together, such emotional factors display an organizing team’s powerful belief in their cause, one that draws others to join in support.

Out of the organizing team’s mutual trust can grow healthy communication. Such dialogues not only create forums for decision-making, but also generate new ideas and enforce accountability. Every member of the team must discuss their actions and their results, and these conversations reinforce the idea that everyone is responsible, to the team and to the cause, for producing good outcomes. The effectiveness of the NFWA stemmed from their commitment to:

a deliberative framework for daily analysis, evaluation, and innovation. Organizers discussed themes, reviewed leaflets, tallied numbers, analyzed problems, and reconsidered approaches. This approach allowed trainees to acquire the basic tools of the craft, while at the same time taking part in a learning process through which they could understand, evaluate, and respond to their experiences and thus engage their creativity. As the organizing team grew . . . this structure created a venue within which a diversity of views could enhance the NFWA’s strategic capacity, rather than tearing it apart—as could quite easily have occurred. 29

These conversations allow the team to celebrate successes, solve problems, generate new ideas, and train new members. Therefore, the strong internal communication promotes a perpetual self-renewal that allows the organizing team to remain fresh, cohesive, and agile.

27 Ganz, Why David, 125.
28 Ganz, Why David, 163.
29 Ganz, Why David, 191.
Narratives are hugely important to the success of any organizing effort. These stories shape both the internal team dynamics as well as the outside perception of the organizers and their cause. The importance of storytelling begins within the team. The stories that individuals understand about themselves, as well as the stories that the team members share with each other, help to fuel the fire propelling the entire organizing team forward. Ganz highlights the significance and power of such narratives: “Organizers motivate action by deepening people’s understanding of who they are, what they want, and why they want it. Mobilizing feelings of hope, anger, self-worth, solidarity, and urgency, they challenge feelings of fear, apathy, self-doubt, isolation, and inertia that inhibit action.”30 For example, the FWA began its own periodical El Malcriado, written in Spanish and later in English as well, which distributed thoughts and stories amongst the farm workers. One strike issue editorialized:

What is a movement? It is when there are enough people with one idea so that their actions are together like the huge wave of water, which nothing can stop. It is when a group of people begins to care enough so that they are willing to make sacrifices. The movement of the Negro began in the hot summer of Alabama ten years ago when a Negro woman refused to be pushed to the back of the bus. Thus began a gigantic wave of protest throughout the South. The Negro is willing to fight for what is his, an equal place under the sun. Sometime in the future they will say that in the hot summer of California in 1965 the movement of the farm workers began. It began with a small series of strikes. It started so slowly that at first it was only one man, then five, then one hundred. This is how a movement begins. This is why the Farm Workers Association is a movement more than a union.31

By placing their efforts under the lens of history, the FWA organizing team enabled their supporters to regard the cause as a weighty moment in history, another narrative decision that reinforced everyone’s commitment to the cause. Indeed, this awareness of the symbolic power of narratives played a significant role in a crucial vote during the farm workers’ movement, where:

30 Ganz, Organizing Notes, 1.
31 Ganz, Why David, 126.
signing an NFWA card and signing a Teamster card—and there were many farm workers who did both—meant two very different things. Especially for the Mexicans, but also for other people of color, signing an NFWA card meant taking a risk, expressing solidarity with one’s fellows, making a claim, and asserting an ethnic identity. Signing a Teamster card meant protecting one’s job, doing what the boss wanted, and, in the eyes of many, denying one’s ethnic identity. Signing an NFWA card expressed anger or hopefulness; signing a Teamster card expressed fear or resignation. And it was not at all clear which emotions would prevail in the voting booth.\footnote{Ganz, Why David, 194.}

These crucial votes were based not simply in practical considerations, but also in the symbols and spirit motivating each side of the dispute.

In addition to the organizing team’s internal dynamics, it is important for the team to present itself to the public in the strongest possible light in order to garner support for its cause. The narrative that an organizing team creates influences the subsequent reactions and decisions of the public. For example, during the California Farm Worker movement, Chavez made the critical decision to protest non-violently, and this choice subsequently shaped the narrative of the workers’ struggle. Ganz explains that a non-violent strike “was new to the farm worker community and to agricultural strikes in general. . . . reframing the Delano strike as a Gandhi-like nonviolent struggle helped the NFWA to garner support from church groups. It also echoed the civil rights movement. At least since the NFWA’s rent strike in June and July, it was clear that identification with the civil rights movement could help to mobilize public support.”\footnote{Ganz, Why David, 125.} By drawing parallels to other historic movements, the NFWA gained public sympathy that responded to the cause itself as well as to the famous struggles of both Gandhi and civil rights protestors. Moreover, the FWA made allusions to the Bible, another move that helped them to gain public support:

Not only in rhetoric, but also in action, the NFWA came to interpret itself as an oppressed minority struggling for its freedom, rather than as just another union.
This narrative, as old as Exodus and as current as the march from Selma to Montgomery, helped the NFWA to build a critically important bridge to the urban public at a time when ‘labor solidarity’ had lost the moral force it had in the 1930s. The NFWA situated itself within a moral framework that coupled racial justice claims with economic justice claims in a new way.  

These narrative decisions helped the NFWA organizing team to promote their cause and gain access to greater resources as a result of the increased public sympathy and outpouring of support from new groups of people. Ganz elaborates:

In 1965, the systematic discrimination to which Mexicans had been subjected in the Southwest was a story not well known by the rest of the country, but one about which NFWA leaders could speak from their own experiences. Public support for the civil rights movement suggested that the rest of the country might be ready to hear it. It was a story that helped to explain the dire circumstances in which farm workers lived and, at the same time, distinguished the NFWA as more than just another union and the farm workers struggle as more than just another strike. It was the story that would turn this movement into what author Peter Mathiessen in the New Yorker called the next chapter in the ‘new American revolution.’

The NFWA’s careful crafting of their narrative helped their cause to gain support and strength by elevating their struggle from a labor dispute to a grand and courageous battle for independence, respect, and above all, human dignity.

With the growth of support for the cause, it is important for the organizing team not to become entangled in the web of alliances with other organizations. An organizing team must anchor itself, instead of being swept away on another group’s tidal wave. For example, the NFWA managed to preserve its autonomy “only because it had built its own base among farm workers and developed its own allies within the Mexican-American community, churches, civil rights groups, liberal Democrats, and students, as well as the labor movement itself. . . . It would have been easy for the NFWA to become a pawn in a larger game . . . That it did not turn out this way shows not only the vigilance with which the NFWA protected its autonomy, but also the

34 Ganz, Why David, 163.
35 Ganz, Why David, 133-134.
As an organizing team gains more support, it would be easy for it to become caught up in another group’s agenda. Thus, once again, it is apparent that organizing is just as much an art as a science—a delicate dance to unpredictable music.

What is social media?

Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos, and audio. It is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share five important characteristics. The first is participation: social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested; it blurs the line between media and audience. The second is openness: most social media services are open to feedback and participation; they encourage voting, comments, and the sharing of information. Furthermore, there are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content (password-protected content is often frowned on). The third is conversation: whereas traditional media is about “broadcast” (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation. The fourth is community: social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively, a phenomenon that has made political organizing easier. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue, or a favorite TV show. The last is connectedness:

36 Ganz, Why David, 159.
38 Mayfield, iCrossing.
39 Mayfield, iCrossing.
40 Mayfield, iCrossing.
41 Mayfield, iCrossing.
42 Mayfield, iCrossing.
most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources, and people (i.e. Twitter hash tags).\textsuperscript{43}

Currently, there are six basic forms of social media (though, as with most technology, innovation and change are common). One of the more popular forms of social media is social networks, which are sites that allow people to build personal web pages and then connect with friends to share content and communication. The biggest social networks are MySpace, Facebook, and Bebo. Social networking sites allow individuals to create public or quasi-public personal profiles within a bounded system; users also create lists of people they want to share information with or “follow,” and in turn, users can then view their list of connections and the lists of others’ connections.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, social networking sites connect individuals who are family, friends, co-workers, or simply sharers of similar interests. These platforms for social media provide users with an unprecedented opportunity for individual empowerment: social networking sites allow users to speak out on issues and share opinions and information with the people in their online social networks and the greater public—generating personalized material that is collectively known as social media.

In addition to social networking sites, there are many other forms of social media that are sometimes not commonly thought of as social media. For example, there are blogs, which are online journals with entries appearing with the most recent first.\textsuperscript{45} There are also wikis, which are websites that allow people to add content to or edit the information on them, acting as a communal document or database. The best-known wiki is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia which currently has over 3.8 million English language articles.\textsuperscript{46} Podcasts are also wildly

\textsuperscript{43} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{44} Boyd and Ellison, Social Network Sites.
\textsuperscript{45} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{46} Mayfield, iCrossing.
popular, which are audio and video files that are available by subscription, through services like Apple iTunes, for example.\textsuperscript{47} The fifth form is forums, which are areas for online discussion, often around specific topics and interests. Forums came about before the term “social media” and are a powerful and popular element of online communities.\textsuperscript{48} There are content communities, “communities which organize and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos (Flickr), bookmarked links (del.icio.us) and videos (YouTube).”\textsuperscript{49} The last form is microblogging, which is “social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content (‘updates’) are distributed online and through the mobile phone network.”\textsuperscript{50} Twitter is the clear leader in this field.

In the past ten years, social media has exponentially increased in users and content. Facebook passed the 500 million users mark in July 2010, and it is predicted that by January 2013 Facebook will have just over 750 million users.\textsuperscript{51} Twitter, established in 2006, now sees an average of 460,000 new users a day. Twitter users send out an average of 250 million tweets per day.\textsuperscript{52} There are more than 110 million blogs being tracked by Technorati, a specialist blog search engine.\textsuperscript{53} An estimated 100 million videos a day are being watched on the video sharing website, YouTube.\textsuperscript{54} These numbers demonstrate the pervasiveness of social media not only in Western countries, but across the entire globe; 70 percent of Twitter accounts are held outside of the U.S.\textsuperscript{55} What began in the late 1990s as a handful of websites allowing users to share fun

\textsuperscript{47} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{48} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{49} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{50} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{51} Tagnam, Dailytech.
\textsuperscript{52} Smith, The Huffington Post.
\textsuperscript{53} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{54} Mayfield, iCrossing.
\textsuperscript{55} Hempel, 68.
information with their friends has now grown into a multibillion-dollar industry built on people around the world connecting with one another to share ideas and experiences.

In 1997, social media took its first form as “sixdegrees.com,” a website that was named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed users to list friends, family members, and acquaintances. Users could send messages and post bulletin board items to people in their first, second, and third degrees, and see their connection to any other user on the site. In 2003, “MySpace” was launched, which allowed friends to connect and share personal information with one another. Facebook, created in 2004, was initially only open to Harvard students and grew to allow access to students from other universities. It was not until 2006 that Facebook opened up for public use. YouTube rose to popularity in 2005, and by 2009 the number of YouTube video streams per day averaged 1.2 billion. The growth and development of social networking sites in the past ten years indicates the massive infiltration of these sites into everyday life in a relatively short amount of time and highlights the human nature that craves for community.

Indeed, in the present day, it is difficult to remember life before the Internet. There is a vast sea of information available to anyone only a mouse-click away. Internet-related technology is advancing at a dizzying pace, and “the Internet is in a continual state of development... ‘an Internet year is like a dog year, changing approximately seven times faster than normal human time.’... with computing capacity doubling approximately once every two years... increases in bandwidth, storage capacity, and cheap processing power render new classes of activity viable. ... imagine trying to launch YouTube on the dial-up connections of the mid-1990s.”

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56 Boyd and Ellison, Social Network Sites.
57 Boyd and Ellison, Social Network Sites.
58 Arrington, TechCrunch.
59 Karpf, 88.
power of the Internet, it is now possible to be in constant contact with our friends and family, most often through the platforms of social media.

**Social Media and Organizing**

Although social media may often be perceived as a tool for personal amusement, its usefulness as a tool for rapid and instantaneous communication also imbues it with the potential to enable masses of people to organize around a specific cause. Indeed, social media has come to play an increasingly prominent role in political campaigns and elections. There are several examples of the ways in which social media and political organizing intersect.

First, social media makes it easier for anyone to participate in democracy and make their voice heard. The advancement of Internet technology in general “is increasing the complexity and specialization of information while at the same time decreasing its cost, thereby making abundant political information and communication available to anyone with the motivation to acquire it . . . the information regime model predicts that such a large-scale change in the cost of information should lead to political change, through its effects on the identity and structure of political intermediaries.”\(^6^0\) These new technologies, especially social media, allow people to engage with the political process more easily than ever before.

Social media likewise facilitates the meeting of like-minded people, and from there, it paves the way for political organizing. In fact, “the traditional logic of collective action has been fundamentally altered by the lowered transaction costs of the new media environment. Formal organizations are no longer necessary since individual tactics like e-petitions can now be organized online and information can spread virally through social media channels like blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. In other words, we are all our own publishers and political

\(^{60}\) Bimber, 21.
organizers now. Social media’s low barrier to expressing one’s sentiments makes it especially appealing to the grassroots population: “Media content is now spread through Twitter and the blogosphere, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. The costs of engaging in many individual acts of political speech have become infinitesimal, particularly in a stable democracy like the United States, where citizens do not face the looming threat of government reprisal.”

It is critical to distinguish between politically-related activity on social media and the use of social media to further political goals. There is an important difference between “this political activity in the new media environment and the political organizing that occurs.” Politically-related activity on social media sites can yield important information for political teams; such opinions can give organizers a better sense of the issues that matter to the public, which in turn helps them to shape the narrative of their cause:

Younger Americans appear to be re-imagining ideals of citizenship, rejecting the “dutiful citizenship” model of previous generations and instead adopting an “actualizing citizenship” model. They turn their attention to participatory or consumptive activities rather than traditional governmental forums. They share public sentiments through tweets and Facebook likes, and view this as a legitimate form of expression. We should treat these new trends seriously while also remaining clear about where they occur. Citizenship models hold long-term implication for civic life. A change in public notions of citizenship responsibilities is what I would term an “Internet effect” located at the mass behavioral rather than the organizational level. It demands a different set of analytic tools and affects different elements of our political system.

Therefore, it is important to understand the dual role of social media:

Social media platforms provide a new set of tools for political associations to engage their communities and convert resources into political power. They also provide a venue for citizens to speak out, sharing opinions and spreading news (true or false). . . . They are both a novel venue for activated public opinion,

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61 Karf, 7.
62 Karf, 7.
63 Karf, 166-167 sic.
64 Karf, 167-168.
equivalent to spontaneous letterwriting of previous eras (but more versatile and publicly accessible), and a toolset for coordinated citizen mobilization efforts.\textsuperscript{65}

Social media expands the ways in which people are able to communicate with each other, and it is necessary to understand the distinctions between the different roles that social media can play in people’s lives and in political organizing.

Is social media a cause of better political organizing or merely a tool to facilitate better organizing? It is the actions of people sharing a goal or a cause that creates change, not the technology, which can only “advantage certain actors and social practices. Technology does not deterministically change society—people using technology do so. . . . Online media incentivize some novel political behaviors, but it is the people who make use of this new technology that affect the contours of political speech.”\textsuperscript{66} In fact, the emergence of new technology does not automatically mean that political realities will suddenly shift. Technology remains merely a platform off of which people can try to jump to new heights:

First, there is “a fine but excruciating line between being the first and being the \textit{first to succeed}.” The rapid development of computational equipment meant that the first PDA—the Apple Newton, in 1987—could be an abysmal failure, while a decade later the Palm Pilot proved to be a tremendous success. It is a matter of the underlying technologies ripening. Just as importantly, however, is the social learning process that occurs online.\textsuperscript{67}

For true change to emerge, it is necessary to foster both the development of technology as well as the interest of people in harnessing such technologies. In the case of organizing, “new media offers an enhanced toolset rather than a complete departure from traditional organizing techniques.”\textsuperscript{68} In other words, an organizer is only as good as her adherence to the principles of organizing, regardless of what fancy technological tools he may or may not wield.

\textsuperscript{65} Karf, 168.
\textsuperscript{66} Karf, 7.
\textsuperscript{67} Karf, 88 sic.
\textsuperscript{68} Karf, 109.
Does social media enable genuinely better political organizing? There are many competing arguments, and each one bears a grain of truth:

First, the new media environment has enabled a surge in “organizing without organizations.” We no longer need organizations to start a petition, create media content, or find like-minded individuals. Second, many fundamental features of American politics—from the average American’s lack of political knowledge or interest to the elite nature of major political institutions—remain unchanged by the new media environment. Everyone can now speak online, but surprisingly few can be heard.⁶⁹

Some argue that social media does not facilitate real organizing around causes, but instead fosters a superficial form of activism dubbed “‘clicktivism’ [that] focus[es] attention on particular digital tactics and argue[s] that historic movements for social change require deeper commitments and stronger ties than those found on Facebook or Twitter.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, these critics deplore the quality of such “clicktivism” and lament the age of social media:

According to their arguments, the Internet’s effect on political institutions is minimal, and may even have deleterious unintended consequences. Malcolm Gladwell suggested, in a widely read New Yorker essay, that “The revolution will not be tweeted.” He argued that social media tools fail to promote the type of strong interpersonal ties necessary for successful social movement organizing. Stuart Shulman has warned that waves of e-petitions and online public comments will swamp federal agencies in “low quality, redundant, and generally insubstantial commenting by the public,” drowning out more substantive citizen participation. Evgeny Morozov dismisses most digital activism as “slacktivism” and argues, “Thanks to its granularity, digital activism provides too many easy ways out.” Waves of new online communications tools lower the costs of citizen input, and this in turn unleashes waves of low-cost symbolic actions with little or no political impact. Underlying these observations is a deeper concern that, to the extent that e-petitions and Facebook clicks substitute for deeper citizen engagement, they may breed resentment and increased apathy toward government action. When all that clicking produces no change, they reason, citizens will turn bitter or tune out.⁷¹

In other words, the rise of clicktivism has led to a lack of true engagement and, from there, to a lack of genuine action and creation of change. Indeed, some argue that although the Internet

⁶⁹ Karpf, 3.
⁷⁰ Karpf, 6.
⁷¹ Karpf, 8.
reaches exponentially more people, the strength of that contact is actually rather weak. Although many voices can now share their political opinions, such ubiquitous sharing does not translate into different political outcomes. For example, “when millions tune in to the State of the Union address, typing and retweeting comments and jokes across Twitter, no coordinating organization is pushing that activity. Much of it, likewise, can be dismissed as unlikely to have a substantial impact on contested political outcomes.”

If social media were the only means through which people communicated, that argument would hold true. But social media complements the traditional practices of organizing, and in doing so, it strengthens organizers’ ability to achieve their desired outcomes:

while information diffuses primarily through weak-tie networks, social movement activation occurs through strong-tie networks. But [Malcolm] Gladwell’s notion of Internet use is too limited. Groups like Living Liberally rely on the Internet to organize social events whose purpose is to foster strong ties between progressive activists. Indeed, the infrastructure that Living Liberally offers to the movement can best be understood as a reservoir of strengthened social ties. It is a substrate through which advocacy organizations and network entrepreneurs can locate potential collaborators to launch future campaign actions.

Social media is another tool with which organizers can build a strong community of leaders who together create a web of people striving towards a goal.

Social media also allows organizers to have a better sense of what the public is reacting to amongst the different narratives about their candidate or cause that a team presents. This real-time feedback and interactive relationship enables an organizing team to know what approach the public finds most compelling, shaping the narratives put into place for a candidate or a cause.

The significance of this feedback loop is not limited to organizing:

The transition toward a “culture of testing” has illustrative parallels in the news industry... the introduction of web metrics (the number of clicks and comments per story) facilitates “management strategies that emphasized the widespread

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72 Karpf, 166.
73 Karpf, 118 sic.
diffusion of audience metrics.” At one online news site, Anderson finds, “It is not an exaggeration to say that website traffic often appeared to be the primary ingredient in news judgment.” The introduction of tools that provide a rough quantitative measure of audience interest can dramatically change work routines for a news organization. Once a measure of audience feedback has been constructed, it takes on meaning within the newsroom. \(^{74}\)

By extension, social media similarly affects a campaign’s decision-making process as it shapes the narrative of its cause. Social media can be taken a step further and used to quantify attendance and engagement in political events or causes:

Online activity like webpage visits and e-mail clicks can be passively tracked. Report-backs from offline events, by contrast, require additional, active effort on the part of the members. As a result, Internet-mediated organizations know vastly more about their members’ online activity than their offline activity, and the organizations can do far less to support and cultivate that offline activity. \(^{75}\)

These are only some examples of the uses that social media can have in an Internet-centric, mobile world.

The rapidly evolving technology around Internet-related devices has likewise spurred changes in the impact of social media on organizing. The rise of Internet-connected mobile phones has further expanded the power of social media in political organizing:

The Mobile Web extends the reach and modifies the application of these tools. The iPhone has already led to an extensive (and some say threatening) new field of online experimentation. With over 300,000 applications available through Apple’s iTunes “app store,” various economic, social, entertainment, and civic organizations are building customized applications to take advantage of geo-local tools. Organizing for America (OFA), the sedimentary offspring of the Obama for America presidential campaign (discussed below), has been at the forefront of developing these apps to support offline engagement. The Obama ‘08 app allows supporters to look up issue information, find local events, sign up for local groups, and use a distributed phone-banking tool. By routing supporters through the application, OFA is able to passively capture more data on the activities of their active volunteers. As Mobile Web-enabled phones gain market share, meeting augmentation and evaluation tools become a next obvious step. Rather than asking members after a meeting to fill out an online questionnaire or enter meeting notes into a backend system, those features can be built into an

\(^{74}\) Karpf, 36.  
\(^{75}\) Karpf, 93 sic.
application that augments the in-person meeting itself. The same type of rating practices that routinely occur on sites like DailyKos—giving “kudos” to comments or recommending diary contributions—can be applied to the PFC activities that, to date, have remained strictly offline.\footnote{Karpf, 93-94.}

These technological tools serve as helpful additions to the traditional organizing practices that center on sharing information, learning from experiences, and constant communication. The mobility of the web means that people can communicate more instantaneously than ever before. Indeed, many people treat their mobile phones as an extension of their arms, with the Internet always at their fingertips. This phenomenon can best be summed up as follows: “The wall that separated ‘cyberspace’ from the ‘real world’ has become a porous boundary. Internet access has come untethered from desktop and laptop devices and become an ever-present, augmenting feature of public life.”\footnote{Karpf, 100.}
Chapter II

2008 Obama Campaign and Social Media

In examining the impact of social media on political organizing, this thesis analyzes the 2008 Obama Campaign as a case study. Compared to other presidential campaigns, the 2008 Obama Campaign was unique and innovative for two reasons: its enormous grassroots field operation and its use of social media to complement and improve organizing practices. This chapter will focus on the campaign’s particular blend of social media and organizing. Indeed, the Obama Campaign offers an ideal example of how social media improves organizing. Besides using an array of public social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, the campaign also employed two social media tools built specifically by and for the campaign: My.BarackObama.com and NationalField; my thesis focuses on the latter application. This chapter briefly describes how the campaign’s use of My.BarackObama.com changed organizing practices for the better. It then describes in detail what NationalField is, how it works, and what data NationalField collected in 2008, in order to set up my argument in Chapter Four that NationalField improved the way people organize.

The Impact of Social Media on the Obama Campaign

The Obama campaign used a wide variety of social media—both public platforms and platforms built by and for the campaign—in order to mobilize an unprecedented number of citizens: “3.1 million contributors, 5 million volunteers, 2.2 million supporters on his main Facebook page, 800,000 on his MySpace page and perhaps a million more names on Obama’s
own campaign Web site."78 This mobilization was also shocking in light of the decline of civic engagement in the United States, which up to that point was "believed to be generational, as younger, less active citizens replace[d] their more civic-minded parents and grandparents over time."79 The Obama campaign "was so successful in overcoming this decline in civic engagement"80 because of its early and consistently active presence on the Internet. As Omar Wasow explains in his article "The First Internet President," "Like John F. Kennedy before him with his masterful exploitation of television, Barack Obama proved that a new medium can not merely impact, but completely transform presidential politics."81 In fact, "Obama was the only candidate who truly cracked through. On YouTube, nearly four times as many people watched official Obama campaign videos as clips of John McCain (about 96 million to 25 million). On Facebook, Obama has 2.4 million "friends," versus McCain's 623,000."82

Some of the Obama campaign's success in the realm of social media can be attributed to its emphasis on creating a New Media Team. Indeed, one important difference between the 2008 Obama campaign and campaigns of the past is the fact that the Obama's New Media department was not a subdivision of the campaign's Technology team.83 Instead, it was coequal with the Communications, Field/Grassroots, and Finance teams, giving the department more weight and power than similar departments have had in campaigns of the past. Like the directors of the Field, the Fundraising, and the Press teams, the New Media team leader Joe Rospars reported directly to campaign manager David Plouffe; thus Rospars was as much a part of the campaign's planning and decision-making as the other team leaders were.84

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78 Burch, 154.
79 Burch, 155.
80 Burch, 155.
81 Wasow.
82 Wasow.
83 Delany, TechPresident.
84 Delany, TechPresident.
In early 2007, Rospars, who co-founded his own online consulting firm and worked on Howard Dean’s 2003-2004 online-fueled campaign, was selected to be the Obama campaign’s New Media director, and Kevin Malover, a veteran of online travel agency Orbitz, to be the chief technology officer.\textsuperscript{85} In an interview in May 2007, Julius Genachowski, Chairperson of the Technology, Media, and Telecommunications Policy Working Group, which created the Obama Technology and Innovation Plan, said: “We may be the only campaign with a full-time chief technology officer.”\textsuperscript{86} While Rospars was in charge of the entire political operation, Malover helped build software and took care of integrating data and voter files.\textsuperscript{87}

Moreover, the social media tools used on the Obama campaign in 2008 were inspired by the innovative tactics of the Howard Dean presidential campaign during the 2003-2004 election cycle in which Dean used his own organizing website, MeetUp.com.\textsuperscript{88} As Scholar Michael Cornfield points out:

\begin{quote}
the Internet’s distinctive role in politics has arisen because it can be used in multiple ways. Part deliberative town square, part raucous debating society, part research library, part instant news source, and part political comedy club, the Internet connects voters to a wealth of content and commentary about politics. At the same time, campaigners learned a great deal about how to use the Internet to attract and aggregate viewers, donors, message forwarders, volunteers, and voters during the 2003-2004 election cycle.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

Campaigning on the Internet yielded large advances for former Vermont Governor Howard Dean in his long-shot bid for the Democratic nomination for the presidency. Campaign Manager Joe Trippi’s strategy was to “brand Dean as the candidate who would use the Internet to revive democracy. ‘When you looked at him,’ Trippi wrote in his campaign memoir, ‘you were going to

\textsuperscript{85} Delany, \textit{TechPresident}.
\textsuperscript{86} Delany, \textit{TechPresident}.
\textsuperscript{87} Delany, \textit{TechPresident}.
\textsuperscript{88} Cornfield, S.
\textsuperscript{89} Cornfield, 1.
think Internet and personal empowerment in the same way you thought Vietnam hero when you looked at John Kerry, or Southern optimism when you looked at John Edwards."\(^90\)

Beyond reaching scores of voters, the Obama campaign gained another advantage from its use of social media and the Internet. The campaign’s online strategies “successfully reduced the costs of political participation in terms of time, money, and civic skills,”\(^91\) paving the way for typically inactive citizens to become engaged. Compared to previous campaigns, the Obama campaign had a more universal and democratic form of participation, in which youth, low-income citizens, etc. participated because they were now enabled to do so. All of a sudden, resources were not as large of an issue (“one of the primary factors affecting civic engagement is access to resources; people undertake civic activities because they have resources such as time, money, education, and civic skills”\(^92\)); the 2008 campaign saw people from all walks of life participating in politics. Then-Senator Obama often called upon each citizen to become change makers because “direct action by Americans can make change.”\(^93\) During his speech accepting the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination, Obama said, “Change comes to Washington. Change happens because the American people demand it—because they rise up and insist on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics of a new time.”\(^94\) For the first time in several decades, the youth of America saw themselves as the agents of change.

**The Obama Campaign’s Strategy for Organizing and Social Media**

Although the Obama campaign’s use of a wide variety of social media enabled it to reach millions of voters, it was the campaign’s use of two specific social media platforms—

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\(^90\) Cornfield, 1.
\(^91\) Burch, 156.
\(^92\) Burch, 156.
\(^93\) Burch, 158.

Pan 36
My.BarackObama.com and NationalField—to enhance its organizing efforts that were truly groundbreaking. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, was the genius behind My.BarackObama.com, the public social media platform created by the campaign’s New Media team. In early 2007, Hughes left Facebook to work in Chicago on Senator Obama’s new media campaign, and has since been often cited for his innovation on this venture. “The campaign’s new-media strategy, inspired by popular social networks like MySpace and Facebook, has revolutionized the use of the Web as a political tool, helping the candidate raise more than two million donations of less than $200 each and swiftly mobilize hundreds of thousands of supporters before various primaries.”\(^{95}\) David Plouffe, Manager of the Obama Campaign, explained, “Technology has always been used as a net to capture people in a campaign or cause, but not to organize. Chris saw what was possible before anyone else.”\(^{96}\) Even President Obama credited the Internet’s social networking tools as a “big part”\(^{97}\) of his primary season success: “One of my fundamental beliefs from my days as a community organizer is that real change comes from the bottom up, and there’s no more powerful tool for grass-roots organizing than the Internet.”\(^{98}\)

The My.BarackObama.com site offered online organizing tools that mobilized and activated citizens to become involved in the Obama Campaign on their own. For example, the site featured a revolutionary virtual phone bank tool, where volunteers could sign in online, receive a list of phone numbers, and then make calls from home. The Obama campaign “pioneered a way to combine voter databases and telemarketing tools into a home-based phone

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\(^{96}\) McGirt, Fast Company Magazine.
banking system that allowed current supporters to easily call undecided voters in key states,\textsuperscript{99} a first in campaign history. Moreover, the Obama campaign's website facilitated the organic development (i.e. without the help of a staffed Field Organizer) of grassroots organizing within a community, because "group members could talk directly to each other and coordinate independent campaign efforts that ranged from sharing informal personal stories to planning big-ticket fundraisers, getting together for modest debate watching parties and organizing mammoth weekend get-out-the-vote efforts."\textsuperscript{100} Therefore, My.BarackObama.com empowered volunteers to organize on their own – it served as an application to "grow your own organizer."\textsuperscript{101} Furthermore, the main difference between President Obama's Internet presence in 2008 and that of many other candidates was the fact that My.BarackObama.com allowed supporters to reach one another: it was not solely a one-directional means for the candidate to reach his supporters. In this way, the Obama new media team brought people together to participate in the democratic process, creating an online hub at "the centerpiece . . . My.BarackObama.com, where supporters can join local groups, create events, sign up for updates and set up personal fund-raising pages."\textsuperscript{102} But most important was the way that My.BarackObama.com "bridged the gap between online and offline voters."\textsuperscript{103} After attracting all of these supporters to the social media platform, the campaign would then send these supporters' contact information to their local campaign field office.\textsuperscript{104} In this way, the campaign was ingeniously connecting its online organizing efforts to its offline field organizing efforts by making sure all of the data being collected by the social

\textsuperscript{99} Wasow.
\textsuperscript{100} Wasow.
\textsuperscript{101} Wasow.
\textsuperscript{103} Wasow.
\textsuperscript{104} Wasow.

Pan 38
media application was then given to each of the local Field Organizers. In other words, supporters and interested volunteers were always connected back to their local Field Organizer; the Field Organizer could then contact these supporters to ask if they wanted to get more involved. This integration is significant because it often brought more volunteers to the campaign field office’s doorsteps, and more importantly, it unified all of the field operations in a given region, guaranteeing that individuals who were organizing on their own through the site were not redoing what the local office had already done.

The campaign’s two main social media tools, My.BarackObama.com and NationalField, served two completely different functions. My.BarackObama.com improved the way that individuals who were unaffiliated with the campaign could organize and combine their efforts with the campaign’s field offices. My.BarackObama.com also contained other features for grassroots fundraising purposes, and it was an application available all over the world. By contrast, NationalField was the social media tool used solely on the campaign side – a tool that was internal to the field operations and not accessible by the public. NationalField focused solely on the organizing practices of the campaign’s hired Field Staff. Thus, NationalField was an internal social network that tracked organizing productivity. Its purpose was to help make Field Organizers achieve better organizing outcomes by holding them accountable to their goals, tracking their progress, and applauding their success. Most importantly, however, NationalField fostered a new competitive environment that drove organizers to work harder and set higher goals for themselves.

It was in the state of Georgia that the 2008 Obama Campaign first realized the potential that social media held for facilitating powerful organizing capabilities for political organizers. The peach state was where the Obama Campaign’s social media platform, “NationalField,” was
born. On almost every campaign, especially those that focus on their grassroots efforts, there is an enormous amount of data being reported every night—such as, the number of doors being knocked on, the number of phone calls being made, the number of new voters being registered, just to name a few—and that data somehow must be managed, organized, and analyzed. NationalField arose from the 2008 Obama campaign’s strategic need to manage all of that data in Georgia, and subsequently, in Ohio and Florida.

During the 2008 Presidential Primaries, many of the individual state primary teams were put together quickly and did not have a lot of time to accomplish their work (primary campaigns for Obama in 2008 on average lasted about two weeks). As a result, many of these campaigns ran up against data problems, but never had sufficient time to address the issues before moving on to the next primary competition. Field Organizers had limited options for reporting data: Excel spreadsheets that they would email to their Regional Field Director; the EditGrid application that allowed multiple Field Organizers to report on a single spreadsheet all at once, but was often very slow and full of bugs; or GoogleDocs. Even if a Regional Field Director managed to keep track of all of this daily data on his/her own, there was no good way to visualize it so that Field Organizers, Regional Field Directors, Deputy Field Directors, all the way up the chain of command to Field Directors and State Directors could assess each individual’s progress over time. This critical issue was not fully addressed until the General Election.

Aharon Wasserman, who was a Deputy Field Director in Georgia at the time, was put in the role of data manager. Every night he had to compile all of the Field Organizers and Volunteers numbers by 9:00 pm and send it up the chain to the national headquarters in

105 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
106 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
107 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
Chicago. But the process to collect all of this data was so cumbersome that it was nearly impossible to get all of his numbers in on time. Finally one night, he received a call from Jon Carson, National Field Director of the 2008 Obama Campaign, asking him why his numbers were coming in so late every night. Aharon explains:

After that phone call, I said to myself, there has to be a better way to do this. I was fed up. Here I was, receiving data from hundreds of people in a million different ways. Some people would email me their numbers in the body of an email, some people would email me an Excel spreadsheet with their numbers in it, some people would make a Google Doc and share that with me... and I had to go through all of these sources and compile them in one or two hours. That’s when I started to think about other more efficient ways to do all of this.

Thus, NationalField was born, with the help of then-volunteers Justin Lewis and Edward Saatchi, who shared Aharon’s vision of an online platform for the state’s entire field operation to use.

As the three of them began implementing this platform, they quickly realized that creating a tool for reporting numbers was only the beginning – they should not stop there. They implemented a leaderboard to show which organizers were on top for that day; using Facebook as their model, they gave each user their own profile and a “Wall” for others to post comments on; they added ways to report qualitative data such as best practices or “ups and downs,” a term the campaign used for each organizer’s accomplishments and challenges of each day; they put progress bars on each user’s page so that an organizer could see what percentage to their goal they were. But halfway through this implementation, the Obama campaign decided in August 2008 to remove the majority of its field efforts from Georgia because their data indicated Georgia would not be a state in play for then-Senator Obama. Jeremy Bird, the Ohio General Election Director at the time, had heard about the innovative online platform that Wasserman, Lewis, and Saatchi had implemented in Georgia and quickly called them to ask that they come to

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110 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
Ohio. This is how NationalField came to be employed in Ohio, and soon after Florida followed suit.\footnote{Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.}

So how does NationalField work? Each member of the Field Staff receives a username and password to login to NationalField. Once logged in, the user would see the home page of the application, which was the statewide Leaderboard.\footnote{Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.} This Leaderboard would report in real-time all of the organizers who had achieved the highest number for each metric the campaign was tracking at the time.\footnote{Please see Appendix B, Figure 6.} From this page, a user could access their “Submit Report” page. This page contained several empty field boxes for the user to fill in with their numbers every night when they had to report.\footnote{Please see Appendix B, Figure 1.} Some metrics would change every now and then, for example the Number of Watch Parties for the presidential debates – this metric would only be tracked for the week leading up to the debates.\footnote{Ashley Interview. Personal interview. January 20, 2012.} The Number of New Voter Registrations was another metric that changed: it was tracked every day until mid-October, the voter registration deadline.\footnote{Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.} But there were certain metrics that were consistently tracked throughout the entire time that NationalField was employed during the General Election: Number of New Volunteers Recruited, Number of Doors Knocked On, and Number of Phone Calls Made.

In addition to these numerical metrics, the organizer had to submit “ups and downs” for each day, which are short anecdotes of things that went well and things that went poorly on a given day. Once a Field Organizer entered all of their metrics for the night, they would click submit report and this would update their profile and the Leaderboard too, if the organizer had broken the current standing record. The Field Organizer’s profile contained several pages: there
was a “Wall” where anyone on NationalField could leave a comment for that organizer, an organizer could upload a picture and update their information page with personal details, and there was a graphs page which visually displayed in line or bar graphs the organizer’s various numbers over a given amount of time.\textsuperscript{117} A user can search for any other user when using the Search field and each user can see any other user’s profile and data. In many ways, NationalField modeled itself after the Facebook structure.

Through this application, the Obama Campaign was able to collect an enormous amount of organizing data during the 2008 elections. Every Field Organizer in Ohio (there were about four hundred of them\textsuperscript{118}) reported their numbers every day on NationalField from mid-August to the end of the General Election on November 4, 2008. This data was used in many ways: for the Senior Staff in Ohio campaign headquarters, which was located in Columbus, to track the work of the Field Staff on the ground; for Field Organizers and their supervisors (Regional Field Directors) to measure what percent the organizers were to their goals; and to report to the national campaign in Chicago the progress of Ohio as a state. But there were also other less tangible but equally important uses of this data: to serve as a motivation tool for organizers on the ground because they could then compare their numbers to other organizers, which in turn created a competitive environment that helped organizers improve their organizing practices.

\textsuperscript{117} Please see Appendix B, Figure 4 and Figure 5.
\textsuperscript{118} Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
Chapter III

Data and Methods

Although the 2008 Obama Campaign had Field Organizers in all fifty states—making it one of the largest field operations in presidential campaign history\textsuperscript{119}—my data focuses on the state of Ohio. My reasons for this focus are threefold. First, of my cumulative research, the most complete set of data for organizing metrics comes from Ohio. During the General Election in 2008, NationalField was implemented in only three states: Ohio, Georgia, and Florida. Due to my own employment as a Field Organizer in Ohio, I was able to obtain Ohio’s organizing data from the period before NationalField was implemented (data to which I do not have access for the other two states), as well as Ohio’s organizing data from the period after NationalField was implemented. In order to understand how a social media platform like NationalField improves the way that people organize, it is crucial to look at the transition from an organizing environment without any social media influences to an organizing environment with a heavy emphasis on social media tools. Thus, Ohio offers the best and most thorough overview of this critical transition.

Second, again due to my own employment in Ohio, I was easily able to pinpoint whom to interview for this research because I was already familiar with the types of organizers (i.e. organizers responsible for different types of turf) in Ohio. This selection process would have been harder to determine if I had researched and interviewed organizers in other states because each state varied in the way that it categorized its Field Organizers.\textsuperscript{120} Thus, my familiarity with Ohio enabled me to conduct interviews with eight very different Field Organizers from Ohio;

\textsuperscript{119} Traci Burch, “Can the New Commander In Chief Sustain His All-Volunteer Standing Army?”
\textsuperscript{120} TechPresident.
choosing to cover this wide spectrum of turf yielded a variety of reflections and anecdotes that are invaluable to this study.

Third and most importantly, for decades Ohio has been—and continues to be—a significant battleground state during presidential elections. Dubbing it the “Ultimate Battleground State,” news media outlet *ABC News* writes, “In the last century, Ohio has predicted the outcome of nearly every presidential election, which is why the Buckeye State may be the ultimate bellwether when it comes to the nation’s politics.”¹²¹ Indeed, 2008 was no exception: Ohio was a crucial swing state for then-Senator Obama; in fact, Ohio was one of eight states that had a margin of victory that was less than 6%.¹²² Recognizing its importance in deciding the electoral outcome, the Obama campaign placed a lot of emphasis on Ohio and focused much effort there. In fact, Ohio had one of the largest field operations out of all fifty states; there were four hundred paid Field Organizers on staff in Ohio.¹²³ Thus, for these three reasons, Ohio is the most ideal case study to examine when analyzing political organizing and social media during the 2008 Obama Campaign.

It is important to note, however, that the decision to focus solely on Ohio contributes some degree of bias to the results of my study. Since Ohio was a crucial battleground state for then-Senator Obama in 2008, the campaign’s field efforts were much larger in Ohio than in most other states. Therefore, it is unlikely that the experiences of the hundreds of Field Organizers on the ground in Ohio were the same as the experiences of the dozen or so Field Organizers in any of the other states.

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¹²³ Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
NationalField Numbers and Organizer Interviews

In order to prove that social media improves organizing, this thesis examines data collected during the presidential campaign from June 2008 to Election Day (November 4th, 2008). The data were drawn primarily from three sources: quantitative data collected by NationalField; open-ended and long interviews with Field Organizers for the Obama campaign in Ohio, volunteers for the Obama campaign in Ohio, and staff members from NationalField; and observations of the organizing practices of these same people. My own field notes from my experience as a Field Organizer in Dayton, Ohio and field notes on day-to-day operations and conversations with fellow organizers and volunteers were considered as well. The study focuses on three regions: Cleveland, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; and Dayton, Ohio. These three cities are particularly interesting because they are all located in Ohio—a state that, as aforementioned, is electorally competitive (i.e. a “Swing State”)—and because these regions include urban turf, suburban turf, and in some cases even rural turf. Ohio’s electoral competitiveness allowed for the observation of campaign offices whose main focus was on organizing in the field, whereas other states placed their priorities not on organizing but on fundraising, for example.

Collecting the organizing numbers from NationalField ended up being a much more complicated process than I originally thought it would be when I embarked on my thesis journey. The main challenge I confronted was privacy issues. Since the 2008 Obama campaign organizing data from Ohio technically belongs to the Ohio Campaign for Change, which is now housed under the Democratic National Committee, there were more organizations from which I needed to receive permission than I originally realized. Once NationalField discovered that the Democratic National Committee felt that this data should be kept private (especially since all of
the numbers are tied to specific organizers), it became a lot more difficult for me even to look at
the data, let alone use all of it for this study.

This case study is primarily based on open-ended, long interviews that covered topics
such as the Field Organizers’ or volunteers’ personal histories (i.e. “Stories of Self”\textsuperscript{124}), why they
got involved with the campaign, the offices in which they worked, their work itself, their
organizing practices, and how these practices changed over the course of the campaign. What
follows is an explanation of how I chose whom to interview as well as what procedures I used to
obtain and to conduct the interviews, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the long
interview method more generally.

The key data used for this study—the phrases, language, and understanding of political
organizing—were collected in long, open-ended interviews ranging in length from one hour to
about four hours, with fifteen subjects who had all worked on the Obama Campaign in Ohio.
These fifteen subjects came from three different kinds of groups: hired Field Organizers in Ohio,
volunteers in Ohio, and staff members from NationalField. I selected these three groups to
compare paid organizers and their practices against one another, and then to compare these
experiences to those of the volunteers. I sought organizers with different types of turf (i.e. Urban,
Suburban, Rural, Youth Vote/University) in order to achieve diversity in my interviewee sample
and to capture a wide band of the various types of organizers that were involved on the
campaign.

Having selected my interview group types and my interviewees, I obtained my initial
interviews by emailing or calling my subjects. Luckily, due to my own former position as a Field
Organizer in Dayton, OH, I already had all of my interviewees’ contact information. In making
these initial emails or calls, I briefly explained the nature of my project, provided my

\textsuperscript{124} Ganz, Organizing Notes, 3.
institutional affiliation, and then asked if they were willing to participate. I was successful in obtaining all of the interviews I had set out to do: eight interviews with Field Organizers, four interviews with volunteers, and three interviews with staff members of National Field. In some cases, the interviewee was ready to do the interview immediately, namely, right after I introduced my project they wanted to conduct the interview then and there over the phone. In other cases, the interviewee preferred to schedule a substantial chunk of time at a later date to conduct the full interview. I made sure to be as flexible as possible in the scheduling of interviews, agreeing to do them during evenings and weekends if the interviewee preferred that schedule.

Since my interview guide was open-ended, I assured those worried about time constraints that the length of the interview depended a great deal on them, on the availability of their time and how much they had to say. As other long interviewers have found, my interviewees’ concerns about time were rarely expressed again once the interview actually began. Interviewees would often spend much more time talking to me than they had originally indicated was possible, which was helpful for me in gathering as much data as possible. I found that scheduling interviews in late afternoons/early evenings or on the weekends make for a more relaxed atmosphere, and often resulted in a longer interview.

**Interviewing Mechanics**

The interviews themselves took place over a five-month period, spanning October 2011 to February 2012, and my transcription efforts continued through April 2012. In total, my efforts at conducting and transcribing interviews took about eight months and generated more than

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thirty-five hours of recording and more than sixty double-spaced pages of transcripts (some interviews I did not transcribe fully if I felt some parts of the interview were not relevant to my study). I conducted almost all of my interviews over the phone or over Skype, recording them as well as taking handwritten notes in some cases. I traveled to Washington, DC to conduct my interviews with the NationalField staff members in the NationalField office, and recorded those in person as well. The interviews themselves were structured but open-ended, ranging from one hour to about four hours; I found that the interviews with the Field Organizers tended to be the longest ones. My interview guide126 was designed to get interviewees to talk freely about themselves, their relationship to the campaign, the organizing work they did on the Obama Campaign, and their relationship to NationalField.

I came up against a few challenges while conducting the interviews. Some interviews proceeded uninterrupted, whereas others were interrupted by phone calls, work, or other distractions. I always made every effort to hear every word spoken by the interviewee, but sometimes this was very difficult to do. It required a great deal of attention, and I was frequently quite tired at the end of an interview. As other long interviewers have reported, listening may well be harder than talking.127 For all the interviews, I used my MacBook to record the interview. In the case of the phone interviews, I put the interviewee on speakerphone and held the phone close to my computer’s microphone. In only one or two instances did the computer fail to capture every word spoken by the interviewee.

I tried to keep my tone of voice in the interviews as neutral and professional as possible, which was often difficult since I had personal relationships with each of the interviewees. As a result of this close bond with the interviewees, however, I felt that there was a lot of trust already

126 Please see Appendix A for the interview guide.
established between us. Thus each of my subjects was trying to be as thorough and helpful as possible in their interview responses. On the other hand, I did wonder if these personal connections somehow biased my interviews by making the interviewees feel the urge—consciously or subconsciously—to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear.

It is also important to note that, although I made efforts to obtain similar kinds of information from each interviewee and stayed within the general parameters set by my interview guide, I did not try to make every interview exactly the same nor did I try to rigidly control the direction of the conversation, as survey and other interview research sometimes does. As scholar Nathan Teske points out:

The advantages of this approach over survey research and coded interviews is that it acknowledge that interviews are in fact formed in specific social contexts and are really a species of conversation in which, as with all conversation, the meanings of words and phrases are ‘indexical.’ This is, Mishler argues, unlike a view of surveys and interviews as stimulus-response exchanges, in which the interviewer endeavors to provide each interviewee with an identical stimulus in order to compare different responses, an indexical understanding of interviews acknowledges that ‘meanings in discourse are neither singular nor fixed, … [but] rather take on specific and contextually grounded meanings within and through the discourse as it develops and is shaped by the speakers.’

Therefore, this approach assumes that the use of open-ended interview data is an interpretive task, “one guided not by predefined categories or coding schemas but by the contextually situated meanings of what was said in the interviews.” In this way, the interpretive quality of open-ended interviews along with the non-random sample makes generalizing about political organizers in this study difficult, but not always impossible. Thus I conclude that it is enough to

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assert that the ideas and experiences captured by these interviews are reasonably widespread, but not necessarily universally applicable to all organizers.
Chapter IV

Analysis

After looking closely at the various forms of aforementioned data, three main themes emerged as to how social media (i.e. NationalField) improved the way that Field Organizers in Ohio during the 2008 Obama Campaign organized. First, social media improves efficiency in organizing work. By using a social media platform, organizers could communicate, report their numbers, and get their feedback all in one centralized location. Second, social media creates a more powerful feeling of camaraderie amongst organizers. By becoming part of a social media network, members of the field staff from all levels were communicating more easily and more frequently. The idea that these two themes, efficiency and camaraderie, arise as a result of the integration of social media with organizing is a relatively intuitive one. The more unexpected result, however, is that social media fuels competition, and it is this competitive factor that is the biggest and most important impact of social media on organizing. The feeling of friendly competition amongst the organizers ultimately proves to be the most powerful means of improving the way that people organize. The influence of NationalField can be seen through its effect on organizing outcomes and its effect on organizers’ feelings.

The most explicit way to see NationalField’s impact is to look at the quantitative changes in organizing outcomes from both before and after NationalField was implemented. The data from before NationalField was implemented (June to mid-August) reflect the Ohio Field Organizers’ numbers without the help of a social media platform; in other words, each organizer reported her numbers only to her direct supervisor via Excel spreadsheets, Google Docs, or email. The data from after NationalField was implemented (mid-August to Election Day) reflect
the Ohio Field Organizers’ numbers with the help of a social media platform, when the use of
social media was integrated into organizing practices.

These data illustrate that, after NationalField was implemented, organizers’ numbers
(specifically the number of doors knocked on) increased significantly.\textsuperscript{131} Unfortunately, as I
mentioned in the previous chapter, I was not given access to the entire dataset due to privacy
issues. I was able, however, to capture certain trends in the data of each of the Field Organizers
whom I interviewed for this study. All of the Field Organizers that I interviewed believed that
the most important metric in the General Election campaign was the number of Door Knocks.

David, a Field Organizer from Columbus, OH, explains:

Knocking on doors was definitely the most important thing we reported every
night. If you were on the Leaderboard for door knocks, it’s like finding the Holy
Grail... I think it probably has something to do with the fact that getting
volunteers to canvass is not easy – people don’t usually like going door-to-door or
talking to strangers in person. People would much rather phone bank. So as an
organizer, if you were able to get a lot of people to go out knocking on doors for
you, then you were a damn good organizer.\textsuperscript{132}

Therefore, the metric of number of Door Knocks is the most significant metric because, to an
organizer, it represents the ultimate success. Being the most difficult metric in which to excel,
organizers compared their skills largely based on this one metric.

Furthermore, the Obama campaign itself recognized that face-to-face contact via
canvassing remained highly significant in appealing to voters. Scholars Donald P. Green and
Alan S. Gerber proved this truth when they conducted randomized experiments to examine the
effectiveness of phone canvassing and face-to-face contact on youth vote turnout near large
public universities. Their study found that “face-to-face canvassing increases turnout by an
average of 8.5 percentage-points [which] is also statistically significant” and that “face-to-face

\textsuperscript{131} Please see Table 1 and Table 2 on page 54.
\textsuperscript{132} David Interview. Personal interview. October 20, 2011.
canvassing produces ‘spillover’ effects. Adults living with voters in the treatment group vote at significantly higher rates than adults living with voters in the control group."¹³³ To examine the impact of NationalField on organizing outcomes, the following table displays Field Organizers’ numbers of Door Knocks during the campaign:

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Location</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Door Knocks/Day, Pre-NationalField</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Door Knocks/Day, Post-NationalField</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan – Columbus, OH</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley – Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa – Dayton, OH</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew – Dayton, OH</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David – Columbus, OH</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will – Columbus, OH</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary – Dayton, OH</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Location</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Door Knocks in Region/Day, Pre-NationalField</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Door Knocks in Region/Day, Post-NationalField</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aharon³⁴ – Dayton, OH</td>
<td>1201</td>
<td>5534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated by the two Tables above, Field Organizers were significantly more successful in their organizing outcome of Number of Door Knocks after NationalField was implemented. In one case (Andrew’s), the organizer even quintupled his results.

³⁴ Aharon was the Regional Field Director in Dayton, OH. Therefore, his row of data reflects his entire region’s door knocking numbers, which is the sum of 10 Field Organizers’ door knocking numbers.
It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this numerical data. It is hard to know the precise reason behind these improvements. One could argue that the numbers are trending upwards because of the natural passage of time; as the campaign got closer and closer to Election Day, perhaps organizers were having more success because more volunteers showed up as time was running out. Or perhaps, as organizers gained more experience, they became better organizers, regardless of the implementation of the social media platform. Or perhaps NationalField was in fact the catalyst for these improvements. The bottom line is that the data shows a clear change in organizing outcomes after the implementation of NationalField.

Besides quantitative differences, what were some of the qualitative differences—for example, the impact on people’s feelings—after NationalField was put into place? The interviews that I conducted help to paint a clearer picture of what was actually happening on the ground in Ohio, and help to uncover some of the reasons for the changes in organizing outcomes. NationalField improved organizers’ efficiency, and the most significant way in which it achieved this effect was by streamlining communication. Before NationalField was implemented in Ohio, communication amongst staffers on the campaign was one-directional. Field Organizers would email their Regional Field Directors their daily numbers and their ups and downs, and then the Regional Field Director would email these to the Deputy Field Director, who would then email them to the Field Director, continuing up the chain of command.\textsuperscript{135} In other words, most of the communication was happening in a “bottom-up manner,”\textsuperscript{136} where communication occurred vertically between an organizer and her direct supervisor, but not laterally between an organizer and another organizer, for example.

\textsuperscript{135} Please see Appendix A, Figure 1 for a diagram of the campaign field structure in Ohio.
\textsuperscript{136} Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.
After the implementation of NationalField, however, the way that organizers communicated completely changed. With the social media platform, organizers could communicate more easily, more efficiently, and more casually with all members of the Field Staff. For example, writing on the “wall” of an organizer whom one did not know because he/she was from a different region felt “easier and more normal than sending them an email.”\textsuperscript{137} Gary, a Field Organizer from Dayton, OH, sheds light on this subject: “If I saw the ups and downs of an organizer from another region that related to my own ups and downs, I could connect with that organizer through NationalField via wall comments and start giving advice to one another. It made me feel better knowing other people were having the same struggles as myself.”\textsuperscript{138} As Gary illustrates, another helpful outcome of the newly streamlined communication, besides efficiency, was the fostering of an open dialogue amongst the organizing team. This sentiment echoes Ganz’s emphasis, as mentioned in Chapter I, on the importance of healthy communication; such dialogues not only create forums for decision-making, but also generate new ideas and enforce accountability. According to Ganz, it is crucial for every member of the team to discuss their actions and their results because these conversations reinforce the idea that everyone is responsible, to the team and to the cause, for producing good outcomes. Thus, NationalField became the forum for this type of dialogue.

Besides streamlining communication, NationalField improved organizing efficiency by facilitating GOTV (Get Out The Vote). One of the most innovative tools introduced by NationalField to the world of political organizing was its “GOTV Tool” for Election Day. There were a lot of numbers that needed to be tracked by senior staff throughout GOTV and Election Day, and these numbers were updated every two hours by Field organizers on the ground. One

\textsuperscript{137} Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.
\textsuperscript{138} Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.
of the Regional Field Directors explained, "I don't even know what Election Day would have looked like without NationalField. Our inboxes and Blackberries would have been flooded—I don't think I would have been able to keep track and stay on top of each district of my region." Each Field Organizer was operating out of one location, named their "hub," on Election Day, but had several staging locations that they needed to manage. These staging locations were strategically placed all over their turf and were managed by their volunteer leaders. At the beginning of Election Day, which began at 4:00 am, each Field Organizer needed to indicate that their "hub" and their staging locations were all open. This status notification was accomplished in real-time on the NationalField platform; with the click of a button, an organizer could indicate which staging locations were open and which were not yet open. Thus, with the help of NationalField's GOTV tool, organizers improved their efficiency by cutting down on back-and-forth emailing, thereby helping organizers to be more productive with their time.

Furthermore, Field Organizers were responsible for reporting various metrics from all of the polling locations in their turf. These numbers needed to be updated every two hours. Without the social media platform that Field Organizers updated in real-time, it would have been extremely difficult and cumbersome for Senior Staff to manage and track each Field Organizer's progress on Election Day.

More importantly, the open communication streams facilitated by NationalField also brought about an increased transparency of data, which proved crucial in improving organizing outcomes by creating a feeling of camaraderie. Before NationalField, when each organizer reported her numbers without the social-media platform, all organizing data was, by default, kept

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139 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
private to each individual. An organizer from Region 2 could not see the numbers or progress of even another organizer from Region 2, let alone see the data of organizers in a completely different region of the state. Therefore, not only were organizers operating individually—focusing solely on their own numbers, goals, and ups and downs—but each region in the state was likewise operating on its own. Thus, the field operations of the entire state felt fragmented, with each region disconnected from the rest. The emphasis was placed on the individual organizer, instead of on the grassroots efforts as a whole. Ganz’s teachings, as mentioned in Chapter I, warn organizers of the importance of building a community and developing a strong sense of teamwork. It is much harder to achieve successful organizing outcomes when a team’s efforts are fragmented and its organizers are working as individuals.

These individualistic attitudes changed once NationalField was in place and the sharing of data became a staple of the organizing process. Organizers were now able to share qualitative data such as “ups and downs,” as well as quantitative data such as their metrics (i.e. number of new volunteers recruited, one-on-one meetings held, voters registered, phone calls made, doors knocked on, etc.) and their percentage to goal. (Goals were numbers usually set by the Regional Field Director or Deputy Field Director.) This newfound transparency of data created a new organizing culture—one that fostered competition, which drove organizers to set higher goals for themselves and for their regions.143

In conjunction with data transparency, the placement of the Leaderboard at the front and center of the NationalField home page was another way in which the social media platform encouraged competition. At the end of every day during the campaign, each of the four hundred

Field Organizers reported their numbers on a simple web form. Their new numbers were instantaneously added to their profile, and the Leaderboard was updated in real-time. This real-time feature was important because it “created an excitement around reporting. At the end of the day, I would wait in anticipation with my volunteers at a phone bank or with my fellow Field Organizers in our region’s headquarters to see who made the Leaderboard. Watching different names and numbers change on the Leaderboard in real-time as people were reporting was kind of exhilarating.” Thus, NationalField created a new organizing ritual that revolved around its Leaderboard. Some offices noticed that their office culture began to center around NationalField and its nightly reporting. Aharon, the Regional Field Director in Dayton, OH, explains that “reporting on NationalField every night was one of the few times all the organizers from my region came together. That was when we felt most like a team, because we wanted our region to be on top of the Leaderboard… During reporting time, I started to notice some friendly competition between organizers in my region.”

Indeed, the Leaderboard triggered an emotional transformation in many organizers and their volunteers. Field Organizers felt a stronger sense of urgency to accomplish their goals because they were being measured in concrete and highly visible terms. Ashley, a Field Organizer in Cleveland, OH, describes this transformation: “NationalField made me want to win even more – and I don’t just mean the election, which I obviously always wanted to win, but I mean my region… Because the whole state could see how you were doing, I felt more pressure to succeed.”

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144 Please see Appendix B, Figure 1.
147 Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
were high enough to be published on the Leaderboard. Thanks to NationalField, everyone on the
ground had a means of comparison, and this new state of affairs brought about some friendly
competition. Alyssa, a Field Organizer from Dayton, OH, found herself working harder and
trying new organizing techniques and practices as a result of NationalField and its Leaderboard.

Before, I was working and minding my own business... all I knew was that I was
trying my best to hit my own goals. If I didn’t, I didn’t. If I did, yay for me. I
never really thought to compare myself to others, mainly because I had rural turf
and most of the other organizers in my region had urban or suburban turfs. But
then, when I started seeing organizers who had rural turf from other regions on
the Leaderboard, and they were blowing my numbers out of the water, my ears
perked up a bit. What were they doing that I wasn’t doing? How can I learn from
their best practices? It was time to put on my A-game.149

The growing feeling of competition drove her to push herself to become a better organizer.

These feelings of increased competition were felt by field staff and volunteers alike.

Alyssa explains the change in her volunteers: “It was no longer just about Barack Obama and
winning the election, it was now also about pride for one’s community. Volunteers wanted to see
their district or neighborhood team on the Leaderboard; they wanted to prove that there were
people in rural Ohio who supported Obama just as strongly as in, I don’t know, urban areas like
Cleveland... My volunteers really cared about the Leaderboard, and they worked harder because
of it.”150 NationalField gave agency and efficacy to volunteers and organizers by holding them
accountable to their goals in a public way, applauding and recognizing their success, and
tracking their productivity. In almost all of the interviews conducted, the organizers expressed
feelings of “happiness” or “pride” if their name made it onto the Leaderboard.151 Will, a Field
Organizer from Columbus, OH, explains, “It felt good to be recognized for all the hard work...
Organizing is not easy, and it was nice to feel like you were getting credit for everything you were doing every now and again.”¹⁵²

Capitalizing on the increased competition fostered by the social media platform, the General Election Director for Ohio, Jeremy Bird, and the Field Director for Ohio, Jackie Bray, organized several statewide competitions for the state’s Field Staff. Two of the more memorable competitions were “Born to Reg” and the “Ohio vs. Pennsylvania” competition.¹⁵³ The “Born to Reg” statewide competition occurred during the week before Ohio’s voter registration deadline and focused on registering new voters. The Field Organizer whose neighborhood team accumulated the highest total number of new voter registrations, phone calls, and door knocks over the course of that week would get to go to a Bruce Springsteen rally for Obama—to introduce Springsteen in front of 15,000 people and meet him backstage. In response to this large and exciting prize, “my volunteers were in a frenzy. My life as an organizer revolved around NationalField during the weekend of this competition because it was all about the numbers.”¹⁵⁴ A similar sentiment infused the “Ohio vs. Pennsylvania” challenge, in which Ohio challenged Pennsylvania in the number of doors that could be knocked on over a weekend. These official competitions made Field Organizers more conscious of their organizing data and placed a new emphasis on the Leaderboard as a yardstick for one’s success as an organizer.

There were a few exceptions, however. Some organizers began to feel discouraged, instead of ambitious and energized, by this new competitive environment. Gary explains that he “absolutely felt the increased competitiveness of his peers, but sometimes it wasn’t always a good thing.”¹⁵⁵ Gary was assigned a wealthy, mostly-conservative suburban area for his turf, and

¹⁵⁵ Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.
he found organizing in that area to be particularly difficult.\footnote{Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.} I felt like I was doing everything right – I was trying out other people’s best practices, making volunteer recruitment calls every day, working on my pitch with my Regional Field Director, but never had that much success. And then, when I saw other Field Organizers who had suburban turf similar to mine with a phone bank that had 20 volunteers who made a thousand calls in one day, it made me feel totally dejected. Why couldn’t I get those numbers if we have the same turf? I guess I don’t work well with competition.”\footnote{Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.} Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the tools offered by NationalField made a few organizers feel dismayed, instead of empowered. This disheartened feeling may have been due to the fact that, pre-NationalField, Field Organizers who were not that successful did not know it in such concrete terms. The shock over other organizers’ success was hard to bear, and the “embarrassment of never being on the Leaderboard wasn’t fun.”\footnote{Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.}

Although the competitive environment fostered by NationalField made Gary feel discouraged, he did experience a silver lining: “One thing I will say, though, is that I definitely wouldn’t have made as many friends outside my region without the competitive environment. I think all the people who weren’t meeting their goals kind of came together – kind of like a support group – on NationalField. We built a mini-community to help each other out and I don’t think I would have found that community without NationalField.”\footnote{Gary Interview. Personal interview. November 6, 2011.} The numbers indicate that the competition didn’t change Gary’s organizing practices in quantitative terms. But the competitive atmosphere did enhance Gary’s qualitative experience of being an organizer by bringing him closer with other organizers who were similar to himself. The post-NationalField atmosphere could have crushed Gary’s spirit; instead, he adapted to the new situation by forming
close bonds with similar organizers. It seems likely that such camaraderie helped all of those organizers to remain motivated and dedicated to the cause, despite the daunting obstacle of competition.

It is also important to note that, as I discussed in Chapter I and as Ganz elucidates, there is much more to good organizing than just big numbers. The other, sometimes overlooked, benefit of organizing with a social media platform is the qualitative feedback each organizer receives in addition to their quantitative feedback. Each organizer submitted “ups and downs” at the end of every day, which often told a clearer and more valuable story than just their numbers.\footnote{Please see Appendix B, Figure 2.} Will explains, “Sometimes my numbers for a given day were really low... like embarrassingly low... If you were to look only at my numerical data, you would think I was a terrible organizer. But, my ups and downs would often tell a different story. I may not have had a huge canvass, but maybe I held a large organizing meeting in which I recruited ten new ‘super volunteers.’ Or maybe I opened a new office that day. You can’t always get the whole story just from the numbers.”\footnote{Will Interview. Personal interview. December 2, 2011.} By sharing these anecdotes in their ups and downs, Field Organizers were sharing their organizing experiences with the entire Field Staff, opening up a new channel of feedback and innovation.

Thus, besides fostering a numbers-based competition, NationalField fostered a qualitative form of competition, as organizers competed with each other to become the most skilled organizer possible. Successful organizing, as Ganz describes it, emphasizes how vital it is for organizers to share innovations with one another and to adapt to new situations. NationalField’s “ups and downs” tool helped to disseminate organizers’ best practices, thereby encouraging all of the organizers to incorporate these recommendations into their skill sets. Andy, a Field Organizer
in Dayton, OH, recalls, "I remember when I posted this 'up' about how I recruited an eighty-
year-old woman, who was a lifelong Republican, to make calls for Obama... I got so many
comments from other organizers. I think one person wrote that that was their new goal — to get a
lifelong Republican from rural Ohio to volunteer on the campaign."\textsuperscript{162}

NationalField further reinforced this sense of qualitative competition by allowing for
support and validation from all levels of the campaign hierarchy. Ohio's General Election
Director, Jeremy Bird, often told the Field Staff on conference calls that he received everyone's
ups and downs in his email or to his Blackberry at the end of every day, and that he read through
them.\textsuperscript{163} Aharon remembers how "one time, our office was totally out of printer toner so we
couldn't print walk packets. I wrote it as my 'down' for the day and Bird replied back saying
'Toner on the way!'\textsuperscript{164} Thus the social media platform helped Field Organizers to feel
connected to senior staff; their voices were heard, and sometimes they received feedback from
Bird himself who offered advice or solutions.\textsuperscript{165} This environment is exactly what Ganz would
hope for, namely a community built around the leadership team. Bird encouraged the entire field
operation in Ohio by letting them know that he was receiving organizers' "ups and downs" every
day and by responding to organizers' comments. This open communication loop would not have
been possible without the social media platform.

As the 2008 Obama Campaign in Ohio illustrates, the social media platform of
NationalField facilitated efficiency, camaraderie, and most of all, friendly competition—all of
which ultimately contributed to organizing productivity. The open reporting of quantitative and

\textsuperscript{162} Andy Interview. Personal interview. November 17, 2011.
\textsuperscript{163} Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
\textsuperscript{164} Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
\textsuperscript{165} Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
qualitative data empowered Field Organizers and Volunteers to "own" their numbers\textsuperscript{166} and to challenge themselves to become better organizers.

\textsuperscript{166} Aharon Interview. Personal interview. October 17, 2011.
Conclusion

Social media improved the organizing work of the Field Organizers on the 2008 Obama campaign by enhancing efficiency, fostering camaraderie, and above all, creating an environment of friendly competition in which each organizer felt more motivated and driven to reach their organizing goals. These research findings reinforce my own experiences as a Field Organizer in Dayton, OH during the 2008 Obama campaign. When I first arrived in Dayton, OH in August, the Field Organizers were reporting their numbers via email to the Regional Field Director, who would then forward those numbers up the chain of command. This approach did not make me feel that reporting numbers was an important practice in my organizing; in fact, reporting numbers felt more like a necessary evil than a task that was helpful to me in my efforts. If you had asked me then, I would have had no idea where I stood as an organizer—whether my numbers were average, better than average, or worse than average. Moreover, I did not have any idea of how the rest of my region was performing. I was one of ten Field Organizers staffed in the Dayton, OH region, and of those, only two others had suburban turf like I did. I had no way of comparing my progress to theirs or of even knowing their best practices or their ups and downs. Each organizer was an island, operating in her own turf and reporting only to her direct supervisor.

Everything changed once NationalField was implemented. Suddenly, I was able to compare myself to the other organizers in my region and even to the organizers in the rest of the state. NationalField helped me to become a better organizer by allowing me to visualize my data and track my progress. For example, at one point, I saw that my volunteer recruitment numbers
were increasing, but my number of doors knocks was staying the same. This observation was important because it indicated to me that there was something amiss with my canvassing teams; with more volunteers, there should have been a correspondingly higher number of door knocks. Without NationalField, I would not have been able to make these types of observations and intervene to facilitate my team’s organizing efforts.

Moreover, the numbers on the Leaderboard triggered my sense of competition, and I felt a renewed drive to succeed in my organizing goals—especially after my first appearance on the Leaderboard, which was for my team’s number of calls made in a single day. When I shared the news of this success with my volunteers, they were ecstatic and fired up. They loved the fact that their neighborhood team was getting recognized, and that my turf—a wealthy suburban area that had consistently voted Republican in every election—was beating other turfs that were much more liberal and urban. After that first appearance on the Leaderboard, my volunteers and I had the confidence that we would be able to appear there again and again. Indeed, we soon became regulars on the Leaderboard, and the pride in our organizing accomplishments spurred all of my volunteer leaders to new heights of competitive spirit.

In the course of my research for this thesis, several interviewees brought up the “Born To Reg” competition, and I couldn’t help smiling to myself—that was the statewide competition won by one of my neighborhood teams. When the “Born To Reg” competition was announced, unsurprisingly, that team was determined to win. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the competition spanned the entire week before Ohio’s voter registration deadline. My team members took sick days at work because they wanted to spend as much time as possible registering new voters and canvassing their neighborhoods; they phone banked in the evenings; they stayed up late to enter their data into NationalField. At the end of the competition’s first
day, when they saw themselves on top of the Leaderboard, that encouraging knowledge just
pushed them to do it all over again the next day. By the end of the week, when it was finally
announced that they had won, they were beyond exhilarated. The platform of NationalField had
given these organizers the confidence to embrace their roles as leaders and the determination to
continue striving towards their goals. One volunteer beams, “Seeing our neighborhood team on
the top of the Leaderboard during that week, and then when it was finally announced that we had
actually won, I was so happy. So happy! I knew that our whole team had been busting our butts
that week, so it felt really good to win. We deserved it alright!”

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Having examined the success of social media in organizing during the 2008 election,
what can we expect for the 2012 Obama re-election campaign? News reports are already calling
this election “the 2012 data election.” But the data seems to be shifting its focus away from the
organizer and towards the voter: “Barack Obama’s re-election team are building a vast digital
data operation that for the first time combines a unified database on millions of Americans with
the power of Facebook to target individual voters to a degree never achieved before.” With
this new database, the Obama campaign will have “the largest, most detailed and potentially
most powerful [voter database] in the history of political campaigns. If 2008 was all about social
media, 2012 is destined to become the ‘data election.’”

167 Kriss Interview. Personal interview. February 27, 2012.
168 Pilkington and Michel, Guardian.
169 Pilkington and Michel, Guardian.
170 Pilkington and Michel, Guardian.
Thus it appears that social media technology will be wielded in a new and different way for the 2012 re-election campaign. The data being tracked in 2008 was the organizing data generated either by supporters who got involved in the campaign via My.BarackObama.com or by Field Organizers hired in the state. But the 2012 operation has shifted gears to track voter data. This central database will work as follows:

Every time an individual volunteers to help out – for instance by offering to host a fundraising party for the president – he or she will be asked to log onto the re-election website with their Facebook credentials. That in turn will engage Facebook Connect, the digital interface that shares a user’s personal information with a third party. Consciously or otherwise, the individual volunteer will be injecting all the information they store publicly on their Facebook page – home location, date of birth, interests, and crucially, network of friends – directly into the central Obama database.\(^{171}\)

Furthermore, all of this data will be housed in one central location, "which will allow fundraisers, advertisers and state and local organisers to draw from the same data source ... a unified database that incorporate and connects everything the campaign knows about a voter within it."\(^{172}\) This 2012 arrangement contrasts with the 2008 arrangement of fragmented data, which was scattered across several different platforms (My.BarackObama.com, NationalField, and a voter database named Vote Builder). Indeed, in 2008, "the separation of its data on voters into several distinct silos forced high-level staffers to spend hours manually downloading information from one database to another."\(^{173}\) One such time-consuming data transfer, for example, involved distributing the information about supporters from the My.BarackObama.com database to the relevant local Field Organizers.

But the tracking of voter data is not indicative of a shift away from organizing; rather, it offers another means of helping organizers to achieve better organizing outcomes. The value of

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\(^{171}\) Pilkington and Michel, *Guardian*.
\(^{172}\) Pilkington and Michel, *Guardian*, sic.
\(^{173}\) Pilkington and Michel, *Guardian*. 

Pan 69
the voter database lies in its potential ability to “allow staff and volunteers at all levels of the campaign – from the top strategists answering directly to Obama’s campaign manager Jim Messina to the lowest canvasser on the doorsteps of Ohio – to unlock knowledge about individual voters and use it to target personalised messages that they hope will mobilise voters where it counts most.” Imagine a Field Organizer who is canvassing a neighborhood for the first time. Her efforts will be significantly more successful if she is equipped with detailed personal information about each of the residents on whose door she knocks. If she knows, for example, that Wendy Wellesley living at 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA is a member of the Facebook group for Wellesley Women Leaders in Business, then when she knocks on Wendy’s door she will be prepared to discuss President Obama’s signing of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act or his creation of the White House Council on Women and Girls. More knowledge leads to better organizing; such information unlocks the power to target voters more successfully by tailoring the organizer’s pitch and helping her to connect in a meaningful way with each voter. Therefore, the bottom line of the massive 2012 voter database is “to create technology that encourages voters to get involved, in tune with Obama’s emphasis on community organising.”

After all, if voting is the heart of a democracy, then organizing is its lifeblood.

174 Pilkington and Michel, Guardian, sic.
175 Pilkington and Michel, Guardian, sic.
Acknowledgments

First and above all, I’d like to thank my entire thesis committee for their encouragement, support, and feedback throughout this process. Professor Marion Just inspired me to pursue research on this topic when I took her course POL1 316: Mass Media in American Democracy in the spring of my junior year. Her guidance and unwavering attention to my project during the first stages of the thesis process in the fall semester of my senior year were invaluable. Professor Habrie Han generously agreed to join this endeavor in the middle of the school year, despite not previously knowing me as a student. Thank you for taking a leap of faith and jumping on board in the middle of this project! With her incredible expertise in organizing, Professor Han added vital new perspectives and knowledge to my project. Professor Eniana Mustafaraj has been an important and special mentor to me since my junior year. Not only has Professor Mustafaraj been instrumental in my growth as a computer science student, but she has also devoted so much of her time and energy to helping me flourish in other parts of my academic life, particularly this thesis. Professor Jeffries challenged me to examine with a thoughtful and analytical eye President Obama, his campaign, his candidacy, and his presidency when I took his course AMST 317: The Real Barack Obama. His teachings have shaped my analysis of the Obama campaign in this thesis, and Professor Jeffries has supported and guided me to become the American Studies student I am today. Thank you too for managing many of the logistics of the thesis process. I’d also like to thank Professor Jon Imber for agreeing to be the Honors Visitor at my thesis defense.

I give an enormous thanks to all of my interview subjects, without whom this project would not have been possible.
I also want to thank my family and friends for their support throughout the thesis-writing process. In particular, I’d like to thank my sister for playing a crucial role in my decision to write a thesis and for her steadfast encouragement and guidance throughout this entire year.

Last, but definitely not least, I’d like to thank the American Studies Department, the Political Science Department, and the Computer Science Department. All three of these departments are incredible, and I feel so fortunate to be majoring and minoring in these fascinating disciplines.

In sum, I offer my humblest thanks to the following people: Professor Marion Just, Professor Hahrie Han, Professor Eniana Mustafaraj, Professor Michael Jeffries, Professor Jon Imber, all of my interview subjects, my family, my friends, and the American Studies Department, the Political Science Department, and the Computer Science Department.
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Figure 1. Field Staff Hierarchy from the 2008 Obama Campaign. Please note that there was only one General Election Director, one Field Director, four Deputy Field Directors, twenty-four Regional Field Directors, about four hundred Field Organizers, and hundreds upon hundreds of volunteers.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{176} Aharon Interview. Personal interview, October 17, 2011.
Interview Guide

1. Thank you for agreeing to do this interview with me! Please first describe how you got involved on the campaign. What inspired you to join? What were you doing before you joined the campaign? When did you first start on the campaign?

2. What position did you hold on the campaign, and what was the type of work you were doing on a day-to-day basis? Please describe a typical day for you while working on the campaign.

3. Did you know what organizing was before the campaign? If so, where did you learn about it? How many organizing trainings did you participate in while on the campaign? What were some of the key principles you learned during these trainings?

4. Did you ever learn about the “Story of Self”? If so, what was yours? Did you find this practice to be helpful for your work as an organizer?

5. Tell me about your personal experience as an organizer – did you ever find it hard or stressful? Did you enjoy it, or find the work to be rewarding? Was your job as an organizer what you expected it to be?

6. Do you think you were a successful organizer? How many neighborhood teams did you have? How many volunteer leaders did you have? What metric was most important to you as an organizer?

7. I want to shift gears now, and ask you about reporting your numbers. When you first began in Ohio, how were you asked to report your numbers? Was this method helpful to you? Did you ever get any feedback on your numbers, either from your direct supervisor or someone higher up? Did you find reporting numbers to be an important organizing practice?
8. What did you think of NationalField when it was first implemented? Was it easy or
difficult to use? Did you think this new method of reporting was more helpful or less
helpful to you? Did you think NationalField was an improvement over the old method?
9. Do you think NationalField changed you as an organizer? If so, how? Were you more
successful or less successful in organizing? Do you think it helped you improve as an
organizer? If so, how?
10. [If the interviewee is not a volunteer] Do you think NationalField changed the way your
volunteers participated on the campaign? If so, how?
11. Did you notice any changes in other organizers or in your office after NationalField was
implemented? Was there a change in the attitude around reporting? Did you find having a
history of your own personal data to be more helpful or less helpful?
12. Did you ever make it onto the statewide Leaderboard? If so, for which metric? How did
you feel seeing your name on that Leaderboard? Did you share the news with your
volunteers? If so, how did they feel? If not, how did it feel to never be on the
Leaderboard? Did you tell your volunteers about the Leaderboard?
13. What were some of the best practices you had as an organizer? Where did you learn these
organizing practices? Did you ever use tips from other organizers’ ups and downs or best
practices that they posted on NationalField?
14. How often did you look at other organizers’ profiles or numbers? How often did you look
at other regions’ profiles or numbers? How did they make you feel?
15. After NationalField was implemented, did you feel a stronger sense of community within
the Ohio field operation? Did you find it was easier to communicate with any and all
Field Staff in the state of Ohio, regardless of their position?
16. Please feel free to add any thoughts or questions that you think are important for me to consider in my research on this topic. Thank you again for your generosity in sharing your experiences with me.
Figure 1. NationalField’s Reporting Page. Please Note: This image is from the 2012 iteration of NationalField, and thus contains fields for several metrics that the 2008 Obama Campaign did not track.
Figure 2. Real-Time Feed of Organizers’ Ups and Downs. *Please Note: This image is from the 2012 iteration of NationalField for OFA (Organizing for America).*
Figure 3. Another Image of the Real-Time Feed of Organizers’ Ups and Downs. The screenshot shows how Ups – tagged green, Downs – tagged red, and Solutions – tagged blue, get displayed in the site's feed. Please Note: This image is from the 2012 iteration of NationalField for OFA (Organizing for America).
Figure 4. Users' reporting data history over the course of a week. Through these visualizations, a user can get a clearer picture of their progress. Please Note: This image is from the 2012 iteration of NationalField for OFA (Organizing for America).
Figure 5. Example of sparkplug graphs that show a user’s activity over a longer period of time (30 days). Through these visualizations, a user can get a clearer picture of their progress. Please Note: This screenshot comes from the current iteration of NationalField.
Figure 6. Example Leaderboard for Number of Door Knocks on a given day. Please Note: This image is from the 2012 iteration of NationalField for OFA (Organizing for America).