

the staff dedicated to filtering and managing user content.

Enterprise Reporting and Analysis: To stand out from the crowd, newspaper Web sites will focus on enterprise reporting and analysis. That work will rely as much on data as traditional reporting, and Web site users will be part of nearly every effort to analyze the stories contained within large data sets, such as campaign finance reports.

Influencing and enabling all of these changes will be the huge number of young people now emerging from college and graduate journalism programs with online storytelling baked into their DNA. We have an intern who spent the first half of 2008 with us as part of fulfilling her professional placement requirement for her master's in journalism. Not only did she bring with her all of the traditional reporting and writing skills, but her comfort with and interest in technology was deep—from the programming language

we use to build news databases to essential skills in gathering audio, video and photographs. Before she even showed up at work, she'd spotted coding errors in washingtonpost.com's Web style sheets. Recently, she's worked with us on integrating our blogs into the popular microblogging platform Twitter.

This intern does not fit the stereotypical image of a "techie." She's a serious journalist who will go on to do important work, we hope for us at washingtonpost.com.

Another graduate student at a Washington-area journalism program is already filing audio reports for a national radio news network and teaching herself Flash so that she can see how motion infographics are built for the Web. She'll be spending half days with washingtonpost.com this summer just to see how the Web site is put together each day. I've explained to her how unglamorous the work can be at times, but she wasn't fazed. "I want to see how the site production is handled," she told me. "It's important

for me to know how it works no matter what job I take after graduation."

These young people are the future of journalism, as young people have always been. But with this generation of graduates—arriving as they are at such a pivotal time—they are changing in newsrooms long-held attitudes that segregated journalists into jobs like reporter, editor, designer and photographer. Each will doubtless bring two or more of these skills with them. Smart newsroom leaders will be the ones who will encourage their use, as economic shifts affecting all of us require every newsroom to do more with less.

And this is why—and how—2012 will be the first presidential election in the news industry's history to truly be reported for, and viewed on, the Web. ■

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Campaign 2008: It's on YouTube

Since the last presidential election, the 'bubble' in which the press once operated 'has become a fishbowl.'

BY ALBERT L. MAY

In the annals of adversarial journalism, the dustup between Associated Press political reporter Glen Johnson and presidential candidate Mitt Romney preceding the 2008 South Carolina Republican primary might rate a mention in the next Teddy White-style campaign saga. Sprawled on the floor of a Staples store in Columbia, South Carolina, in the midst of an impromptu press conference, Johnson brusquely interrupted Romney as the candidate professed that no lobbyists were running his campaign. "That's not true, governor. That's not true," Johnson said, as he

named a Romney strategist who is a well-known lobbyist.

This brief, heated exchange is familiar to any veteran political reporter who has spent time inside the sometimes fractious "bubble" of presidential campaigns. Familiar, too, is the follow-up confrontation as Romney circled around after the press conference to challenge Johnson with an age-old candidate's lament: "Listen to my words, all right? Listen to my words."

What is different now is the bubble has become a fishbowl. Footage from cable network news cameras captured

the entire episode, which included a scolding of Johnson by a Romney aide that he should "act more professionally." Soon, the scene was uploaded onto YouTube and an incident that would have been relegated to a campaign footnote took on a life of its own. In the new camera-rich environment, the video could have just as easily come from a voter's cell phone or the hand-held device of the ever-present campaign trackers.

After some brief exposure on cable news talk shows, the video went viral, and Johnson became a minor YouTube celebrity and a member of the million

plus hits club on the Google search engine. The political blogs feasted on the confrontation to the point that The Associated Press (AP) moved a brief story on the Internet uproar. Even in mid-March, two months later, the Johnson-Romney imbroglio could be found on a couple of dozen postings on YouTube.com, with these still registering about 95,000 views.¹

The plus side of this new media environment is more transparency in newsgathering; the downside is akin to watching sausage being made. In this case, the consequence was that a member of the press corps became *the* story, rather than how Romney's campaign was connected to lobbyists. Whether Johnson violated a professional norm is not the issue here, although he apparently forgot the legendary AP reporter Walter Mears's instruction to wire service reporters of "keeping yourself out of it."

The Flood of Video

The larger point is that the deluge of online videos flooding the Internet in the 2008 election cycle marks another chapter in the continuing technological transformation of the way Americans receive their political news and how journalists cover campaigns. The campaign has become an even more visual event as pictures crowd out words. Changes we are now experiencing threaten to rival those brought by television news, starting in the



Microphones hover and cameras squeeze around Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani at a campaign stop at the Red Arrow Diner in Manchester, New Hampshire. October 2007. Photo by Lori Duff/Concord Monitor.

1960's. Then, some journalists feared for the written word and the future of serious political journalism. Those fears seemed exaggerated back then, as television went on to enhance the power of political journalists in the heyday of the broadcast networks.

But the debate over television echoes today. As journalism historian Donald A. Ritchie has written, one of those early television critics was then CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd,

who in a 1970 speech issued a warning that seems prescient today. He criticized television for its tendency "to strike at emotions rather than intellect ... on happenings rather than issues; on shock rather than explanation; on personalization rather than ideas."

The "YouTubification" of politics is rekindling these fears and this time, possibly with more reason, especially for journalists who get paid to write or air words. A major thrust of the Internet has been to increase the unmediated information flowing to political elites and also to an increasing percentage of Americans. Many applaud the democratization they see happening with the rise of "citizen journalists" who make their own "mash-up" videos. But even a cursory trip through YouTube's political channel finds a lot of videos and ads produced by candidates and snippets of repurposed television news. It is often difficult to ascertain the sources and to figure out just what has been mashed up.

With the facile attraction of highly entertaining videos, the impulse has increased to use the Internet to bypass conventional journalistic coverage. This stampede to video on the Web makes the fear about television's vapidness seem overheated in comparison to the true trivialization made possible by YouTube. Certainly where we've arrived is not the original vision of cyber utopians who foresaw in the Web



Senator John McCain greeted supporters at a rally at Patriots Point, South Carolina. January 2008. Photo by Alan Hawes/The Post and Courier.

¹ To watch the complete video, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8cHiEGLEls. Or to get a sample of videos on the episode, search "Romney" and "reporter" on YouTube.

The Jigs and Jags of Digital Political Coverage

Since it emerged, the online world has been a source of trepidation for journalists. The American Journalism Review captured the foreboding in its 1999 article, “Navigating a Minefield.”

There have been disruptions, mostly to the finances of news organizations, but some fears have proved false and some hopes gone unfulfilled. An acceleration of news has not led to an explosion of error. New competitors have not displaced professional journalists, although new players have emerged. Journalists have adapted and even absorbed the newcomers. The top Internet destinations for politics remain names like MSNBC, CNN and The New York Times. On the other hand, the earlier vision in the nonprofit world that the Web would become a new arena of civic discourse now seems naive. In its short history, the new medium has been predictable in only one regard—every election cycle has brought a surprise.

In 2002, I led a study, which was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, to assess the impact of the Internet on political journalism. We interviewed almost 300 political journalists and probed the history of the technological impact to produce “The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism on the Internet.”

We pegged the beginning of the story to September 1987 when The Hotline was launched on a CompuServe bulletin board and fast became the first “must read” online digest for political reporters. A steady, ever-widening stream of insider political news has become a hallmark of the new medium, with countless Hotline imitators. The phenomenon moved to the mainstream in 2002 with the launching of ABC News’s The Note, an internal memorandum repurposed into a sassy online offering. The progression hit another milestone in 2007 when the Allbritton Corporation launched Politico, the first

Internet-centric news organization to rival the old media by enlisting top political journalists.

The result of all of this has been a quantum increase in the volume of political news, although targeted to an elite audience.

Web sites emerged in a significant way in the 1996 election, but it was in 2000 that the new medium exploded with experimentation, largely with a flood of print content. New players in political coverage got into the act, including entrepreneurs with political dot-coms and nonprofit organizations seeking to turn the net into a civic tool. The best example of the latter was Web, White and Blue 2000, a project funded by the Markle Foundation that enlisted 17 cosponsoring sites of major news organizations and Internet portals. The mothballed site, which brimmed with textual content, remains an interesting window on the early civic Web.¹ The largest of the

¹ The site can be viewed at www.webwhiteblue.org/.

a new agora—an arena of political discourse and not one saturated by television spots and sound bites.

Take, for example, a mash-up video promoting Senator Barack Obama, “Yes We Can,” produced by a pop singer named will.i.am. It might not have contributed much to the political dialogue but, as of late March, it had drawn 17 million views on YouTube. By comparison, Obama’s March 18th speech on racial reconciliation drew less than a fifth that many views on YouTube, although it was still a substantial audience. Then, of course, there are this election season’s iconic videos—the “Obama Girl,” the “Sopranos” video featuring Bill and Hillary Clinton, John Edwards’ obsessive hair combing, and

Chuck Norris’s macho, fist-in-camera endorsement of Mike Huckabee. All of these drew big numbers on YouTube and also extensive coverage by a news media that have never overcome the allure of the Internet as a source of the bizarre.

According to a poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released in January, a quarter of Americans in the 2008 election regularly turn to the Internet for information about the presidential race. That is almost triple the percentage found by the center in a poll in 2000 when this new medium was blossoming. More interesting for the future, the Pew poll found that 42 percent of 18 to 29 year olds are using the

Internet for campaign information, with much of that flowing through social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. And the poll found that four-in-10 of the younger cohort have watched at least one form of campaign video online, double the frequency among those 30 or older.

With younger audiences’ news habits now better understood, it seems clear where we’re headed.

The Road We’ve Traveled

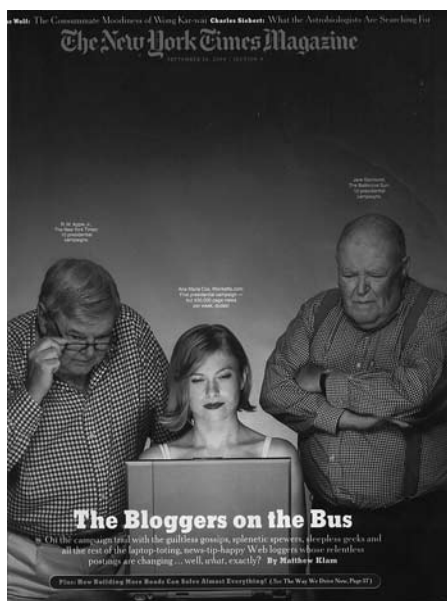
The 2000 election witnessed the first significant use of online videos. But they were a flop, as was described in a study I led² in 2002 entitled “The Virtual Trail: Political Journalism

² The study, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, can be downloaded at www.ipdi.org/UploadedFiles/virtual_trail.pdf.

political dot-coms was Voter.com, a hybrid of journalism and political activism.

The chief criticism of the 2000 environment was not that it was frivolous or polarizing—today’s criticism—but that it produced information overload. Neither Web, White and Blue nor Voter.com lived to see another election cycle, as the hangover from the exuberance converged with the dot-com crash on Wall Street. It was in that lull that we conducted our study, which concluded that political journalists were adapting to the technological changes and making good use of new reporting tools, particularly in tracking campaign finances. The study found passivity in covering aspects of the online campaign beyond its novelty, a continuing problem. We spotted the rise of insider news. We were less than prescient in declaring “the experimentation and excitement have waned.” We did not see the blogosphere or YouTube coming.

The political bloggers became the rage of the 2004 cycle and their impact is a familiar story. Dan Rather saw his career up-ended by conservative



September 24, 2004.

bloggers who raised doubts about CBS News’s report on President Bush’s National Guard service. Bush himself took notice of the blogs in a presidential debate when he denied he would reinstate the draft. “I hear there’s rumors on the Internets,” he said. The blogs achieved a bit of political journalism glory on September 24, 2004 when

The New York Times Magazine ran a cover with Wonkette, flanked by those Boys on the Bus R.W. Apple, and Jack Germond, both looking over her shoulder in puzzlement.

However, rather than become a new journalistic prototype, most bloggers have stuck with political activism. All the presidential campaigns in 2008 have worked hard to enlist bloggers as a new media royalty. Some bloggers have turned more journalistic, developing their own small news staffs. Arianna Huffington turned her blog, The Huffington Post, into a self-proclaimed “Internet Newspaper;” Joshua Micah Marshall, who operates several interconnected sites, won a 2007 George Polk award for excellence in journalism. Traditional reporters also have turned to blogging, mostly by reporting campaign tidbits without much opinionated fervor.

And there is no better example of the co-optation of the new political voices than in one Ana Marie Cox, a.k.a. Wonkette. The face of the bloggers in 2004 went to work for Time magazine. ■—A.M.

on the Internet.” [See accompanying box.] Back then, the technology simply wasn’t ready. Journalists who we interviewed ranked online videos as very low in usefulness. A bold experiment by The New York Times and ABC News was a 15-minute Webcast called “Political Points” that aired daily through the 2000 election. Impossible to watch on dial-up and pretty jerky on broadband, we deemed this effort the “greatest journalistic effort for the fewest viewers.” The show died after the election, and similar sustained efforts at original political programs as Webcasts have not been repeated. Even today, Webcasts as original programming have evolved into three-to-five minute bursts of commentary

or talking-head reporting that often have production values reminiscent of 1950’s television.

In the campaign summer of 2004, video re-emerged in a different, edgier format and made a huge media splash. JibJab.com’s “This Land” video, first spread virally by e-mail, broke into the mainstream media in mid-July. Set to the tune of the Woody Guthrie song, the cartoon parody featured the Bush character calling the John Kerry character a “liberal weiner,” who in turn responded with “right-wing nut job.” Estimated audience: 50 million, as television news replayed it around the world.

As a study by the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet

found, however, JibJab was just one (a mild one at that) of the hundreds of inflammatory videos that circulated by e-mail that year. This study, “Under the Radar and Over the Top,”³ captured both the lack of press scrutiny and the often outrageous content of the videos. The institute collected about 150 examples; some were funny, but many were hyperpartisan and obscene. The videos gained a large audience among political elites, as they forwarded them to colleagues. But without a centrally organizing Web site with easy posting of video by anyone with a digital camcorder, laptop and inexpensive software, viewing didn’t happen among those who lacked a connection to the political underground.

³ The report can be found at www.ipdi.org/Publications/default.aspx.

All of this changed with the February 15, 2005 launch of YouTube.

In our 2002 “Virtual Trail” study, we found journalists generally unsure of how serious to take what was happening online with the campaigns. I remember asking Matt Cooper, then with Time, when we would know that the Internet was a factor, and he said, “When somebody gets beat by it.” That happened to Republican Senator George Allen of Virginia in the famous 2006 “macaca” episode, when he aimed the slur at a “tracker” of his Democratic opponent who was of Indian descent. The video spread on YouTube, where it registered half a million views, then ignited in the blogosphere before it bubbled up in the mainstream media.

By the start of this election cycle, numerous one-man-band reporters embedded in campaigns by TV networks and aggressive outreach by some news organizations to get citizens to send in videos (often shot from cell phones) created the fishbowl in which the AP’s Johnson found himself.

There are positive aspects for journalists and the civic-minded. Young people’s attraction to video is undeniable, especially its shared use in their online social networks. When CNN partnered with YouTube in July 2007 for the first of two presidential debates, some reviewers bemoaned the use of a melting snowman to ask a question on global warming. But CNN reported that the debate drew the largest audience of 18-to-34 year olds in cable news programming history. And the ease of access—and with it a sense of empowerment—facilitated by the Internet is surely a factor in the surge in interest in the 2008 campaign.

Starting in 2004 and accelerating in 2008, the Internet and the easy availability of videos from the campaign trail also has revitalized and enriched the “truth testing” of candidate advertisements and other messages. This movement began in the early 1990’s, but faded, until Factcheck.org, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, revolutionized the use of

a Web site for in-depth fact-checking four years ago.

Now news organizations, from newspapers to local television, use the Web to extend the reach of their traditional coverage of candidate truthfulness. Yet, in 2008, in the spirit of our times, truth testing is taking a saucier approach than the sober appraisals of the past. The St. Petersburg Times and its sister organization, Congressional Quarterly, launched PolitiFact.com, which uses catchy “Truth-O-Meters.” [See article by Bill Adair on page 52.] Washingtonpost.com started its site Fact-Checker that awards “Pinocchios” in measuring candidate veracity. [See article by Russ Walker on page 22.] The New York Times and National Journal have also built Web sites deep in videos and content. And where do they get many of their videos? YouTube, of course. ■

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YouTube: The Flattening of Politics

As online video reshapes political coverage, news organizations ignore it ‘at their own peril.’

BY STEVE GROVE

For a little over a year, I’ve served as YouTube’s news and political director—perhaps a perplexing title in the eyes of many journalists. Such wonderment might be expected since YouTube gained its early notoriety as a place with videos of dogs on skateboards or kids falling off of trampolines. But these days, in the 10 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute of every day (yes—every *minute* of every day), an increasing amount of the content is news and political video. And with YouTube’s global reach and ease of use, it’s changing the way that politics—and its coverage—is happening.

Each of the 16 one-time presidential candidates had YouTube channels; seven announced their candidacies on YouTube. Their staffs uploaded thousands of videos that were viewed tens of millions of times. By early March of this year, the Obama campaign was uploading two to three videos to YouTube every day. And thousands of advocacy groups and nonprofit organizations use YouTube to get their election messages into the conversation. For us, the most exciting aspect is that ordinary people continue to use YouTube to distribute their own political content; these range from “gotcha” videos they’ve taken at campaign rallies to questions for the

candidates, from homemade political commercials to video mash-ups of mainstream media coverage.

What this means is that average citizens are able to fuel a new meritocracy for political coverage, one unburdened by the gatekeeping “middleman.” Another way of putting it is that YouTube is now the world’s largest town hall for political discussion, where voters connect with candidates—and the news media—in ways that were never before possible.

In this new media environment, politics is no longer bound by traditional barriers of time and space. It doesn’t matter what time it is, or where