

The Role of Authenticity in Electoral Social Media Campaigns

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Abstract

Authenticity is a popular buzz word in electoral politics, as electoral candidates and politicians are expected to be authentic in their public interactions. Since 2008, social media has become an integral part of elections in the US, and continues to gain importance in electoral campaigns around the world as social media offers electoral candidates a new medium for communicating with their constituents. Given the attention authenticity has received in relation to electoral campaigns, and the role of social media in campaigns, this research studies the role of authenticity in electoral campaigns by using Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) definition of online authenticity as the theoretical basis and as the basis of the semi-structured interview guide. Ten interviews are conducted with US Democrats in which participants are shown and asked about screenshots from four American electoral candidates' Facebook pages. Using grounded theory to analyze the interview transcripts, this study refines existing definitions of online authenticity and offers insights into how electoral candidates can demonstrate their authenticity in electoral social media campaigns.

Key words: authenticity, social media, electoral campaigns, electoral candidates, internet politics

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man” (Shakespeare, 1992). Some 400 years after Shakespeare first penned these words, they still ring true with relevance in modern-day electoral campaigns. The focus on electoral candidates to be their true authentic selves recalls the words of Shakespeare and gives the words context in present day electoral campaigns. Candidates’ perceived authenticity, or lack thereof, may have implications upon how voters decide to cast their ballot, and may be especially relevant now that candidates have an additional platform for demonstrating their authenticity through social media.

The following chapter provides an overview of this thesis’ research on authenticity in electoral social media campaigns. As an introduction to the research, this chapter will first provide a general background on the focus of this research by discussing social media and electoral politics and listing the research and sub-research questions. Then the following sections will address the scientific and social relevance of this topic. The last section of this chapter discusses how the thesis is laid out, as well as a brief explanation of how the research will be conducted and analyzed.

1.1 Social Media and Electoral Political Campaigns

Social media have become some of the primary platforms for electoral campaigns to communicate with constituents who have an interest in their cause. Henderson and Bowley (2010) define social media as online platforms that allow for participation, information sharing, communication and user create content in a community of users; a definition that fits Facebook, the social media platform that will be used for this research. Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, which made use of social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to communicate with his supporters, was one of the first very visible examples of how vital social media is to electoral political campaigns and showed that strategic use of social media may help win elections (Reynolds, 2011). Social media has become incorporated into nearly all electoral campaigns in the US and Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign exemplified how social media such as Facebook can be used to communicate the campaign message to constituents.

Despite the relatively recent emergence of social media platforms, they have been the focus of several studies dealing with electoral campaigning. Wells (2010) in particular notes the importance of digital media, which encompasses social media, “digital media is one of the unprecedented opportunities for new forms of engagement and action” (p. 422). Digital media is a particularly beneficial medium for communication with a large group of people because it is a cost-free way to engage with a very large and interested audience. Furthermore, with the combination of text, audio, and video, social media allows political parties to provide more information to their constituents at once, (Ward, 2011). Social media’s role in electoral campaigns has shown to be just as important as it is in traditional marketing and advertising campaigns, “...the social web is ripe with opportunities for candidates and office holders alike to connect with voters, foster transparency, and even spar with opponents in the same way they have been in the traditional media for hundreds of years” (Silverman, 2010). Ellison, Lampe and Steinfeld (2007) suggest that a candidate’s image on social media is probably authentic because the information on social media can be verified offline, expressing the assumption that candidate images in social media are authentic. Similarly, Reynolds (2011) advises politicians to “maintain transparency and authenticity” and to “make sure the posts are in the candidate’s voice.”

Facebook’s US Politics App page gives candidates the advice to be authentic, writing “in an ideal world, the candidate will from time to time post to Facebook himself or herself. Nothing beats having people hear directly from the candidate” (Liptak, 2011). As campaign experts and academics alike argue for the importance of authenticity in campaigns, it is of interest to discover how authenticity plays a role in electoral political campaigns. The issue is addressed in this research with the following research question:

How does authenticity play a role in electoral social media campaigns?

To further address this question, the following four sub-research questions are posed:

- 1. How are the features of social media used to demonstrate authority in an electoral social media campaign?*
- 2. How are the features of social media used to demonstrate identity in an electoral social media campaign?*
- 3. How are the features of social media used to demonstrate transparency in an electoral social media campaign?*

4. *How are the features of social media used to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign?*

The research questions are discussed and explained further in chapter 3.

1.2 Scientific Relevance

Past studies on electoral campaigns have noted that a candidate's impression management, political style and self-presentation are relevant to electoral political campaigns (Berman, 1970; Mayhew, 1974; Pels, 2003; Corner, 2003), and that authenticity has long been an important dimension in politics (Berman, 1970; Mayhew, 1974). Since research on electoral campaigns has shown that politicians' image and authenticity are integral to their campaigns, and as social media is now incorporated into most political campaigns, it is presumable that authenticity may also play a role in electoral social media campaigns, as it is the goal of candidates to send a message and present themselves to the public through their campaigns. Previous research has shown that voters want authentic representatives (Parry-Giles, 2001) however deeper research on authenticity in electoral social media campaigns does not seem to have been previously performed.

This research topic is useful in providing new insights to previous research on the role of authenticity and social media in electoral campaigns. In particular, deeper investigation into how authenticity plays a role in electoral social media campaigns can build upon research by Louden and McCauliff (2004) who suggest that voters seek authentic candidates, as "politicians are a class presumed to be self-serving and are granted only provisional trust" (p. 92), and that authentic electoral candidates "know who they are and behave consistently with themselves" (p. 94). While Louden and McCauliff (2004) recognize that authenticity plays a role in electoral political campaigns, their definition of authenticity remains unclear, and leaves room for deeper investigation. Therefore, this research can help provide a definitive description of authenticity based on the views of voters.

Recognizing the growing use of digital media in public communication, Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) proposed a model of authenticity in online communication, drawing upon comments from the US State Department blog for their research. Their model of authenticity is based on four underlying dimensions of authenticity: authority, identity, transparency and engagement, and will serve as the theoretical basis of this research. As their research focused on a blog, this research builds upon their work by specifically investigating

the role of authenticity in electoral social media campaigns on Facebook. While their dimensions of authenticity provide a more specific definition than that proposed by Louden and McCauliff (2004), they can be further refined to fit electoral politics in social media campaigns. Thus this research seeks to build upon the findings of Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), by focusing on social media and electoral politics, and by further refining the original dimensions to fit the social media outlet most commonly used in electoral campaigns, Facebook.

Furthermore, this thesis can help build on research by Henderson and Bowley (2010) which suggested that authenticity plays an important role in recruiting constituents on social media. By using data drawn from constituents, this research can provide insight into what techniques are the most successful for demonstrating authenticity on social media, and show what constituents deem to be authentic and what they consider the determinants of authenticity to be. These findings can be useful as electoral candidates may be able to use them to more effectively recruit constituents via social media.

This research on the role of authenticity in electoral social media campaigns thus seeks to help address the issue of a vague definition of authenticity in electoral politics by building off of Louden and McCauliff (2004), more thoroughly investigating the dimensions of authenticity as proposed by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), and determining how voters perceive authenticity in electoral social media campaigns, building on the work of Henderson and Bowley (2010). Although this research is centered around how authenticity plays a role in electoral social media campaigns, the results of how voters interpret authenticity may be useful for research on authenticity and internet politics in general, as the technological landscape is constantly changing and a new innovation may take the place of social media in the future.

1.3 Social Relevance

Social media campaigns have become a regular tool in electoral campaigns in the US, as nearly all candidates for national and state-level offices in the 2008 US presidential election adopted Facebook (Foot and Schneider, 2006 in: Robertson *et al.*, 2010), and based on this data it may be presumable that a similar amount of candidates will use social media in the 2012 presidential elections. That nearly all candidates have social media pages suggests that Facebook has become a primary communication platform for candidates to communicate with their constituents.

While politicians have previously used traditional media to communicate with their constituents and release important statements, Facebook has become an increasingly common platform for such communication. Its popularity was evidenced by Senator Marco Rubio's public endorsement of Republican presidential primary candidate Mitt Romney, and Congressman Mike Pence's announcement of his bid to become the governor of Indiana via Facebook. The use of Facebook in electoral campaigns isn't limited to the US, however. Social media was incorporated into French presidential candidates' campaigns for the first time in the 2012 elections: former president and then candidate Nicholas Sarkozy used Facebook to digitally share the story of his political experience and voters use it to pass judgment on the candidates' credibility (Antheaume, 2012). Additionally, social media, namely Facebook and Twitter, have been adopted into Irish politics, with 78 percent of electoral candidates using a Facebook account, (Edwards, 2011). Finally, Andersen and Medaglia (2009) found that Danish voters see Facebook as an information source during national elections, showing that the role of Facebook in electoral politics is not just an American phenomenon and that this thesis' findings may have be useful for both US and worldwide electoral social media campaigns.

Several bloggers and commentators have noted the importance of authenticity in electoral social media campaigns, but little research exists on what role authenticity specifically plays. As the "buzz word" of the moment, the concept of authenticity has received attention from politicians and media alike. Before Herman Cain dropped out of the Republican presidential primary race in 2011, Fournier (2011) claimed that he was a threat to Mitt Romney because he was more authentic, and that "there may be no uglier brand in politics today than a lack of authenticity." Authenticity may be especially relevant to the digital world because people are "cultivating digital versions of themselves" and authenticity is "one of the major things that political strategists care about" (Rosenbloom, 2011).

Authenticity has been suggested to be an important factor in political and social media campaigns, but research has not demonstrated how voters perceive authenticity in social media campaigns. Research on the role that it plays in electoral social media campaigns may therefore have implications on how big of a role authenticity continues to play in social media campaigns, and can perhaps establish how those who elect the candidates, the voters, perceive authenticity. The attention social media and authenticity are receiving from campaign consultants and the media underscores the significance of authenticity, and shows how socially and politically relevant it is for academic research

1.4 Thesis Layout

This research investigates the role that authenticity plays in electoral social media campaigns by focusing on the campaigns of four Democratic candidates for the US Congress and Senate. The definition of authenticity as defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) is used with its four dimensions of authenticity as the theoretical framework for this research. The four dimensions are used to inform the sub-research questions that are used to further investigate the role that authenticity plays in electoral social media campaigns. Screenshots demonstrating the dimensions of authenticity from the four candidates' Facebook campaign pages will be shown to interviewees, who will be asked about the content of the screenshots. After ten individual semi-structured interviews have been conducted and transcribed, the transcript text will be analyzed using Mayring's (2000a, b) approach to grounded theory.

The thesis is organized as follows: first, a review of theory and previous research regarding social media and electoral politics are provided and organized around the four dimensions offered by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), and are further distinguished within each dimension section between content and effects. Next, the paper's research question and sub-questions are presented in the methodology chapter, along with a description of the chosen methods of analysis. The methodology also explains the process of selection of the electoral candidates and the interviewees, explains why US Democrats were chosen as the focus of this research, and explains why grounded theory is used for this qualitative research. Then the results are presented as seven patterns that emerged from the analysis of the interview text, and are organized based on the dimensions of authenticity which are used as the theoretical basis of this research. Finally, the thesis concludes with a chapter of conclusions which include answers to the research and sub-research questions, considerations for future research, methodological lessons and the scientific and social relevance of the findings.

Chapter 2. Theory and Previous Research

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter previous theory and research on authenticity and social media in electoral politics will be presented. First, a review of research regarding the influences of the internet and social media on electoral politics will be provided. Then a general overview of research on authenticity will be discussed, in which a four-dimensional definition of authenticity will be provided, and will serve as the theoretical basis of this research. Next, a review of each of the four-dimensions of authenticity is provided with an overview of the media content and effects of each dimension. Finally the chapter concludes with a summary and a look toward the next chapter.

2.2 Internet and Politics

As a foundation for the rest of the thesis, a background of academic research on the internet's influence and media effects on electoral politics must be understood before continuing to discuss it in relation to the four dimensions of authenticity.

The influence of the internet on politics has been the focus of academic debate, with competing opinions on the internet's impact on politics. Internet optimists, such as Rheingold (2000), believe that new media promote democracy by reducing communication, association, and participation costs, while pessimists, such as Margolis and Resnick (2000) and Sunstein (2001: in Xenos and Moy, 2007), hold that new media does not have any significant impacts on political behavior and could potentially harm public life. According to DiMaggio *et al.* (2001), academic literature on the internet's influence on society and politics has gone through three stages: "unjustifiable euphoria, abrupt and equally unjustifiable skepticism and gradual realization that web-based human interaction really does have unique and politically significant properties" (p. 319).

At the center of debates on the internet's influences on politics, one often finds two very prominent topics: social capital (Putnam, 1995) and the public sphere (Habermas, 1962). These are two approaches to understanding the role of communication in citizen engagement that have provided the basis for many studies on the internet and politics. Putnam (1995) argues that participation in civic groups enhances trust between citizens, and that trust in turn impacts political self-confidence. He defines social capital as "the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation

for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995: in Chadwick, 2006, p. 87). According to Putnam, social capital in the United States declined in the years following World War II. Internet optimists see the digital world as a new platform for social capital to be built, and for political dialogue to take place, while internet pessimists suggest that the internet is an isolated place (Kraut *et al.*, 1998). Grossman (1995) offered an optimistic view of the internet’s influence on electoral politics, suggesting that constituents can communicate with their president, senators, members of Congress and local leaders to tell them what to do and in what order. This political dialogue may affect the perceived authenticity of a candidate, especially if it takes place between candidates and constituents. Engagement in online activity has been found to significantly affect political participation (Weber *et al.*, 2003), and those who use the internet to seek out or exchange political information are more likely to have higher levels of social capital and are more likely to have higher levels of trust than those who used traditional media (Shah, Kwak and Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, and Yoon, 2001). These findings may suggest that information online is perceived as more transparent, and perhaps more authentic, than information presented via traditional media. On the other hand, Gershuny (2003) argues that time spent online reduces the time that citizens would spend in physical community building activities. Pessimists “have tried to isolate the effects on political engagement of increases in the quantity of political information provided by the internet” (Chadwick, 2006, p. 104).

The public sphere, introduced by Habermas (1962), describes how movement of “rational forms of political deliberation away from the tentacles of state control and allowed public opinion to develop” (Chadwick, 2006, p. 88). Dahlberg (2001) drew upon Habermas’ (1962) theory of the public sphere and applied it to the internet, premised on the notion that citizens can engage in political debate with no concern for intervention from the state, corporations or social structures, (Chadwick, 2006, p. 89). While traditional public spheres have become fewer and fewer, the internet has emerged as a new public sphere for civic dialogue and debate, and is especially suited to be a medium of public sphere communication because it provides a space that is spontaneous, flexible and governed by the users themselves, (Dahlgren, 2000). In the public sphere civic dialogue and debate may exist between constituents and politicians, potentially providing the opportunity for transparent communication, which is a dimension of authenticity. Despite the emergence of this new public sphere, there are several ways in which the internet falls short of being a utopian public sphere. Issues such as online flaming (Abouchar and Henson, 2000), strict online

government policies (Chadwick, 2001), and restrictive online discussion forums (Polletta, 1999) interfere with the online public sphere.

The internet is seen as potentially influential in electoral politics as it “may allow individuals to be involved in politics in new ways and to donate to campaigns more easily and allow candidates to organize individuals more effectively” (Hall and Sinclair, 2011). The internet has greatly affected political figures’ and organizations’ efforts to recruit supporters, gain funding, and attract votes, (Anstead & Chadwick, 2008; Davis, Owen, Taras, & Ward, 2008; Ward & Gibson, 2009).

2.3 Social Media

As the thesis focuses on authenticity in electoral social media campaigns, a brief review of previous research on social media and electoral politics follows, including a definition of social media, and followed by an overview of social media’s content and politics. Finally, the section provides a brief overview of the social media platform Facebook, which is the chosen social media outlet for this research.

Rather than a communication platform in which the content producer is separate from the consumer, social media is a model of communication in which the lines between producer and consumer are eliminated, and rely on collaboration and open sharing, (Bruns, 2006; Kolbitsch and Maurer, 2006). Due to the opportunities to collaborate and share on social media, it is presumable that these opportunities offer politicians the possibility to be more transparent in their communication with their constituents, perhaps helping them establish their authenticity. Henderson and Bowley (2010) define social media as “collaborative online applications and technologies that enable participation, connectivity, user-generated content, sharing of information and collaboration amongst a community of users” (p. 239). A crucial difference between the internet and social media is that “traditional internet sources rely predominantly on paid professionals, whereas social media rely primarily on interaction among users” (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2008, p. 611). Features of social media include sharing photos, videos, creating blogs, connecting with public figures, and messaging other users (Henderson and Bowley, 2010). Social media is a broad umbrella term, under which social networking sites fall. As defined by boyd and Ellison (2008), social networking sites are web platforms in which individuals can: create a public or private profile within the platform, create a list of other users with whom they are connected, and view their list of connections within the platform. boyd and Ellison (2008) refer to an online platform in which

online users have a preexisting connection, in which friendship is the main concern, while Beer (2008) defines social networking as including the potential to connect with strangers and those with whom users already have a relationship, and holds that social networking sites are for networking with people and making connections. Since social media is a broad umbrella term, and for the sake of uniformity, this thesis will refer to both social media and social networking sites as social media.

While electoral campaigns have used the internet since 2000, online tools and strategies have become more sophisticated, and are now deeply tied to the entire campaign operation, (Davis, 2005; Vargas, 2008). Social media, and in the case of this thesis, Facebook, allow users to communicate with friends and strangers and make their social networks visible to the public. Users can communicate both directly via timeline postings, instant messaging and messages and indirectly via notes and status updates. Facebook provides space for both individual and organizational pages, in which individual users can “Like” pages and join groups, and these “Likes” are then listed on individuals’ personal profile pages along with other information about the individuals’ interests, (Facebook.com). These “Likes”, as well as other activities, appear in the News Feeds of users’ friends, so users can indirectly share their involvement in an electoral campaign. Any activities from campaigns or candidates that users have “Liked” will also appear in the users’ News Feeds, so campaigns and candidates can also communicate with their followers without the followers needing to visit the candidate’s personal page. Facebook users can also post to a candidate or campaign’s “Timeline” which is an “unthreaded public forum within the Facebook environment on which registered users may post their thoughts” (Robertson *et al.*, 2010, p. 15). The features of Facebook allow for the production of varied content, of which may help candidate’s establish authenticity in their political social media campaigns.

2.4 Authenticity

A background on previous research regarding authenticity is provided here. General research on authenticity is discussed first, followed by a four-dimensional definition of authenticity which is used as the main theoretical framework of the thesis and research, and will be considered as the determinants of authenticity.

Given the issues that political organizations may have in communicating with and engaging constituents online, one possible means of addressing this issue may be to concentrate on authenticity in electoral social media campaigns since authenticity is a popular

topic in public relations. One of the primary goals of public relations is to build a relationship between organizations and stakeholders, which is similar to the relationship between candidates and their constituents. Previous research on authenticity has focused on it in terms of hand-made products (Fine, 2003), advertising (Beverland, 2003), public relations (Slater, 2002), political discourse (Liebes, 2001), and racial authenticity among black politicians (McIlwain and Caliendo, 2004). Authenticity's role in advertising and brand identity has also been a common research focus and its relationship with advertising and brand identity has become important as consumers seek authentic brands and experiences, (Fine, 2003; Peñaloza, 2000; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Authenticity is related to brand identity as was discovered by Kreber *et al.* (2007: in Henderson and Bowley, 2010), "authenticity is commonly associated with presenting a genuine, critically reflective and true self." In relation to brand management, brands must manage to stay authentic while also remaining relevant (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2001; Keller, 2003). Authenticity is argued to be one of the building blocks of an effective online public relations campaign, because "relationships between institutions and constituents can only be established by overcoming the doubt often inherent in online interactions" (Slater, 2002: in Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010). Although much research on authenticity exists, few scholars define the term or agree on a general meaning, and what is deemed authentic may be arbitrarily determined since "images of authenticity involve projecting an image that is partly true and partly rhetorical" (Beverland, 2005, p. 1008). Authenticity in relation to electoral politics is also vaguely defined, the term "lacks precision either in describing candidate attributes or voters' evaluative dimensions" (Louden and McCauliff, 2004, p. 90).

Despite debate over what determines authenticity, Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) argue that clarity and consistency of identity are central to building authenticity, and continue to acknowledge four dimensions which influence online authenticity: authority, identity, transparency and engagement, which are defined below:

1. Authority: Perceived authority is based on expertise and credibility (p. 262).
2. Identity: Defined along a continuum – authentic identities are perceived as reliable and genuine, while less authentic identities are unreliable or generic (p. 265).
3. Transparency: Communication that is open to scrutiny (p. 265).
4. Engagement: Interaction between members of the online community and the organization (p. 266).

These four dimensions are important to maintaining authenticity, and may explain why maintaining authenticity on a social media platform is one critical step an electoral political campaign can take in building a better relationship with its constituents. Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) dimensions of authenticity are discussed further after brief reviews on the internet and politics and social media and politics.

2.5 Four Characteristics of Authenticity

In each of the following sections an overview previous research as it relates to one of the four dimensions of authenticity as defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) will be reviewed. Each dimension will have a general overview followed by a discussion of how it is related to both media content and effects in electoral campaigns.

2.5.1 Authority

This section focuses on Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) first dimension of authenticity, authority, and reviews previous research that relates to the content and effects of authority in social media.

While previous research has not focused on candidates' authority or authenticity on social media specifically, it has shown that credibility is related to the public's perception of a candidate and has been an important factor in electoral politics. Authority is described as being based on an actor's expertise on the content being discussed and in the context in which the actor plays a role, and assumes that the individual who is speaking is empowered to do so, (Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody, 2010, p. 262). Instead of resting within a medium or media source, authority is established through a combination of normal practices such as meeting audience expectations and persuasiveness, (Robinson, 2007).

Parry-Giles (2001) states that the anxiety caused by the Vietnam War, the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals and the Clinton impeachment have created the desire for authentic candidates among the American electorate, (p. 214). These scandals may have diminished the credibility and trustworthiness of politicians. Pels (2003) argues that the perceived authenticity of a politician helps build trust between citizens and the politician, (p. 51). Fisher (1989, p. 47: in Louden and McCauliff, 2004) argues that "determining a character's motive is a prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief", and that credibility is dependent upon the audience's attribution of expertise, trustworthiness and dynamism to a character (p. 148). Fisher's (1989: in Louden and McCauliff, 2004) concepts are mirrored in

research on candidate image, related to the second dimension of authenticity, identity, which is discussed later in the theory review. Furthermore, Helms (2012) suggests that it is now “widely acknowledged that authenticity as an element of good democratic political leadership has gained importance in terms of democratic legitimacy” (p. 6), supporting the notion that democratic leadership is associated with legitimacy, or credibility. Credibility, a determinant of authority, has been studied for the influence it has on political campaigns, (Teven, 2008; Hacker, 2004), and has been found to be critical to the selection of opinion leaders (Richmond and McCroskey, 1975). Candidate credibility is an important part of communication because communication that is perceived to be more credible is more persuasive, (Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey, Holdridge and Toomb, 1974; Miller and McReynolds, 1973). Further supporting the importance of authority in electoral politics, studies show that with the exclusion of campaign issues or policy stances (Benoit, 2003), a candidate’s characteristics and perceived credibility may be the most important determinants of voter behavior (Stephan *et al.*, 2004), demonstrating a relationship between authority and political engagement.

Content

Online content may influence constituents’ perceptions of candidate authority in electoral social media campaigns. Coleman (2011) suggests that political blogging may be a response to citizens’ sense of being lost without authentic representation, and that the increasing number of political blogs is an attempt to “authenticate deeper and more expansive accounts and narratives than traditional political discourse permits” (p. 194). This suggestion reflects Parry-Giles’ (2001) observation that constituents seek authoritative, authentic candidates, and shows that citizen blogs may address the lack of authority and authenticity. Briones *et al.*’s (2010) study on the American Red Cross’s use of social media to build relationships found that organizations should be active on their social media pages in order to gain information from their constituents, and that consistency is an important means to enhance the audience’s trust, which is key to establishing credibility and authority (p. 41). In agreement with Briones *et al.*, Henderson and Bowley (2010) asserted that authenticity plays a very important role for organizations which try to recruit potential constituents on social media, and suggested that organizations must maintain a consistent brand identity while keeping careful not to over-moderate the content on their Facebook pages.

Hall and Sinclair (2011) argue that it is imperative to a politician's success to stay up to date and use the newest technologies, because it helps them stay relevant and competitive, (p. 60). In regards to the importance of the internet in electoral politics, it is argued that citizens come to develop expectations for a candidate's website when the citizens themselves become more tech-savvy, (Wagner and Gainous, 2009; Trent and Friedenber, 2007; Chadwick, 2006; Foot and Schneider, 2006), revealing that citizens expect candidates to be at least as active online as the citizens themselves and the importance of the online sphere to political campaigns. Thus, posting content or establishing a profile on the latest social media platform can help establish a candidate's authority because they are expected to at least match their constituents' use and knowledge of technology.

Effects

Social media also has implications for the destruction of perceived candidate authority, as authority can be degraded by platforms that allow symmetrical dialogue, as explained by Lüders (2008). Symmetrical and asymmetrical interaction (Dozier *et al.*, 1995; Grunig, 1989; Grunig and Hunt, 1984) can impact perceptions of authority on social media: because most interaction on Facebook happens in a "walled garden" (Papacharissi, 2009) and the territory in which users can comment is delineated, which can lead to asymmetrical forms of communication that reinforce a hierarchy of authority, (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010). Digital tools that allow symmetrical communication (two-way communication between the candidate and constituents) may erode authoritative boundaries, (Lüders, 2008). However, we see that engagement and interactivity also shape authenticity, so authority must not interfere with engagement. Authority and power differentials, i.e. the perceived power of a candidate, are the effects of communicative interaction, and those power differentials may also play a role in how willing a constituent is to engage online, (Dahlberg, 2001).

Paradoxically, although a candidate's authority can be established via the use of content social media platforms, and transparent communication is a dimension of authenticity, authority can also sometimes be threatened by the social media platforms that allow symmetrical communication.

2.5.2 Identity

This section focuses on the third dimension of authenticity, identity, and reviews previous research on social media as it relates to the content and effects of identity in electoral politics.

Impression management, public image and self-presentation, which are all tied to an electoral candidate's identity, have long been important and influential in electoral politics, as the literature review below demonstrates. Identity is not stagnant, building identity is rather an ongoing and socially constructed narrative (Ricouer, 1985; Somers, 1994; Elliott, 2005), and relies upon several factors including language, writing style, graphics and other interactions, (Dahlberg, 2001). The concept of identity is similar to Mitra and Watts' (2002) concept of a voice which asserts that a voice is a "phenomenon constitutive of ethical and emotional dimensions that make it a dialogic event" (p. 483) and that in socially mediated conversation "power structures are more closely tied to the ability to create a voice than in real life" (p. 487). This close relationship between the voice and identity shows that there may be a relationship between identity and authority, two main concepts of authenticity.

Further, there are several variables that can contribute to authenticity that may be a part of a candidate's identity, including believability, honesty, humor, fairness, faithfulness, justice, genuineness, independence, reliability, sincerity and trustworthiness, and the campaign's attempt to establish the candidate's authenticity by creating unfolding storylines about the candidate, and by avoiding the term "politician" (Louden and McCauliff, 2004). Research by Miller *et al.* (1985, 1986, in: Louden and McCauliff, 2004) showed that voters are interested in a candidate's character and are more likely to vote based on a candidate's image because they assess a candidate's future performance on their character. Campaigns may try to construct a candidate's identity around the characteristics mentioned above to establish a candidate identity that is not only based on being a politician. Overall, the issue of identity in electoral politics is about the "alleged betrayal of the public through misrepresentation" and concerns how constituents feel unrecognized or understood by their representatives (Coleman, 2005, p. 194). Additionally, a candidate's image largely determines voter behavior and candidate selection (Dennis, Chaffee and Chloe, 1979; Trent *et al.*, 1993; Hellweg, 2004), showing how influential identity is on constituent engagement.

Research on impression management as early as the 1970s (Berman, 1970; Mayhew, 1974) shows that authenticity has long been a dimension in politics and that politicians seek to exude qualities such as experience, knowledge, responsiveness, concern, sincerity and independence. Pels (2003) similarly offers the concept of political style, which is a combination of ways of acting and speaking with presentational techniques, and suggests that communication and trust are predicated on political style and taste, (p. 48). Politicians' self-presentation, interaction with media and the amount that personal qualities are seen, serve not

only to “enhance, but to underwrite political values” (Corner, 2003, p. 68). Impression management, political style and self-presentation can all be considered determinants of a candidate’s identity, as they all must be constructed and managed, supporting the suggestion that identity is dynamic (Ricouer, 1985; Somers, 1994; Elliott, 2005).

Just as they judge others every day, voters use their own experiences (Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin, 2000) to assess each encounter they have with a candidate (Husson *et al.*, 1988). How voters evaluate candidates is multidimensional and determined by their perceptions of the candidates, (Anderson and Kibler, 1978; Nimmo and Savage, 1976), showing how crucial voters’ opinions of candidates are to a successful campaign. The connection between campaigns and candidates, who are the central actors, can lead to a tension created between voters’ wishes and the candidate’s own character and agenda (Louden and McCauliff, 2004). Corner and Pels (2003) similarly argue that the electorate scrutinizes politicians for authentic identity, and Parry-Giles (2001) argues that political authenticity is central to American political campaigns in which “political opponents seek to deconstruct the authenticated image” (p. 214), therefore seeking to undermine the opposing candidate’s identity.

Content

Media content can influence a candidate’s identity as politicians have used both traditional and new media to create a public image (Mughan 2000; Gulati 2004), and have sought to appear to be “a likeable, trustworthy, and competent person, who is sincere in promising changes for the better, as well as capable of bringing about these changes” (Schutz, 1995: in Stanyer, 2008, p. 415). Focusing on the political discourse of authenticity in a debate between two candidates for the Israeli prime minister and the Bill Clinton character in *Primary Colors*, Liebes (2001) asserts that genuine conversation is important for political survival, and that although authenticity is performed, “everyone can see and judge for themselves (or so it seems) if he is real or just faking” (p. 499), showing the relevance of an authentic identity in electoral politics, and that voters can distinguish between authentic and inauthentic identities.

In a study on authentic identity on social media platforms, Marwick (2005) found that although the social media websites presume that users have a single authentic identity that is presented accurately, many people do not present their authentic identities online. On the other hand, in regard to identity in political social media campaigns, Ellison, Lampe and

Steinfeld (2007) argue that it can be expected that a candidate's public image on social media is authentic and consistent with other campaign material since Facebook profiles usually represent an individual honestly, because it is likely that personal information can be verified in the physical world, (Donath and Boyd, 2004). Following Ellison, Lampe and Steinfeld's (2007) logic, it is presumable that voters expect to see a candidate's authentic identity in a political social media campaign.

Effects

Since there are ample opportunities for deceptive online representation (Dahlberg, 2001; Slater, 2002), identity is especially important for establishing authenticity. Media effects may negatively impact a candidate's identity, and social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter can actually work against the cultivated image, undermining authenticity and revealing the disagreement between private and public self-representation, (Coleman, 2011). Gueorguieva's (2007) findings on Myspace and YouTube's role in the 2006 election showed that the social media platforms posed a challenge to campaign strategists in that they weaken the amount of control that campaigns have over a candidate's image and message due to the user-created content on social media sites, (p. 296). Along similar lines Helms (2012) argues that because leaders are aware of the social media mechanisms that can expose the inconsistency between their "authentic" and private identities, it is less likely that genuine leaders emerge, and authenticity becomes a rare commodity that can only be secured by image and media management, (p. 9). Assuming authenticity is a rare commodity in electoral politics and the associated pressure of constructing an authentic identity, the online environment may produce identities that are perceived as performative instead of authentic (Slater, 2002: in Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010), because candidate identity may be perceived as a performance rather than authentic character. Highly performative or insincere communication may negatively impact constituents' trust in interacting with an organization, or candidate (Dahlberg, 2001; Donath, 2007). Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) note that government institutions have to avoid creating an online performative identity and need to maintain trust (p. 264), the most authentic identities are perceived as genuine and reliable, and authentic identity ranges on a scale from performative to genuine, (p. 265).

2.5.3 Transparency

The following section discusses the third dimension of Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) definition of authenticity, transparency, and reviews literature that is related to the content and effects of transparency in social media. Transparency is defined as communication between the constituents and campaign that is open to scrutiny and independently confirmed (p. 265).

Transparency can be argued as essential to an electoral campaign as it gives constituents the opportunity to know what happens within an organization (Strathern, 2000). Transparency can refer to verifying online claims, (Slater, 2002: in Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010) and media trends such as reality television and Web 2.0 have been argued to increase the pressure on organizations and the government to be more transparent (Andrejevic, 2006). The importance of transparency is supported by Molleda (2010) who writes that organizations are increasingly pressured by stakeholders who demand greater transparency, openness and responsibility from organizations (p. 223), and that all of these are factors of authenticity. Likewise, political campaigns themselves, especially the 2008 Obama campaign, used social and interactive media, which allowed the public to scrutinize the candidate and communication, to engage with its voters in the 2008 election season (Carr and Stelter, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Learmonth, 2008).

The issue of transparency plays an important role in social media campaigns of all kinds, as there is a demand for authenticity and a focus on the "real" that is "associated with the need for more person-to-person, or authentic, interactions, by consumers" (Henderson and Bowley, 2010, p. 242). Louden and McCauliff (2004) suggest that voters look for transparency, dependability and consistency in determining if the candidates are their authentic selves, demonstrating an overlap between perceived transparency and authentic identity. Viewers want to see candidates being themselves in unscripted settings, (Anderson, 2000) however it is questionable whether any such circumstances ever exist in a political campaign, although there are particular situations in which candidates are expected to be especially transparent (Louden and McCauliff, 2004, p. 97). Transparency, including interactivity, is also a substantial part of dialogue that public relations researchers assert is the key to a good relationship between an organization and its public, (Bruning *et al.*, 2008).

Content

As discussed below, many aspects of online media content, such as interactivity and dialogue, influence a candidate's transparency and therefore may affect the candidate's authenticity. Since social media offer some of the same functions of interpersonal communication such as user communities, friendship maintenance, social interaction and the development of personal identities and relationships online (Hanson *et al.*, 2010), they provide both constituents and candidates the possibility to communicate and spread political information via interaction, online communities and user-to-user messaging to name a few examples. Interactivity refers to the dialogic process between users of a website including the website creator, (Lilleker and Malagón, 2010, p. 28) and is two-way communication that allows users to react to other user input (Quiring, 2009). Interactivity can be considered a means of establishing transparency because it provides the opportunity for communication and content that is open to public scrutiny. Noting the importance of interactivity in an online political campaign, Xenos and Foot (2008), defined two different types of online interactivity, and distinguished between which is the most useful for online campaigning. *Transactional* interactivity is a website creating technique in which information about the users' internet behavior is stored and used to personalize website content, (Xenos and Foot, 2008). *Coproductive* interactivity (Xenos and Foot, 2008) is described as when users are allowed to leave comments and feedback on a website, is necessary for organizational online campaigns to thrive, according to Ward (2011). Co-productive interactivity agrees with Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) notion of transparency, and can be threatening to political campaigns as web producers have less control over the content on the campaign website.

Since the internet can be considered a "dialogic medium" (Henderson and Bowley, 2010), and transparency is one of the key dimensions in authentic online communication, dialogue between candidates and constituents may be a determinant of transparency. Oblak (2003) argues that mutual dialogue and the equal exchanging of views, reflecting the symmetrical communication discussed by Dozier *et al.*, (1995), Grunig (1989) and Grunig and Hunt (1984), helps to create true transparency, although online symmetrical communication opportunities do not ensure transparency. According to Bruning *et al.* (2008), dialogue is important to organizations in their public relationships as it allows the constituents to ask questions, express opinions and to better understand the organization itself. Obama's 2008 presidential campaign supported Bruning, Dials and Shirka (2007), as

Obama's relationship with the grassroots campaign showed to be valuable and mutually beneficial, (Levenshus, 2010).

Taylor and Kent (1998) studied how the internet is used "to create organizational public relationships (OPRs) through dialogic components allowing input by and communication to publics" (Briones *et al.*, 2010, p. 38). According to Taylor and Kent there are several key factors in online relationship building via online content, which may play a role in transparency, two of which are frequently updating content to engage the public and putting useful information on the site. In conjunction with their factors for relationship building, Kent and Taylor (2002) posit five methods in dialogue's role in public relations: *mutuality*, recognizing campaign-public relations; *propinquity*, spontaneous interactions with the public; *empathy*, support of public goals and interests, *risk*, the willingness to interact with publics on their own terms, and *commitment*, how much the organization involves itself in dialogue. These practical dialogic components help to construct an authentic and transparent relationship between the campaign and its constituents, and Kent and Taylor (2002) argue that dialogue is more about open discussion than it is about agreement. Although social media presents dialogic opportunities, candidates should also understand how to most effectively communicate with their constituents to build an online public relationship.

Effects

Aspects of transparency, including interactivity and dialogue, have been studied for their influence on political engagement. Interactive Web 2.0 tools like blogs and grassroots activist sites have been found to have a bigger impact on votes than static platforms and newsletters, (Rackaway, 2007). Nonprofit organizations who tweeted more, had more likes and more followers were found to be perceived as more transparent and credible by their stakeholders, and those who updated less frequently were perceived to be less transparent, showing a relationship between activity frequency and perceived transparency and credibility (Sisco, n.d.). Lilleker and Malagón (2010) suggest that "interaction among voters and between voters and political candidates and elected representatives, is crucial for reinvigorating democracy" and that interactive communication can help build a public sphere, which may be an effect of transparency (p. 27).

Despite being one of the key dimensions of transparency, Stromer-Galley found that "human-interaction," i.e. online interaction between website users and producers, was not

used by political candidates due to its potential effects, because it may be “burdensome to the campaign, candidates risk losing control of the communication environment, and they no longer can provide ambiguous campaign discourse” (Stromer-Galley, 2000, p. 120). Some discourage interactivity because it can be argued that too much interactivity makes a website difficult to navigate (Sundar *et al.*, 2003) and because it may mean that candidates lose control by having to follow the agendas set by others (Davis, 1999). Furthermore, the ability for users to create content “pose[s] a dilemma for campaigns over when they should react [to user-created-content] and when they should not” (Williams and Gulati, 2007), showing that campaigns may be reluctant to interact despite the importance of interactivity to transparency. Williams and Gulati’s (2007) findings on interactivity’s influence on a campaign’s transparency mirrors Lüders’ (2008) finding that symmetrical communication can erode authority, demonstrating the relationship between transparency and authority.

Interaction on social media has been found to affect political engagement because people can gather more political information and live beyond personal resource constraints via social interaction, (McClurg, 2003). Although interactivity may sometimes be discouraged in a political campaign, John Kerry’s online team allowed debate to take place on his campaign website, which may have worked in his favor by establishing the appearance that debate was encouraged, while still not compromising Kerry’s position, (Chadwick, 2006, p. 172). Interestingly, in a study on nonprofit organizations and social media usage, Sisco (n.d.) found that the amount of dialogic tweets did little to influence the public’s perceptions of credibility or transparency. Some studies have focused on how online interactivity affects voters’ perceptions of candidates, (Ahern and Stromer-Galley 2000; Sundar *et al.*, 2003). Sundar *et al.* (2003) found that different levels of interactivity led voters to judge candidates differently, and that voters viewed the candidates’ character, competence and likeability more positively with medium levels of interactivity, and that there can be too much interactivity between candidates and voters. Thus, a political social media campaign must effectively interact with its constituents to take full advantage of the dialogic opportunities provided by social media platforms.

2.5.4 Engagement

This section reviews research on electoral engagement as it relates to the content and effects of social media. Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2008) consider engagement to be the interaction between members of the online community and the organization (p. 266) and this

thesis will focus on authenticity as partly determined by constituents' engagement in online political campaigns.

Campaigns that have higher levels of constituent engagement may be perceived to be more authentic however perceived authenticity may also be crucial to constituent engagement. Research on the role that social media play in political engagement is plentiful and previous research has also focused on political mobilization and participation. As mobilization and participation are often used interchangeably, and both are related to engagement, they will also be discussed in this review. How to communicate with constituents in an effective way to get them to engage has been of particular interest to many scholars, and candidate authenticity may influence constituent engagement. Social media became especially prevalent in the 2006 and 2008 election seasons in which new technologies afforded citizens the ability to participate in online communities that were centered around creating and exchanging media content, (Kolbitsch and Maurer, 2006; O'Reilly, 2005; Rainie, 2007; Tapscott and Williams, 2006). Data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that 65 percent of social media users between 18-29 years old participated in at least one of five political activities available on social media during the 2008 campaign season such as joining a political group on a social media site or getting information about a candidate, (Smith, 2009).

Political mobilization is "the process by which candidates, parties, activists and groups induce other people to participate" (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, p. 25). Conventional tools of mobilization include telephone, postal mail, and door-to-door canvassing, which according to Krueger (2006), depend on contact lists while the internet reduces the need for targeted contact lists (p. 762). Political participation is a similar, and often times synonymous term to political mobilization, and can be practiced in many ways, including donating, trying to persuade others or wearing a button to show support of a particular candidate, (Kenski and Stroud, 2006). It can also be considered a person's "intent to influence government actions through different activities, either directly by affecting the creation or implementation of public policy, or indirectly by influencing the people that make those choices" (Burns and Schlozman, 2001: in Vitak *et al.*, 2011, p. 108). Anduiza, Cantijoch and Gallego (2009) argue that the generic question of whether the internet affects political participation is confusing, and that the internet's effect on three types of participation should be distinguished: activity which is only possible online, activity carried out in the real world and online, and activity which is only carried out online. For the

purposes of this thesis and research, engagement will include all three types of activity: online activity, offline activity, and both on- and offline activity and engagement will be an umbrella term, including mobilization and participation.

Content

The content of political social media campaigns may influence user engagement, and campaigns that users perceive to be authentic may be more successful in constituent engagement. What is most important in online campaigns is that online engagement requires the willingness of the constituents to participate, (Ward, 2005), thus electoral social media campaigns must effectively communicate with their constituents online to encourage participation. In research on the role of the internet as a tool for democracy, Kenix (n.d.) discovered that the possibilities for recruiting people to engage were not fully realized despite the advantages of online communication. These results showed that political and civic organizations actively used the internet, but used it for educational content rather than for self-promotion and did not communicate effectively enough to result in user engagement.

The use of political websites for educational content may lend authority to the campaign, but may lack the other dimensions of authenticity that influence engagement. Baumgartner and Morris's (2010) findings involving social media and political engagement among young adults supported Kenix (n.d.), as the potential for social media to increase political engagement had not been fully taken advantage of, although users sought out political campaigns on social media that corresponded with their own views. Other research has focused on how the plethora of political information online available to the general public helps people become informed, and how it helps politicians, NGOs and governments to spread their messages, also lending authority to campaigns, which may be pertinent to constituent engagement (Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles, and Larson, 2004).

According to Mascaro (n.d.) the "truthfulness in profiles makes social mobilization and discourse in online social networks authentic because social capital developed in the physical world is at stake online" (p. 2), demonstrating the relationship between transparency and engagement. Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) suggest that high levels of engagement may be more important to constructing authenticity, as the "willingness to engage directly with constituents, or to provide places where these may interact with each other with minimal restrictions, may increase the perceived authenticity of the communicative space" (p. 267). Much of the research discussed studied the influence of content on engagement prior to the

advent of Facebook, and did not take the features that Vitak *et al.* (2011) list into account: users can engage by joining political groups, downloading candidate materials, sharing opinions, and engage in conversation on political issues. Therefore, Facebook may be seen as providing candidates with more opportunities to produce content that demonstrates, authority, transparency, and identity which could impact users' engagement in the campaign.

Effects

How to effectively communicate with constituents to succeed in engagement has been of particular interest to many scholars and candidate authenticity, specifically determined by authority, identity and transparency, may influence constituent engagement. There are several different strands of research that focus on the internet and political engagement. Digital activism is one such strand of political engagement research, with a focus on how blogging and hacktivism can influence democratic transparency and legitimacy (Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003), showing the connection between engagement, transparency and authority. Other early research focused on the types of political activity possible on the internet, (Katz, Rice and Aspden, 2001; Shah, Cho, Eveland and Kwak, 2005; Wang, 2007). One primary type of political activity was determined to be information seeking behavior, and the other primary type is a more active behavior in which the user participates in online communities or interacts online with other users or with candidates, which may influence engagement. Tools such as email reminders of rallies, candidate appearances, and invitations can also help lead to volunteerism, (Bimber and Davis, 2003), which demonstrates that engagement can be influenced by online tools.

Campaign websites have been found to have greater significant mobilizing impacts on participatory behavior like sending emails to others encouraging them to vote or make a donation than collective participatory behavior like attending a rally, (Park and Perry, 2008), showing that authentic campaigns may achieve higher levels of online constituent engagement. Although it is unlikely that voters convert their vote to support a candidate after viewing the candidate's website (Gibson and McAllister, 2006), the web may have an indirect effect by serving as a source of information for activists who mobilize others to support a candidate (Norris and Curtice, 2008; Quintilier and Vissers, 2008), thus, the more information on a candidate online may lead to higher levels of perceived authenticity. Ward (2011) found that organizational websites are most successful when constituents are allowed to interact with each other and with the organization, which may show a relationship between

campaign transparency and successful constituent engagement. In research on communication styles on civic engagement websites Wells (2010) found that communication styles on organizational websites are correlated with the citizenship styles of its followers, and that communication style is an important means of successful engagement with an online audience.

The influence of social media on political engagement has been the focus of several studies (Mascaro, n.d.; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2009; Kim and Geidner, 2008; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009, Dimitrova *et al.*, 2011). Political and media observers such as Hesseldahl, MacMillan and Kharif (2008), Marchese (2008), and Owen (2008) noted that social media significantly influenced young voters' political behaviors in the 2008 election. Since nearly all candidates were active on social media, engagement may have been related to the ability social media offered candidates to demonstrate their authenticity via their online authority, identity and transparency. Furthermore, Williams and Gulati (2009) argue that "active engagement by the candidate and a well maintained site can make the candidate more accessible and seem more authentic" (p. 19). Since social media like Facebook combine many of the internet's capacities, it is conceivable that political engagement on social media platforms has the potential to influence offline political participation, (Vitak *et al.*, 2011). Despite the enthusiasm for users' abilities to share campaign information and engage in Facebook groups, a study by Vitak *et al.* (2011) found that although young voters may participate in political activity on Facebook, the degree of participation was somewhat superficial, thus supporting the opinion that social media encourages "slacktivism."

While some research has found a positive relationship between reliance on social media and civic engagement, no relationship has been found between social media reliance and political engagement, (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). This may suggest that despite the opportunities offered, political social media campaigns lack the authenticity needed to affect constituent engagement. In a similar vein, Bode *et al.* (2010) showed that social media is used to bring attention to an issue that mainstream media lack, yet argue that the potential for social media to offer a voice to minority groups has been overstated due to the lack of strategic social media use. Because social media can bring attention to an issue that the mainstream media doesn't focus on, it may be perceived as providing information that is more transparent, and perhaps more authentic, although as Bode *et al.* (2010) found, social media should be used strategically to reach its full potential. Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009) argue that a positive relationship exists between "informational uses of ICTs and expression

in the online domain” in relation to political participation, yet found no support between online expression and offline participation (p. 917). These findings may demonstrate a relationship between perceived authority and online political engagement, as online mobilization and participation were shown to be positively related to information seeking and online information about a candidate helps establish the credibility of a candidate.

2.6 Summary

In summary, the perceived authority, identity, transparency, and engagement of a candidate’s political social media campaign may have crucial effects on the electoral candidate’s perceived authenticity. As the reviewed literature suggests, there are several means by which the four dimensions may be demonstrated on a social media platform via the content provided on the platform, and likewise, there may be several effects of this content. What specifically demonstrates the dimensions of authenticity, however, is still unclear, and warrants further research.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research design used for this thesis. The research questions are presented first, followed by a description of how the research will be conducted, and ending with a description of the method of analysis.

3.2 Research Questions

How the concept of authenticity is demonstrated in electoral social media campaigns and how the four determining dimensions of authenticity are demonstrated through the features of social media is the focus of this research. The authenticity of electoral social media campaigns is studied via qualitative content analysis of data that is drawn from ten semi-structured interviews with US Democrats, ranging from 41 to 57 minutes in length. In general, research about authenticity focuses on public relations or advertising, however this thesis explores how authenticity is demonstrated in electoral candidates' social media campaigns. This thesis' research questions look at how the concept of authenticity plays a role in electoral politics, namely how it relates to a candidate's social media campaign on Facebook. The main research question is: *How does authenticity play a role in electoral social media campaigns?* Although studies (Liebes, 2001; Louden and McCauliff, 2004) have discussed the role authenticity plays in voters' perceptions of the candidates, they have not specifically addressed how authenticity plays out in electoral social media campaigns. To better address the main research question, four sub-research questions are also posed and will be considered in determining how authenticity plays a role in electoral social media campaigns. The dimensions of authenticity that the sub-research questions are based upon are drawn from the dimensions defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010). The first sub-research question deals with the perceived authority of an electoral candidate's social media campaign:

How are the features of social media used to demonstrate authority in an electoral social media campaign?

Authority is comprised of credibility, expertise and legitimacy. This sub-question will provide insight into how a candidate's credibility and expertise are conceived in an electoral social media campaign via the establishment of these factors.

The next question focuses on the second dimension of authenticity, identity:

How are the features of social media used to demonstrate identity in an electoral social media campaign?

The second sub-question is meant to determine how candidate's identities in social media campaigns are perceived by voters, and what features determine an authentic identity.

The third sub-research questions focuses on transparency:

How are the features of social media used to demonstrate transparency in an electoral social media campaign?

This sub-question focuses on whether or not candidates are engaging in communication that is open to criticism and is not obstructive, and what types of content in electoral social media campaigns contribute to, or detract from transparency.

The fourth and final sub-research question focuses on engagement:

How are the features of social media used to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign?

The final sub-question seeks to determine how participation and mobilization among online community members helps to establish a candidate's authenticity. The sub-research questions address the four dimensions of authenticity and allow for qualitative analysis through the use of semi-structured interviewing.

3.3 Interviewing

Qualitative interviewing is the chosen methodology to address the main and sub-research questions on how the concept of authenticity relates to electoral social media campaigns. Qualitative interviewing of US Democrats is the selected method of exploration because candidates' electoral social media campaigns are an effort to communicate with their constituents or potential voters. Interviewing members of a group that the electoral social media campaigns are interested in reaching can provide insight into how constituents perceive and respond to the content of these campaigns, which may be applicable to the electoral politics around the world, not only to the US Democratic Party. As Coleman (2005) argues, digital communication offers politicians the potential to be connected with their

constituencies, which helps them have “unmediated and undistorted access to the represented, to be better understood, to nurture public consent” (p. 189).

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), qualitative interviews are meant to “contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees” (p. 314). Qualitative interviewing is therefore a worthwhile method as this research seeks to determine how voters perceive the content of candidates’ electoral social media campaigns, which is built upon their own experience of and opinions about viewing the content. Unlike surveys, interviews allow participants to answer questions on their own terms, (May, 1993, p. 92), which suits this study, as it is most interested in how respondents perceive the authenticity of electoral Facebook campaigns. Interviewing allows for the possibility to discover opinions and attitudes about candidates’ authenticity that might not be possible to uncover via quantitative analysis. To address the research question and sub-questions regarding authenticity and its four dimensions, ten US Democrats will be interviewed either in person or via Skype.

Why US Democrats?

There are several objectives of interviewing US Democrats. The first objective is to determine how the concept of authenticity is related to social media and in the same vein, to determine what interviewees perceive as authentic in an electoral candidate’s Facebook campaigns. The second objective is to determine how each of the four dimensions demonstrates authenticity, and if each of these dimensions impacts how interviewees perceive the candidates’ authenticity. To draw conclusions about how the concept of authenticity is demonstrated in electoral social media campaigns, ten individual semi-structured interviews ranging from 41 minutes to 57 minutes are conducted.

Given that candidates seek to reach their constituents and potential supporters as effectively as possible, interviewing citizens who are interested in politics serves as a means to gain insight into how citizens perceive the candidates’ authenticity. Since interviewees should be as homogenous as possible, and since they should share characteristics related to the research question (McCracken, 1988), this research focuses on US Democrats. Interviews only took place with those who consider themselves to be Democrats for practical reasons. By interviewing only citizens who consider themselves to be Democrats, the research avoids the limitation of drawing data from interviews with citizens who have no electoral interest anyway. Campbell *et al.* (1960) suggested that party identification “raises a perceptual screen

through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation,” (p. 133: in Bartels, 2002). Similarly Goren (2002) suggests that “Democrats are likely motivated to render poor judgments about Republican nominees just as Republicans are for Democratic candidates” (pp. 628-629). Due to the inherent partisan bias that may exist against the opposing party, only Democrats are interviewed, and are asked questions about screenshots from the pages of Democratic candidates.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The interviews follow a semi-structured guide that includes the most important topics regarding authenticity by asking questions that deal with authority, identity, transparency and engagement, which help to determine how authenticity plays a role in electoral social media campaigns, but without a predetermined order in which questions are asked or topics are brought up. Yin (2009) recommends that the interviews are guided by questions developed in relation to the research questions, and interview questions are related to the four dimensions of authenticity covered by the sub-research questions. Semi-structured interviews are “organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). A semi-structured guide is the chosen interview style as it allows for flexibility in the interview and for follow-up questions to be asked. Each of the sub-topics include various open-ended sub-questions about how each dimension is perceived to allow the interviewee to give the deepest response possible, and to allow the interviewee to bring up other topics or personal experiences that he or she might feel is related. Supporting the flexibility of semi-structured interviews Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990) state that semi-structured interviewing allows for a more complex and in-depth discussion of the interview topics. Open questions are used because they also allow for complex answers, as the interviewer can create questions along the way based on the responses that the interviewee is giving, and are useful when the interviewer can’t “anticipate the various ways in which people are likely to respond to a question” (Dillman, 1978, p. 87). The semi-structured interview guide is available in Appendix A.

During the interviews several screenshots from electoral candidates’ Facebook pages were shown as accompaniment to interview questions, as they reflect the dimensions of authenticity. Screenshots of candidates’ “About” sections from their Facebook pages were shown for questions that deal with authority, as this is the section in which most candidates

list their educational, work, or electoral experience. When viewing these screenshots, interviewees were asked about the candidate's qualifications and credentials for electoral office. Questions regarding a candidate's identity were accompanied by screenshots of a picture of a candidate with his wife and daughter, a screenshot of a candidate's interests and activities, and a screenshot of a "Note" a candidate had written. When viewing these screenshots, interviewees were asked about the candidate's character and sincerity. Questions about transparency were accompanied by a screenshot of a candidate's "Wall Post" in which he responded to a fan's question, and a screenshot of a user's complaint against a candidate, with the candidate's response. When viewing these screenshots, interviewees were asked about the communication between the candidate and his Facebook fans and the candidates' openness to dialogue and criticism. Finally, questions about engagement were accompanied by a screenshot of a photo of a house party posted by a candidate on his page, a photo of two women supporting a candidate at an offline event, and a Facebook event page dedicated to a fundraising event for a candidate. When viewing these screenshots, interviewees were asked about the importance of on and offline participation and the constituents' electoral activity. The collection of screenshots is available in Appendix B.

Participants were asked questions about to describe candidates whose Facebook pages they saw (identity), how they perceived on and offline participation in the candidate's campaign (engagement), how qualified the candidate seemed for the position (authority), and to describe the communication they saw with constituents (transparency). In some cases, questions from the interview guide were skipped if the interviewee brought up the topic by his or herself. This occurred most frequently with the topic of online and offline participation in the Facebook campaign, in which the tenth screenshot was omitted from the interview (see Appendix B). Additionally, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) emphasize the importance of building rapport, and argue that it is necessary to make the interviewee feel comfortable and safe in sharing their attitudes. Therefore, each interview began with an explanation of what the interview was about, an explanation of the confidentiality of interviewee responses, and asking the participant if they were comfortable with the interview being digitally recorded. At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked if they wanted to discuss anything that hadn't been brought up yet, or if they had any suggestions for changes that might be made to the interview.

Medium of Interviews

Qualitative researchers usually use face-to-face interviews with conducting semi-structured and in-depth interviews, (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004), however interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via Skype. When possible, interviews were face-to-face and were recorded using a voice recorder. Due to the location of most interviewees, and due to practical geographical reasons, only two interviews were conducted face-to-face. Individually printed screenshots were brought to face-to-face interviews to show participants the screenshots of the candidates' Facebook campaigns. Screenshots were presented one at a time to the interviewee, so that the appropriate screenshot always accompanied the current question. The rest of the interviews were conducted via a Skype call and were also recorded with a voice recorder that was placed next to the computer's speakers. Skype is a VoIP technology (Voice over Internet Protocol) that allows users to make computer-to-computer voice and video calls for free, and allows both types of calls to be recorded. Since this research requires interviewing US Democrats, and because the research is taking place in the Netherlands, there was the potential for both in-person interviews with Democrats who live in the Netherlands, or with Democrats living in the US, or other locations around the world, via Skype. VoIP technology gives researchers the opportunity to "considerably reduce the cost of research interviews and allow a greater number of researchers to collect their own data easily, faster and at a lower cost" (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010, p. 70). Skype offers a cheap alternative to telephone interviewing because it can be done for free between Skype users. Screenshots were uploaded to an online album as photos, and the URL of each individual screenshot was sent to the interviewee one at a time during the interview, so that the interviewee could focus on the screenshot that accompanied the present interview question, mimicking face-to-face interviewing.

Therefore, when it came to interviewing participants over Skype, it was only possible to interview people who have access to the internet and to a computer. Internet penetration rates in the US are very high, with 80 percent of Americans using the internet inside or outside of the home, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Using this kind of technology is not likely to limit the impacts of this research, as this study is specifically focused on Americans who are likely to use social media for political purposes. Each interview was recorded with the digital voice recorder on a mobile phone and uploaded onto a computer. Transcription was based on the audio file from those recordings. Interviews took place during April and were manually transcribed as soon as possible after they took place.

3.3.2 Interviewee Selection

Interviewees were selected using convenience sampling which involves the selection of the most accessible subjects and is the least costly for the researcher (Marshall, 1996). To find interviewees, two comments were posted on the Democrats Abroad Facebook page to seek out potential interviewees who currently live in the Netherlands, as well as Democrats in other countries who might have been interested in interviewing over Skype and who might live in a time zone that would have made it convenient to interview. In this post the research was briefly described and anyone who was a US Democrat and interested in participating was asked to email the researcher. In reaching out to the Democrats Abroad one US Democrat volunteered to participate. Potential interviewees were also sought via the Legal Aliens Facebook Group for expats living in the Netherlands, in an effort to find US Democratic volunteers who might have been easier to interview due to time zone issues, and two people volunteered as a result. On the Legal Aliens Facebook group two similar posts to that of the post on the Democrats Abroad Page were sent, in which US Democrats who might be interested in volunteering were asked to contact the researcher via email, so that an interview could be scheduled. The rest of the interviewees were found via posts to the researcher's personal Facebook and Twitter accounts which asked for US Democrat volunteers or for contacts to people who may be interested. In these posts US Democrat volunteers were asked to send the researchers a private message if they were interested in participating. At the end of each interview interviewees were asked if they knew of any other Democrats who would be willing to participate as an interviewee, however no additional interviewees were found this way. All of the interviewees were told beforehand that the research was about electoral campaigns and social media, but were told nothing else about the specifics of the study.

3.3.3 Selection of Candidates' Facebook Pages

Facebook was the only social media platform used for this research due to its popularity among both electoral candidates and voters, and because it encompasses all of the features of social media as defined by Bruns (2006), Kolbitsch and Maurer (2006), Kushin and Yamamoto (2008), Beer (2008) and Henderson and Bowley (2010). According to Smith and Rainie (2008), 50 percent of users younger than 30 years of age used Facebook for electoral information gathering or expression in the 2008 election, showing the popularity of using Facebook as a tool for electoral participation, and reinforcing the role that Facebook plays in electoral politics. Furthermore, Williams and Gulati (2009) found that major-party candidates

from both the House of Representatives and the Senate embraced Facebook during the 2008 election.

As previously mentioned this research only used the Facebook pages of Democratic candidates and only sought Democratic participants. Using only candidates and citizens from the same party was an effort to help avoid bias and makes practical sense since it avoids certain research limitations. Thus, membership in the Democratic Party was the first prerequisite to electoral social media campaign selection. Focusing on only Democratic candidates was also a time saving strategy, as using candidates from both parties might have required the researcher to make the Facebook pages of each candidate anonymous in an effort to avoid bias against the opposing party. The second prerequisite upon which Democratic candidates' electoral Facebook pages were chosen was based on their frequency of activity on their social media page. Regular Facebook users were chosen because they had more content to choose screenshots from when searching for content that demonstrated the dimensions of authenticity.

Four Democratic candidates were chosen for this research, two Congressional and two Senatorial candidates, all from different states. The Democratic Congressional candidates were found through the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's website (www.dccc.org) which lists all Democratic Congressional candidates in the November 2012 election. Senatorial candidates were found through the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee's website (www.dsc.org/races) which lists the Democratic Senatorial candidates in the November 2012 election.

One of the candidates chosen for this research was Ami Bera, running for Congress in the 7th District of California. The second candidate was Tom Carper, running as an incumbent candidate for Senator in Delaware. The third candidate whose Facebook campaign was used for this research is Joe Donnelly, running for Senate in Indiana. Lastly, Sal Pace, Democratic Congressional candidate for the 3rd District of Colorado was chosen. These candidates were chosen randomly and were selected because they were the first that met the criteria for candidate Facebook page selection.

3.3.4 Screenshots

This research makes use of screenshots during interviews, therefore this section discusses previous research using screenshots and the choice to use them.

Interviewees, both in person and via Skype, were shown screenshots from the Democratic candidates' Facebook pages to elicit feedback about the authenticity of content on said pages. Xenos and Foot (2008) used a similar method in which they gave laptops to focus groups to show participants campaign and nonpartisan websites to gain feedback about aspects from the sites. Screenshots have been used in other electoral communication research as well. They were used, for example, in Roessing and Siebert's (2006) study on the perception of left and right wing extremism in which participants were given hardcopy screenshots of online discussion forums, and were asked to describe how seriously they took the depicted material. In relation to authenticity, a similar method was used to determine the authenticity of the trappist beer brand, La Trappe. Beverland, Lindgreen and Vink (2008) conducted interviews with consumers who were asked to pick three images that they most associated with authenticity from 45 images that pictured the breweries, historical buildings and social situations. In the same study interviewees were asked to comment on the authenticity of the brand based on marketing images and advertisements. Respondents were also presented with 24 beers and were asked to comment on their authenticity to help researchers determine what signaled authenticity and inauthenticity to consumers.

This research follows a similar approach, showing screenshots of electoral social media campaigns to interviewees for comment on the authenticity of what is depicted in the screenshots. For this research, screenshots from individual candidates' Facebook pages were selected based on their depictions of the dimensions of authenticity. Several screenshots of each dimension were chosen to show the interviewees different examples of the same dimension. Screenshots were chosen by the researcher based on how closely they exhibited the dimensions as described and defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010). As discussed earlier, screenshots included information pages, photos, wall posts, dialogue, personal information, notes and an event, all of which were available on the candidates' Facebook pages and which illuminated the dimensions of authenticity. To ensure that all interviewees saw the same content, screenshots were uploaded as photo files to separate URL's. If interviewees were directed to candidates' active Facebook pages instead, which are regularly updated, interviewees might have seen different content which could have an impact on the results, as interviewees would be exposed to different materials. The screenshots showed to interviewees are available in Appendix B.

3.4 Interview Analysis

Each interview was digitally recorded and manually transcribed. The transcripts include only the interviewer and interviewee's dialogue, and do not include non-verbal cues such as smiling, since this research is not interested in non-verbal communication. Although textual material can never fully record everything that happens during an interview (Mischler, 1986; Kvale, 1996; Green, Franquiz and Dixon, 1997; Poland and Peterson, 1998), the transcribed interviews provide all the data for the thesis' analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is “probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents” and it “comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed” (Bryman, 2004, p. 392). In this method, the researcher allows the categories to emerge out of the text, (Bryman, 2004, p. 542), and Cassell and Symon (1994) state that qualitative research is not likely to impose classifications on data and is therefore less driven by hypotheses and specific frameworks, (p. 4), fitting the grounded theory of Creswell *et al.* (2007). Creswell (2007) argues that identifying an approach to qualitative data increases the sophistication of the research design and provides five popular types of research designs: narrative research, case studies, grounded theory, phenomenology, and participatory active research. This research uses a grounded theory as it suggests a general explanation of an interaction (in this case an interaction with electoral candidates' Facebook pages), based on the views of a large number of participants, (Creswell *et al.*, 2007, p. 249). Additionally, this thesis provides revisions to an existing theory and allows categories to emerge without the use of hypotheses, as is suggested by Creswell *et al.* (2007). It is important to note that the research deviates slightly from traditional methods of grounded theory in that it does not suggest a new theoretical model or a hypothesis as Creswell *et al.* (2007) say grounded theory usually does, but it offers deeper insight into existing theory.

Thus, grounded theory was the chosen methodology for analyzing the data from interview transcripts. Mayring (2000b) states that “the object of (qualitative) content analysis can be all sorts of recorded communication (transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes, documents...)” (Mayring, 2000b), which is a suggested method to using grounded theory. After transcription of the interviews, transcripts were analyzed based Mayring's (2000) method of qualitative content analysis, which is based on three steps: summarizing, explication and structuring (Fink, Kölling and Neyer, 2005).

In the first step of analysis, following Mayring's (2000a,b) method, the material was reduced so that the essential content was still preserved and so it reflected the original material, i.e. the text may have been paraphrased or generalized (Kohlbacher, 2006). The second step of explication involved explaining and clarifying the material, in which a "lexicogrammatical definition is attempted" and an "explicatory paraphrase is made of the particular portion of text" (Kohlbacher, 2006). The last step was structuring in which text was structured according to content. Structuring entailed first determining the units of analysis, which in this case was the explicated transcript text. Then definitions were established with key examples and rules for coding in separate categories. If necessary, the categories were re-examined and revised, and finally the results were processed, (Kohlbacher, 2006).

This method ensured that categories were developed inductively step by step from the transcript texts. Inductive content analysis entails reading raw data to "derive concepts, themes or a model" and the purpose of it is to allow findings to "emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structural methodologies" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Data was revised within a feedback loop until it was reduced to seven main categories (Mayring, 2000b), which were characteristics of the text, (Fink, Kölling and Neyer, 2005) and were the central analytical units (Spannagel, Gläser and Schroeder, 2005). Feedback loops ensured conformity of the categories, (Mayring, 2000a,b in: Spannagel, Gläser and Schroeder, 2005). Emergent patterns were chosen based on their recurrence across interview transcripts, their relevance to the theory, or based on their deviance from the theory.

To structure the results, emergent patterns were organized based on their relation to the dimensions of authenticity suggested by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), as they emerged in addressing the questions that focused on those dimensions while allowing new patterns to emerge. For example, questions about candidates' characters and personalities were meant to address identity however three patterns emerged from the results of which two related to and one deviated from the original theory. The exceptional deviant pattern is provided in chapter 4.5, as it does not fit the four dimensions provided by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010). Thus, while the four dimensions of authenticity, (authority, identity, transparency and engagement), were used as the basis for the sub-research questions, and helped determine the semi-structured interview guide, other patterns were allowed to emerge from the results. Since other patterns were allowed to emerge from the results, sub-relationships between the patterns were also allowed to emerge, allowing for deviance from

the initial theory. After the emergent patterns were identified, relevant statements from the interviewees about the emergent patterns were included in the results chapter to help illustrate the patterns which emerged from the interviews. Results of how interviewees perceived each of the emergent patterns and their relevance to or deviance from Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) dimensions are discussed separately and organized by dimension, with results of a deviant pattern at the end of the chapter.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has asked the research and sub-research questions, has provided an overview of the how interviewees, electoral candidates and screenshots were chosen, and has discussed the use of semi-structured interviewing and grounded theory in depth. Following the methodology explained in this chapter, the next chapter discusses the results of the analysis as seven emergent patterns. Each pattern discussed in the analysis, as stated above, is discussed in relation to the initial dimensions of authenticity that laid the theoretical groundwork for this research, with the exception of one deviant pattern.

Chapter 4. Results

This chapter discusses the analysis of the ten individual semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the interviews showed seven emerging patterns from the interviews and the dimensions are discussed in detail below as they relate to the four dimensions of authenticity. The seven emergent patterns are tech savvy-ness, credentials, insincerity, ability to relate to constituents, open communication, social media participation, offline participation, and skepticism. All of these patterns, with the exception of skepticism, emerged in relation to the four original dimensions of authenticity. Tech savvy-ness and credentials arose in relation to authority, insincerity and ability to relate arose in relation to identity, open communication arose in relation to transparency, and social media participation and offline participation arose in relation to engagement. These emergent patterns however, refine the initial four dimensions and redefine them as they relate to electoral social media campaigns, and will be discussed in relation to the initial four dimensions to show how they arose, and how they fit, or disagree with, the theory. Responses from interviewees showed that the dimensions of authenticity are interrelated, as several topics were brought up outside of the question that was meant to address them. An overview of the relationship between the dimensions of authenticity and the emergent patterns is available in Figure 1 (see below).

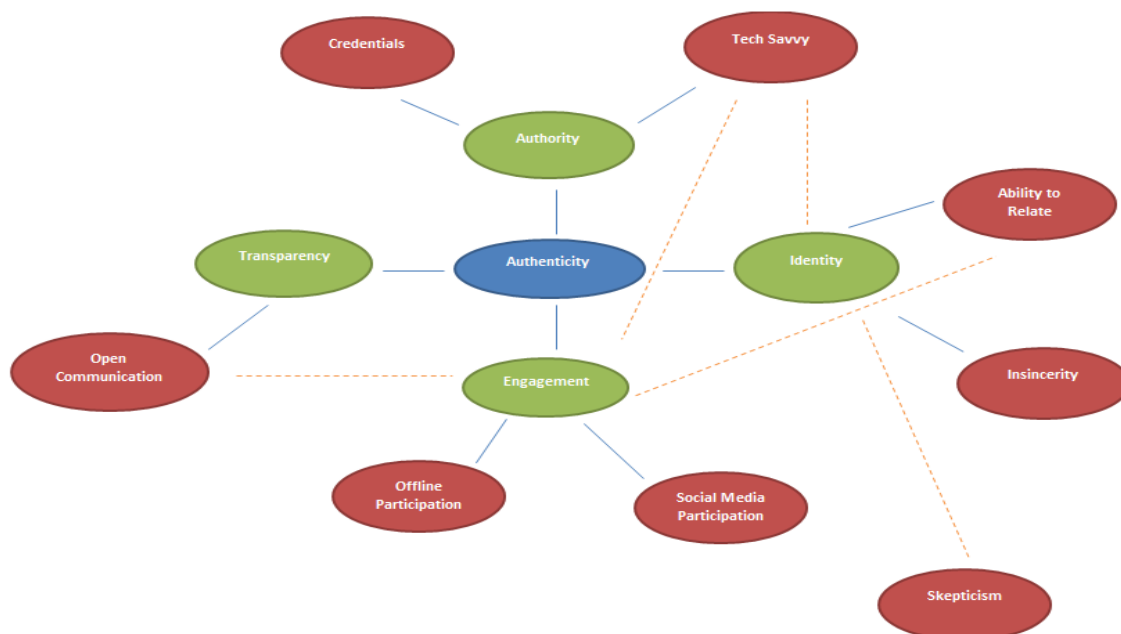


Figure 1. Authenticity and Emergent Patterns. Dimensions of authenticity: green ovals, emergent patterns: red ovals. Blue lines: relationships between authenticity and original dimensions and between dimensions and emergent patterns. Dashed orange lines: interrelationships between patterns

These patterns will be discussed in relation to the four dimensions of authenticity, as defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), authority, identity, transparency and engagement, with the exception of skepticism, which is discussed separately in section 4.5, as it did not fit with any of the previous four dimensions and appeared to be a deviant pattern.

4.1 Authority

Sub-research question #1 asked the question: *how do the features of social media demonstrate a candidate's authority in electoral social media campaigns?* The concept of authority was based on Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) definition, defined as perceived expertise and credibility (p. 262), which was used to help guide the first three questions of the semi-structured interview guide. The two patterns that emerged in relation to authority, and help to redefine it as it relates to authority in electoral social media campaigns, are discussed in the following sections. First, however, a brief description of how these patterns arose in relation to the interview guide is provided.

To determine how voters perceive candidates' authority on Facebook, interviewees were shown a series of three screenshots from the "About" section of three US Democratic candidates' Facebook pages. Two major patterns arose from the interviewees' responses to questions on candidate authority: the first is that the demonstrated level of technological savvy-ness is important to voters' perception of the candidates' expertise, discussed in section 4.1.1, and the second is that voters have a broad definition of what they perceived as an electoral candidate's credentials for office on Facebook, discussed in section 4.1.2. Credentials and qualifications for political office were only brought up during the questions that were specifically meant to target what the determinants are of what voters see as qualified for, or having enough credentials for political office and no interviewees brought up the topic of qualifications in relation to any later interview questions. Tech savvy-ness on the other hand was brought up by respondents when they were questioned about screenshots dealing with two other dimensions of identity and engagement. Although technological savvy-ness came up across the widest variety of topics it doesn't seem that it is more important than any other pattern, since Facebook screenshots were the focus of the interview, and interviewees were told the interview was about politicians and how they use social media.

Figure 2 (see below) provides a diagram showing the emergent patterns that relate to authority, and how these emergent patterns are interrelated to other emergent patterns.

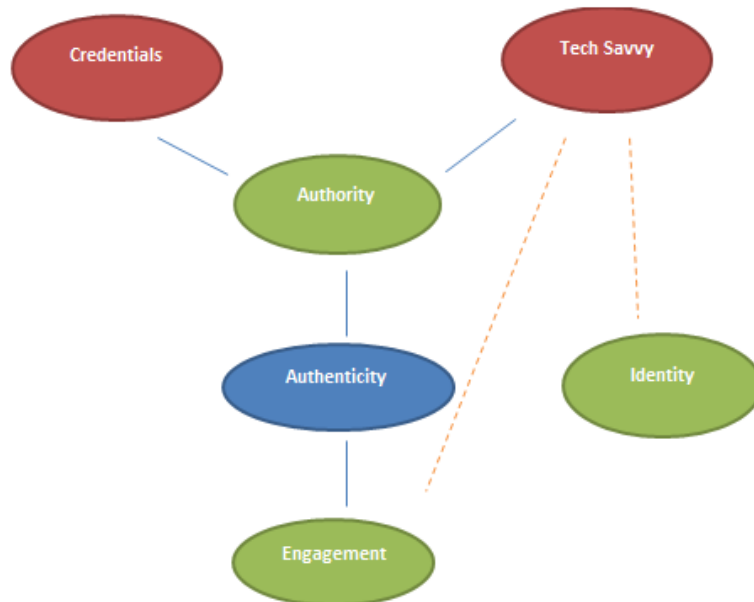


Figure 2. Authority. Dimensions of authenticity: green ovals, emergent patterns: red ovals. Blue lines: relationships between authenticity and original dimensions and between dimensions and emergent patterns. Dashed orange lines: interrelationships between patterns

4.1.1 Tech Savvy-ness

The topic of whether a candidate was tech savvy or not was not included in the semi-structured interview guide, however the topic frequently arose when interviewees brought up a candidate’s understanding or use of Facebook, and was an unanticipated finding. As previously mentioned, the candidates’ understandings and ability to use Facebook for their electoral campaigns was a topic that arose throughout the interviews, and was brought up in relation to several screenshots and questions. That being said, interviewees generally focused on tech savvy-ness in relation to a particular screenshot that appeared in the set focusing on authority, and in which an electoral candidate only listed his campaign’s website in the About section of his Facebook page (Screenshot 3, Appendix B). Interviewees also brought up the idea of how well a candidate understood social media when discussing how a candidate seemed more relatable, an emergent pattern that will be discussed in section 4.2.2, and when discussing the campaigns’ use of Facebook to organize events, relating to an emergent pattern that will be discussed in section 4.4.1. Based on the results, tech savvy-ness is defined as an

electoral candidate's, or electoral campaign's, adoption and understanding of the latest technological and social media trends to communicate with their constituency.

When shown a screenshot in which a candidate had only provided a link to his campaign website as his information, many respondents did not believe that the URL was the only information that the candidate provided on his Facebook page, and asked if the screenshot had been altered. That respondents were in disbelief over the content of the screenshot is telling, in that it demonstrates that voters expect an electoral candidate's Facebook page to provide information, and that providing only a link to a campaign website stood out as an anomaly to the respondents. As one interviewee said,

this guy doesn't know that he needs to fill in this part of his Facebook page...you either need to know it, or if you don't know it... you need to make sure that you have someone in your staff who's going to explain it.

The "About" section of Facebook seems to play an important role in how authoritative, and therefore how authentic, voters perceive an electoral candidate to be. Thus, the "About" section of an electoral candidate's Facebook page can help voters determine how tech savvy an electoral candidate is, and may play an important role as more voters look to Facebook as an information source on electoral candidates.

One respondent also mentioned that it was important for candidates to be tech savvy if they might have the responsibility of voting on a law that deals with the internet. As one interviewee expressed, *"if this guy is going to be dealing with a bill concerning censorship of the internet I want to know that he actually uses the internet and knows how stuff works and has a handle on experience with that."* This quote shows that candidates who are tech savvy might be perceived as being more credentialed for office. In general, respondents said that it is important to be proficient in social media, because they thought that electoral candidates need to have a Facebook page to get noticed, demonstrating the role that Facebook plays in electoral political campaigns, because voters expect to see an electoral candidate on Facebook.

Respondents also perceived understanding how to use Facebook and all of its features to be related with understanding constituents. As interviewee #6 said, *"...this is where my [the candidate's] constituents are going for information or this is where they are spending their social time...it means you are in the know about your constituents."* Understanding

Facebook was also frequently brought up in regard to a screenshot of an electoral candidate's Facebook event. Many respondents said that it's important for candidates to organize events through Facebook because most of their young constituents are on Facebook. In relation to a screenshot which showed communication between a candidate and his constituents on his Facebook wall (Screenshot 7, Appendix B), many respondents said that it didn't matter if the communication was really between the campaign staff and the constituents, as long as someone who was representing the electoral candidate's campaign was monitoring the Facebook page.

That tech savvy-ness was brought up by respondents in relation to questions that dealt with ability to relate to constituents and social media participation through Facebook may show a relationship between perceived authority and perceived identity, and authority and perceived engagement, as depicted in Figure 2 (p. 41). A tech savvy electoral candidate may therefore be perceived by voters as more authoritative, because the candidate is demonstrating not only an understanding of technological trends and might therefore be better informed when it comes to passing law dealing with the internet. A candidate may also be perceived as a more relatable and engaged candidate because voters perceived a tech savvy candidate as a candidate who knows what his or her constituents are interested in, where they are spending their time, and as someone who is willing to engage with constituents through social media. It demonstrates that tech savvy-ness does not solely relate to authority, and that dimensions of authenticity are not be mutually exclusive, but may be interrelated, as voters used information from the entire Facebook page to determine a candidate's authenticity.

Although most respondents said that lack of information on an electoral candidate's Facebook page showed that the candidate did not have a grasp on how to use it, many did say, however, that they would click on the link if they were interested in the candidate. As interviewee #8 said, *"this doesn't tell me anything. If I were looking around and trying to gather information about my candidates on Facebook I would probably click on it, if I just stumbled upon it, probably wouldn't."* This shows that while voters find it important for a candidate to be tech savvy on Facebook, they will look for information in other places if it is not available, and that Facebook, while it is an important source for information about an electoral candidate, is not the only place where voters find information about a candidate online.

Overall, it seems that whether or not an electoral candidate demonstrates tech savvy-ness on Facebook mainly has implications on how voters perceive the candidate's authoritativeness on the subject, but may also have implications for how voters perceive the candidate's ability to relate to and engage with his or her constituents, via the adoption of technological trends that are adopted by the electoral candidate's constituents.

4.1.2 Credentials

As stated earlier, sub-research question #1 sought to determine how a candidate's authority is demonstrated in an electoral social media campaign through the features of Facebook. Results from the questions about candidates' credentials and qualifications for office showed that voters are open to candidates with and without political backgrounds, and provided interesting insight into voters' views on the importance of personal information like marital status and religious views in relation to a candidate's credentials for electoral office. Based on the interview results, voters perceived candidates who provided information about their advanced degrees, political experience, and military service in their Facebook "About" section to be the most credentialed for office. Results showed that electoral credentials can be defined as an educational and professional background that include community service and leadership, as these were the most salient points that arose out of the questions dealing with authority.

Overall, interviewees all stated that listing educational and work experiences on Facebook are important indicators of a candidate's qualifications, but do not determine if someone is qualified for the job. As interviewee #8 said, *"it would be important for the voters to know what their work experience is... what their professions have been does not necessarily make them or count them out for being an ideal candidate, but it's important to know."* Providing information about a candidate's educational and work experience, many respondents explained, can give voters an insight into a candidate's stance on issues, which could help voters predict the candidate's behavior in office. The candidate in the first screenshot (Screenshot 1, Appendix B) had no previous political experience however respondents said that a lack of political experience did not disqualify someone for office. Many respondents, however, listed the candidate from the first screenshot's volunteer work and experience in the community as his qualifications for office, and said that a candidate's volunteer activities and involvement in the community were credentials for electoral office. As interviewee #1 said,

He's highly educated, that would be a credential for office, he's someone that has served his community in both his professional life and in the volunteer sense so he's contributed to public life in that way...those stand out as credentials for office.

In general, information about previous political experience on a candidate's Facebook page was the most relevant for voters because it gave voters an idea of how the candidate would vote on issues, which in turn gave voters a better idea of whether they should vote for him or not. Respondents said that having experience in politics, by previously holding office, can show that the candidate already knows his way around the political system, and shows that someone is electable. As interviewee #7 said, *"He seems very qualified, he's served on a lot of committees, he's been elected to lots of different roles, so he's electable."* Many respondents did add, however, that just listing previous political experience on Facebook doesn't let voters know who the candidate is on a personal level, which they said also comes into play when deciding who to vote for at the ballot box. As interviewee #10 said, *"the qualifications should probably outshine the social life, but I do feel that to show a little bit behind the scenes of who that person is, you get a better feel for the candidate."* One unexpected finding was how frequently respondents mentioned a candidate's military experience as a credential for office. Respondents perceived military service as an extra qualification that may show that the candidate is already familiar with Washington, committed to the country, and has leadership skills. As one interviewee explained, *"...the army is the largest branch of our government, they learn the ropes of working with local government organizations, and when he walks on to DC's campus, I would say he has a leg up with familiarization"* interviewee #8.

As previously stated, respondents were also asked to comment on how a candidate's marital status and religious views related to how they perceived the candidate's qualifications for office, since this information was provided in one screenshot of a candidate's "About" section on his campaign's Facebook page (Screenshot 2, Appendix B). In general, respondents didn't find marriage and religious views important and said that these issues didn't help them determine how qualified the candidate was for office. Respondents did say, however, that they were generally interested in the candidate's marital status and religious views because they said it helped them have a more complete image of the candidate. Some respondents mentioned that it may be important for a candidate to provide information about his/her marital status and religious views, because they can show stability in a candidate and

because political leaders set an example for the rest of the country with the way they lead their lives. As interviewee #8 said,

people who are in political office should carry stable, familial lives...having an example of that kind of family for the rest of the country, because you are on stage constantly...whether you know it or not you're watching their [politicians'] moves and absorbing their life, their morals.

In general, respondents said they wouldn't base their vote on these things unless the candidate's religious views would affect his/her stances on issues and determine how they would perform in office. While many respondents said they wouldn't judge a candidate based on his marital status and religious views, they thought that these issues mattered more to other voters than themselves. As interviewee #4 said, *"Unfortunately I think it is [important], I don't think it should matter, but I know that in the American political climate it definitely does...being a Christian will definitely get you elected more than any other religion."*

As the results show, voters find the information on a candidate's social media campaign, particularly the biographical information about the candidate in the "About" section, to be very important in determining a candidate's credentials and qualifications for political office. While there was no clear consensus on what made a candidate qualified or unqualified for office, all respondents stated that educational and work experience were important to shaping their opinion of a candidate's qualifications. Several interviewees mentioned that previous leadership and political experience were especially important for an electoral candidate to share on Facebook, as this experience showed that the candidate understood and demonstrated their ability to hold a leadership position and understood the political process. An electoral candidate's information about his educational and leadership background on his Facebook page played a major role in how voters perceived his qualifications for office, and showed that authority on an electoral candidate's Facebook page is established in part by listing this information in the About section. Thus, authority can be demonstrated in an electoral social media campaign by providing biographical information about the candidate's educational, professional, and leadership experience in the "About" section of the campaign's Facebook page.

4.2 Identity

Following Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) second dimension of authenticity, identity, which they describe as defined along a continuum in which authentic identities are perceived as reliable and genuine and in which less authentic identities are unreliable or generic (p. 265), sub-question #2 asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate a candidate's identity in electoral social media campaigns?* To determine how voters perceive candidates' identities, interviewees were asked to look at a photo from a candidate's Facebook page, to read information about a candidate from the section of his Facebook page dealing with his interests, favorite music and favorite movies, and to read a screenshot of a candidate's Facebook Note (Screenshots 4-6, Appendix B). Based on these screenshots from electoral candidates' Facebook pages, interviewees were asked about the candidates' personality, sincerity and character. Two major patterns emerged that relate to candidate identity: insincerity and the ability to relate. Although respondents were asked to comment on the candidates' sincerity, nearly all participants brought up the issue of candidate insincerity, which led many to share their skepticism toward politicians. Voter skepticism toward politicians, however, will be discussed in Chapter 4.5.

An overview of the two emerging patterns dealing with identity, insincerity and ability to relate, are discussed below. Figure 3 (see below) shows the two emergent patterns, as well as their relationship with other emergent patterns that arose from the analysis.

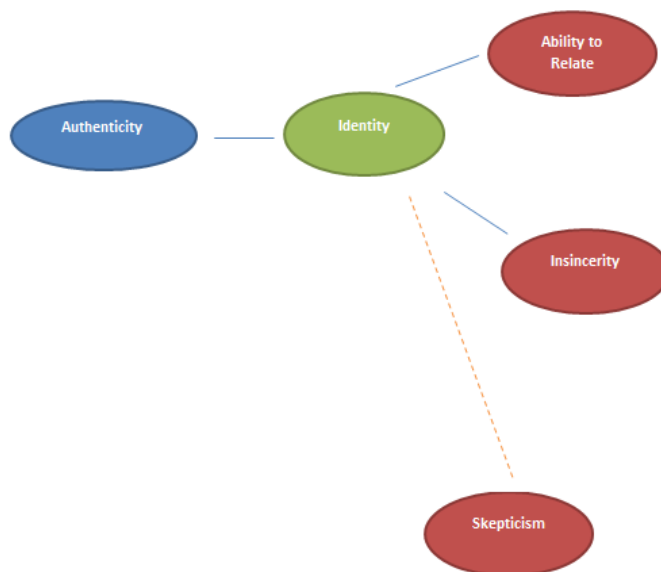


Figure 3. Identity. Dimensions of authenticity: green ovals, emergent patterns: red ovals. Blue lines: relationships between authenticity and original dimensions and between dimensions and emergent patterns. Dashed orange lines: interrelationships between patterns

4.2.1 Insincerity

The candidates' insincerity was one of the topics that frequently arose during the interviews, making it one of the seven emergent patterns. Some respondents brought up the issue of insincerity themselves, while others were asked to comment on how sincere the note seemed to them. Although some respondents felt that the note was sincere, a majority perceived it as insincere, and commented that sincerity was important for them to see in a candidate. Overall, respondents described what they felt was insincere, rather than what they perceived to be sincere. Respondents defined the candidate to be insincere if they perceived the candidate as trying to advertise himself through his good deeds on Facebook, and when motives for community service were difficult to determine – whether the candidate was motivated to volunteer based on his own good will, or if he was motivated by a need to promote the campaign. Based on these responses, insincerity is defined as non-altruistic action motivated by the needs of the candidate to promote his/herself for the campaign on Facebook.

Respondents felt the note was insincere because it seemed to them to be like public relations, a media stunt, and advertising, and as potentially showing that the candidate had a second agenda. In general, the note about the candidate's Thanksgiving volunteer work seemed to respondents like a tool to gain attention and to promote the candidate in a positive light, rather than to simply inform the public about the volunteer work he did on Thanksgiving. The respondents who perceived the candidate as insincere said that they were unsure of the candidate's motives in posting a Facebook Note about his volunteer work. They weren't sure if the volunteer work came from the heart, or if it was a means to bring attention to the candidate, as interviewee #1 said,

I feel like he's touting his graciousness, he's using this holiday opportunity to advertise that he's gonna be giving to his community and so it just reads to me a little, I guess, insincere because I just feel like he's using it to promote himself... I'm glad he's going to do it, but it feels a little bit like a media stunt.

Many respondents also mentioned that although they felt that the note was insincere, they felt that candidates needed to do things like write Facebook Notes and share information

like this on Facebook to promote their volunteer work and to show their active involvement in the community. As interviewee #1 said, *“this is what you’ve gotta do in politics and I’d rather that he’s out there serving turkey to the homeless than not.”* Although the majority of respondents found the Facebook Note to be insincere, there were some exceptions. One respondent said that the Facebook Note did seem sincere because he didn’t use the note as a platform to discuss politics. The respondents who did perceive the Facebook Note as sincere however, said that weren’t sure if the note was true, showing some skepticism toward the candidate. If it was true, however, then they felt that it probably signaled that the candidate was a genuinely caring person.

Although a few respondents identified components that signaled sincerity, i.e. looking legitimately happy in a photo, using Facebook to discuss community issues rather than politics, informality, and support from Facebook fans, these were exceptional cases. When asked if they could say anything about the candidate’s sincerity in screenshot 4 (Appendix B), however, respondents said that they hesitated to judge sincerity solely based on a picture. As interviewee #5 said, *“No one is going to put ugly photos up. I’m not going to read into the eyes or the body language... I wouldn’t judge this picture.”* These responses may demonstrate that voters can more easily define what they perceive to be insincere than they can define what they perceive to be sincere on Facebook.

Sharing information like this on Facebook shows that there is opportunity in a seemingly small space – one paragraph on Facebook – to project insincerity. On the other hand, respondents were asked about another candidate’s, Ami Bera’s, sincerity based on a photo of him with his family, and nearly all respondents said that it was impossible for them to judge his sincerity based on one picture, but mentioned that he appeared to be a family man. Based on this feedback, it seems that voters are more reluctant to make any judgments on a candidate’s sincerity or identity judging by a photo, but most perceived the other candidate, Tom Carper, to be insincere based on a Facebook Note.

While most respondents said that they thought it was good that he volunteered to help the homeless, they suggested that he discuss his volunteer work differently. One respondent described another screenshot that showed a photo of a candidate with two supporters at a volunteer event to have more credibility in relation to the candidate’s sincerity compared to the first candidate, even when not prompted to discuss sincerity. Another respondent mentioned that it seemed more sincere if other supporters were backing a candidate as

opposed to a candidate promoting himself. Another interviewee similarly stated that a photo showing a candidate with his family seemed sincere to her because it showed her that he wouldn't "*plaster on a smile and lie through his teeth, he appears to be someone who cares about his family and is trying to do good things*" interviewee #8. While these responses weren't prevailing, they provide insight into what voters do perceive to be sincere.

The issue of sincerity also arose in respect to a photo of candidate Joe Donnelly at a volunteer activity with two volunteers (Screenshot 8, Appendix B). Although respondents were not asked to comment on this candidate's sincerity, several mentioned that this photo presented a more sincere character than that of Carper, because the candidate appeared with the volunteers in the photo, which one interviewee noted "*speaks for itself*" and said that she was turned-off by Carper's approach to sharing his volunteer work, but found Donnelly's photo appealing. This may demonstrate that Donnelly's photo is perceived by voters to be more altruistic, and therefore more sincere than Carper's Facebook Note.

According to the responses from interviewees, insincerity seems to be a crucial component of a candidate's authentic identity. As previously stated, one respondent mentioned that she preferred a picture of the candidate with other volunteers as opposed to reading about the volunteer work in a Facebook Note. This feedback combined with the feedback that Carper's Facebook note was perceived to be insincere may suggest that voters prefer to see proof of a candidate's involvement on a Facebook page, in the form of a photo for example, rather than read about it in a Facebook Note. Overall, however, most respondents mentioned that while they perceived Carper to be insincere, they also mentioned that they were skeptical of politicians in general, a pattern which will be discussed in section 4.5. The responses show that social media provides a platform for which candidates can influence voter's perceptions, based on the information that is provided on their Facebook pages. Since many voters are skeptical of candidate motivations, candidate sincerity in relation to volunteer and community service may be best left not discussed on a candidate's Facebook page unless there is evidence of the volunteer work, as the Carper note read as insincere to most respondents.

4.2.2 Ability to relate

The next pattern related to identity that emerged from the interviews is how relatable candidates seemed. The ability to relate to a candidate was most often brought up in response to questions that involved screenshots of candidates' About and Interests sections on

Facebook, a candidate's family photo, and in regard to offline participation (a diagram of these relationships is available in Figure 3, p. 47). Rather than asking about how well the constituent could relate to the candidate, these questions asked respondents about the candidate's character, personality, and communication with Facebook fans. Based on the results, the ability to relate can be defined by actions, such as a candidate who shares their informal and personal side with the public on Facebook, including personal interests and hobbies, and may also engage with constituents at informal public events, as depicted on Facebook.

Respondents felt that one candidate, Ami Bera, seemed particularly relatable based on the screenshots that were shown during the interview. The topic of the ability to relate was most frequently brought up when discussing questions that addressed candidate identity. There were several highlights that are worth noting: nearly all respondents noted that Bera seemed to be relatable due to the screenshots of a family photo of his and his interests that were shown in the interview, and nearly all respondents suggested that engaging with constituents in an informal offline event showed that the candidate was trying to relate to his constituents, or seemed more relatable. Respondents said that the informality of the family photo made them perceive the candidate as more down to earth, and as more 'human'. As interviewee #6 said,

It's not a typical political figure with their family because it doesn't look like a posed picture, it looks like an actual family photo which is refreshing, I think I can't help but have a more positive image if I see a picture like that.

Many respondents also mentioned that it was important to see an informal photo of a candidate on Facebook, as well as the candidate's interests because that showed the interviewee that the candidate had a life outside of politics, thus relating back to the perception that the candidate seemed to be more 'human'.

While most respondents said that they could not judge Bera's character or sincerity from the family photo more than just getting the impression that he is a family man who likes the outdoors, they responded that it was important to see informal pictures of candidates and to know about their personal interests. The informality of Bera's family photo, did however, signal to a few respondents that he was a sincere candidate. Those respondents noted that they perceived him as sincere because the photo was not professionally edited or photographed and because the candidate looked happy. Many respondents noted that this

wasn't a typical campaign photo, which they liked. As one interviewee stated in reference to the difference between Bera's family picture and his profile picture in which he is wearing a dress shirt and necktie, "*it's hard for me to understand how someone can do that (relate) if he or she can't be one with the people...the über formal, stoic, unapproachable look does not say the ability to do that*" interviewee #3.

Although the picture of the candidate with his family was generally met with a positive response from the interviewees, the issue of the arrangement of the family in the picture was questioned. In the photo (Screenshot 4, Appendix B), Bera has his arm wrapped around the neck of his wife, and two respondents mentioned that the photo came off as violent at first glance, and was perhaps not the best photo to post on Facebook. As a side note to these findings, while nearly all respondents said that they found the candidate to be more down to earth and human, a few respondents also mentioned that a picture of the candidate with his family could be a tool to get constituents to sympathize with him, again, showing the skepticism expressed by many respondents toward politicians and electoral candidates.

This personal information, interviewees said, helps them get a better understanding of who the candidate is and gives them an idea of how the candidate would behave in office, as was discussed above in reference to credentials and authority in section 4.1.2. Respondents also noted that the personal information that makes candidates seem more 'human' also helps respondents to relate to a candidate, and feel like they have something in common with them, which many respondents said they felt was important for a political candidate. While all respondents said that it was important for them to read information about a candidate's personal interests on Facebook because it shows that a candidate is not "*completely out of touch with reality*" interviewee #9, several also mentioned that the information he listed showed that he was trying to connect with everyone, due to his mention that he is an "observer of the world and a collector of experiences," (available in Screenshot 5, Appendix B). It may be important to emphasize here that respondents said Bera was *trying* to connect with everyone, and did not say that he was successfully connecting with everyone. Two respondents also noted that Bera seemed to be trying too hard and using clichés in this section to "*make themselves [himself] seem cool*" interviewee #1. On the other hand, although many respondents said they perceived Bera as trying to connect with all types of different people, many suggested that he seemed like a 'regular guy,' who they felt was relatable. Therefore, it seemed that while respondents felt that the candidate was relatable, they also recognized that

the candidate and his campaign team might have had that in mind when providing information for the section about his interests on Facebook.

In response to questions that addressed offline participation in a candidate's electoral campaign, several respondents mentioned that they perceived Bera, who posted a picture of himself speaking to a room of constituents at a house party, as a relatable politician. The candidate was also perceived as relating with different demographics, as interviewees noticed the variety of ages and races in the room, indicating to them that the candidate was relatable across a diverse group of constituents. Respondents said that he seemed like a candidate who could relate to everyday people, that he was more 'human' and 'down to earth', and that he was willing to communicate with his constituents, the latter of which will be discussed in chapter 4.3.1 about open communication. Since holding public office means that a politician represents a group of people, respondents said that relating to constituents was very important. Without understanding and relating to their constituents, respondents felt that a candidate could not properly represent them.

Overall, respondents all mentioned that they felt that it was important to see a candidate's personal side on Facebook because it allows the voters to relate to the candidate and get a better picture of who the candidate is.

Chapter 4.3 Transparency

Sub-research question #3 asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate transparency in an electoral social media campaign?* Transparency is one of four dimensions of authenticity as described by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), who describe it as communication that is open to scrutiny (p. 265). Respondents were asked to comment on the electoral candidates' willingness to communicate with their constituents, their relationship with their constituents, as well as their openness to dialogue. The pattern of open communication that emerged from these responses is discussed in detail below, and a diagram of how this emergent pattern related to another emergent pattern, offline communication, is available in Figure 4 (p. 54). The willingness of an electoral candidate to communicate openly with his constituents was also brought up by respondents in relation to a screenshot that showed a candidate at a house party (Screenshot 9, Appendix B), although respondents were not prompted to discuss communication when shown that screenshot.

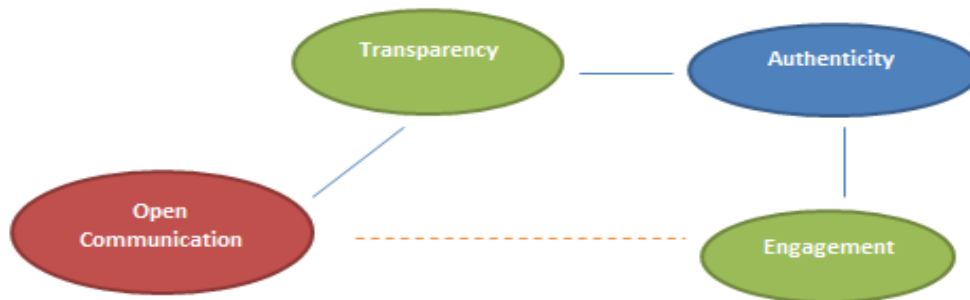


Figure 4. Transparency. Dimensions of authenticity: green ovals, emergent patterns: red ovals. Blue lines: relationships between authenticity and original dimensions and between dimensions and emergent patterns. Dashed orange lines: interrelationships between patterns.

4.3.1 Open Communication

The perceived willingness of an electoral candidate to openly communicate with his constituents was one of the most frequent patterns that emerged from interview responses, and therefore seems to be a crucial determinant of an electoral candidate’s transparency on Facebook. Based on the results, the pattern of open communication is defined by the electoral candidate’s willingness to communicate with their constituents both online and offline, to respond to constituents’ comments in a timely fashion and to allow constituents to openly criticize the candidate on his Facebook campaign page.

Respondents specifically noted that electoral candidates responded to comments that constituents had left on their Facebook Wall or as a comment on a photo. Replying to comments on Facebook was perceived by all respondents to show that the candidate was open to communication. Respondents said that candidates should be responding to their Facebook fans who leave comments on their pages and said it didn’t matter if it was a representative and not the candidate himself who was responding to the comments. Responding to comments made on Facebook showed that the electoral candidates are open to getting in touch with their constituents, and that on Facebook electoral candidates have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their constituents. *“If you’re in office you’re on stage and you have to communicate immensely, you have no excuses anymore...you have the 24/7 task to communicate with the public now that Facebook is there”* interviewee #6.

Interviewees also noted that when a candidate replied to his or her constituents on Facebook, it showed that they were open to having an open relationship with their constituents. In their responses to questions asked about Screenshot 7, most respondents noticed how quickly the candidate responded to a constituent's question. Nearly all respondents commented on the speed with which the electoral candidate's campaign responded to a Facebook user's question (within approximately 20 minutes). As interviewee #10 said, "*...he right away posted about how she could join, it looks like he's pretty fast at responding. If I am trying to support a candidate I want to have my questions answered in a timely fashion.*"

Another aspect that respondents perceived as demonstrating an electoral candidate's open communication was how the candidate dealt with criticism on Facebook (Screenshot 8, Appendix B). Respondents said that not deleting negative comments on an electoral candidate's Facebook page showed that the candidate was open to criticism. As interviewee #10 said, "*He's very open, he didn't delete the post which is nice, and he has full control, so he could have done that. He did well responding to the criticism.*" Respondents said that they thought that the candidate would listen to them if they complained and that it showed that he listens to his constituents. Several respondents compared the interaction in this screenshot to the Facebook Note from Screenshot 6 (Appendix B), in which Carper did not reply to the seemingly negative comment left by a Facebook user. Many interviewees also mentioned that the candidate's response to criticism seemed logical, practical, helpful and polite, while demonstrating that the candidate had served the community's veterans, which the negative comment criticized him for. Although not prompted to make a comparison, several respondents mentioned that Donnelly's response about his services for veterans in response to criticism showed his strengths more than Carper's Facebook Note about his volunteer work, and a few respondents mentioned that Donnelly seemed more credible and sincere than Carper due to the manner in which his community service was brought up. Although all respondents said that addressing criticism on Facebook showed that an electoral candidate was open to communication, many also noted that it took the campaign two days to respond to the criticism. Some respondents perceived the length of response time as a sign that the candidate or his campaign wasn't paying attention to the Facebook page, and mentioned that the response time should have been faster.

Although a screenshot of a photo from a campaign house party was not meant to accompany discussion about the electoral candidate's willingness to communicate, several respondents brought it up themselves. In screenshot 9 (Appendix B), an electoral candidate is

shown speaking to guests at a house party for the campaign. When asked about what type of message a photo like that sent to Facebook users, many respondents mentioned that they perceived the candidate as being open to communication with his constituents. In particular, respondents said “[*this is*] communicating to his Facebook fans that he’s in touch with his constituents,” “*he would probably be willing to talk to me,*” and “*he’s open.*” These responses demonstrate that showing offline communication with potential constituents on Facebook may demonstrate open communication to an online audience, potentially implying a relationship between engagement and transparency. This example again demonstrates that the dimensions of authenticity are not mutually exclusive and that the dimensions can relate to and influence each other, as well as impact how voters perceive the authenticity of electoral candidates.

Based on the results of the interview, an electoral candidate’s open communication is shown to be a determinant of transparency on Facebook. Open communication in an electoral social media campaign can be demonstrated to voters through responding to comments on Facebook, by addressing criticism on Facebook via a public response and not removing the criticism from the campaign’s Facebook page, and by showing that there is offline communication between the electoral candidate and constituents. In addition, voters perceive quick responses to be best, as those who noticed the quick response in Screenshot 7 (Appendix B) said that it spoke favorably of the candidate’s campaign.

4.4 Engagement

Sub-research question #4 asked: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign?* Engagement is the last of Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody’s (2010) four dimensions of authenticity, which they define as interaction between the members of the community and the organization (p. 266), however the organization in this case is considered the electoral candidate’s campaign. The first screenshot that was shown in relation to engagement showed a picture of a candidate speaking at a house party to a room full of constituents, (Screenshot 9, Appendix B), the second screenshot that was shown was a photo of two women participating offline at a candidate’s campaign event (Screenshot 10, Appendix B) and the last screenshot showed a campaign’s Facebook Event page for a gathering of young professionals (Screenshot 11, Appendix B). Two major patterns emerged from the findings, which were social media and offline participation in an electoral candidate’s Facebook campaign. A diagram of these

patterns and how they relate to the other emergent patterns (i.e. credentials, open communication and ability to relate) is available in Figure 4 (p. 54).

4.4.1 Social Media Participation

The perceived social media participation of an electoral candidate’s Facebook fans was shown in these results to be a determinant of the community’s engagement in a campaign. Most of the respondents who felt that social media participation was important to see in a candidate’s Facebook campaign commented on online activity even when the question at hand did not regard social media participation. When unprompted to discuss how important it was to see social media participation in an electoral social media campaign, several respondents brought up their views on social media participation, and mentioned how they perceived a campaign based on online participation. Other than when prompted, discussion about social media participation most commonly came up when respondents were asked to comment on Screenshot 7, which shows a post on a candidate’s Timeline, which includes the number of “likes” and “shares” that the post had, (Appendix B). Based on the feedback from respondents, social media participation in an electoral candidate’s Facebook campaign can be defined as “liking” and “sharing” posts from the candidate’s campaign page.

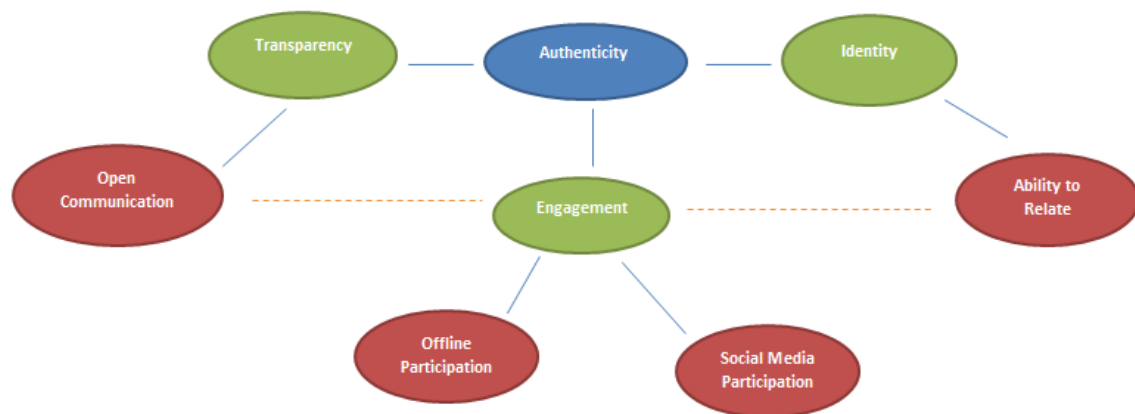


Figure 5. Engagement. Dimensions of authenticity: green ovals, emergent patterns: red ovals. Blue lines: relationships between authenticity and original dimensions and between dimensions and emergent patterns. Dashed orange lines: interrelationships between patterns

While most respondents said that they wanted to see how many people “liked” or “shared” a candidate’s post, all mentioned that these statistics about online participation would not influence their view of the candidate. Instead, many respondents mentioned that

“likes” and “shares” would draw their attention to a candidate, because “likes” and “shares” show that there is something important happening on the Facebook page that is worth paying attention to and mentioned that they showed that similar people to themselves were interested in a candidate. As one respondent said, *“it shows you just how popular a candidate is, and it makes you want to look at what everyone else is talking about and looking at.”* Although many respondents took notice of the “likes” and “shares” on a post that was not expressly chosen by the researcher for questions dealing with engagement, or chosen for the amount of online interaction on it, they said that social media participation did not impact their opinion of the candidate, other than that the candidate might be popular, or that something important might have been happening regarding a candidate.

While a screenshot that was meant to show obvious social media participation, i.e. the number of attendees who said they would attend an event organized through Facebook, it was the number of “likes” and “shares” that a post on the candidate’s Timeline had that sparked the discussion about social media participation. Based on these interviews it seems that social media participation is gauged by how many “likes” or “shares” voters see on Facebook posts. These may be the most relevant to voters because they are the most likely to appear on the News Feeds of Facebook users who are not fans of the candidate on Facebook. Another interviewee said,

there are a lot of reasons why people follow Facebook pages, and it’s not all out of support. That being said, seeing a flurry of activity would be interesting enough to make me interested in seeing what the flurry is about.

Thus, it seems that the social media participation of a campaign’s community is a crucial means of drawing attention to the campaign, as several respondents gave similar responses, and several respondents said that they would be more interested in looking at an electoral candidate’s Facebook page if they saw their Facebook friends sharing posts from the candidate’s page, demonstrating that constituent’s online participation may help electoral candidates to gain exposure to a wider audience. Respondents were shown other screenshots that included comments from Facebook followers, however no respondent mentioned social media participation in relation to the comments that the campaign’s Facebook posts received. As respondents only mentioned “likes” and “shares” on posts as evidence of online participation, these are shown to be two components that determine a community’s engagement in an electoral candidate’s campaign.

While the majority of interviewees responded positively to the social media participation of Facebook fans in screenshot 7 (Appendix B), one respondent mentioned that the level of social media participation from Facebook fans was unimpressive for the size of the constituency that the candidate would like to represent, “18 [likes] out of how many million people, or hundreds of thousands in his constituency? ... it only tells me that there’s a limited amount of active followers” interviewee #5. On the other hand, several other respondents mentioned that 18 likes seemed to be a very high amount of participation in an electoral candidate’s social media campaign, showing that there is no clear consensus on how much participation constitutes enough participation to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign. Overall, however, interview responses showed that social media participation helps draw attention to the campaign, and is a demonstrator of campaign engagement on Facebook.

4.4.2 Offline Participation

In questions that sought to determine how engagement is demonstrated in electoral social media campaigns, offline participation was the second main theme that emerged from the interviews. The engagement of both constituents and of the candidate himself were perceived by the interviewees to demonstrate engagement in the electoral campaign, therefore, this section discusses both the offline participation of constituents in an electoral campaign and the candidate’s offline participation in his own campaign. Based on the results offline participation can be defined as the involvement of constituents and candidates outside of the internet, in which the constituents and candidates are in communication, and is best demonstrated on Facebook by hard evidence, such as photos.

Offline Candidate Participation

Respondents said that offline participation, when shown on an electoral campaign’s Facebook page, showed that there are ways to support the campaign other than via Facebook. Although some participants felt that the photo in Screenshot 9 (Appendix B) of a campaign house party showed that constituents were very active and engaged in the campaign, and perceived it as showing that the candidate was open to communication with his constituents, when asked about offline participation the majority of respondents were skeptical of the photo and said that they didn’t believe that this was an accurate representation of constituent engagement in the entire campaign; the pattern of skepticism will be discussed in section 4.5. While many respondents stated that they could not draw any conclusions about the

constituents' level of participation in the electoral campaign overall, most said that the picture showed that the people in attendance at the house party were active participants in the campaign, because they had to organize the house party themselves and a constituent had to offer his/her house to use to host the party for Bera's electoral campaign, which they also noted showed that there was enough interest in a candidate to organize such an event. As interviewee #5 said, *"if he had said this was the fourth successful house party so I had context or it gave a degree or quantified it then I might be able to make an assessment."* Thus, while respondents perceived the constituents in screenshot 9 (Appendix B) to be generally active, they were unsure if other offline events had been as well attended as that one and therefore could not judge the engagement of constituents in the campaign overall.

Respondents also said that photos of constituents participating offline in an electoral campaign showed the online audience that there are more ways to support a candidate than by only engaging in the candidate's online campaign. Sharing a picture of the house party on the candidate's Facebook page was perceived by respondents to show that there is a lot of support behind the candidate. As one respondent said,

it would be a plus to see pictures of rallies, pictures of any other kind of activity that looks and shows that people are supportive, that there is momentum around the candidate....that they can get critical mass at events...I would like to see pictures that show support for the candidate beyond comments and things that are online.

This feedback echoed the responses of many interviewees who said that showing constituents participating offline in an electoral campaign, (Screenshots 9-10, Appendix B) were important for them to see because they could help induce others to participate offline in the electoral campaign. Additionally, in reference to Screenshot 10 (Appendix B), respondents said that pictures of constituents participating offline in an electoral campaign showed that offline participation could be fun and that they thought it was important that the constituents looked like they were having fun in the pictures. Although it was not an overwhelming consensus, some interviewees also mentioned that they perceived a candidate to be more "capable" after seeing a photo of constituents participating in his campaign offline, because constituents' offline participation demonstrated that they supported the candidate themselves, (Screenshot 10, Appendix B).

The offline participation of both constituents and the candidates themselves also influenced how interviewees perceived the candidates. In response to Screenshot 9, respondents said that the diversity of the crowd present at the house party was a positive because it showed that the electoral candidate may have diverse views himself and showed that the candidate was willing to talk to people from a variety of backgrounds. As interviewee #2 said, *“to see some diversity in the crowd probably shows that the candidate has diverse views too and is willing to talk and listen to everyone which is important.”* The perceived diversity of constituents involved in the campaign also seemed to be a sub-pattern of offline participation. In addition to the perceived diversity of the house party, many respondents also took note that a candidate had included a photo of himself with two African American women (Screenshot 8), although this screenshot had not been chosen by the researcher to address diversity. In general, respondents said that they thought it was important to see a candidate engaging with a diverse crowd on Facebook, because it demonstrated that the candidate was open and had diverse views.

On the other hand, however, respondents also said that the wording of the caption in Screenshot 8 accompanying the photo of the candidate with two African American women was confusing, and several initially interpreted the caption as bragging that the candidate was with African Americans. Upon closer inspection, however, respondents reread the caption and understood that caption was referring to an event held by African American Women in Touch. One interviewee reacted, *“I read it wrong. I thought it said ‘here I am standing with African American women’ ...maybe he should reword that”* and another interviewee said she found it “weird” that he would say that he was with African American women. That several respondents initially mistook the caption for a candidate bragging about his contact with African Americans may demonstrate the skepticism of voters in general, and may also demonstrate that constituents can easily misinterpret information on Facebook. Thus, while respondents generally perceived a candidate as being diverse and open if he was shown participating offline with a diverse group of people, they were also unsure of the candidates’ intentions when showing themselves with a diverse group.

The candidate at the house party was perceived to be more relatable and willing to talk to his constituents than if the photo had been taken at a more formal electoral campaign event. As one interviewee explained

because it's a house party that makes me feel he's more relatable to the everyday, this is someone's house where people gathered, it's not a town hall meeting, it's not at a university...he's reaching out to his constituents instead of being from afar.

Other respondents also mentioned that they perceived the candidate as being willing to communicate with his constituents because he was addressing them in an intimate setting at the house party, and that they felt that a photo of a candidate in an intimate setting suggested that the candidate was both comfortable being around his constituents and that they, as constituents, would be able to engage with the candidate in person as well. These responses show that offline participation can also be related to open communication and the ability of the candidate to relate to his constituents, demonstrating a possible connection between three dimensions of authenticity: engagement, transparency, and identity (as depicted in Figure 5, p. 57). Therefore, if an electoral candidate is shown on his/her Facebook page at intimate offline events, constituents may perceive this candidate not only as an active campaigner, but also as open to communication and relatable. This demonstrates that although interviewees were shown screenshots with written communication between constituents and candidates and information about a candidate from his "Interests" section, transparency and identity can also in part be judged by offline participation. As was discussed in previous sections, these results show that the dimensions of authenticity are not mutually exclusive, and that the dimensions can be interrelated and can support each other.

Offline Constituent Participation

Interviewees were asked to comment on the activity of constituents and the importance of using Facebook to organize electoral campaign events. Overall, respondents said that they thought it was very important for candidates to use Facebook to organize events due to how many users Facebook has. They said that it was especially important for candidates to organize events through Facebook if they were looking to have young constituents in attendance at the event, because so many young people use Facebook. These responses reinforced the pattern of tech savvy-ness, as respondents said that it is an important means of communicating with a large group of people, and of inviting a large group to an event. Nearly all respondents said it was important for them to know who would be attending the event; information that is available on a Facebook event page because that would help them to decide if they were interested in attending the event as well, because they didn't want

to be the only guests at an event alone with a candidate. As one interviewee said, *“it does matter for a lot of people, if they see that there’s a whole big group of people coming, someone would be more inclined to go if they see that everyone else is going”* interviewee #10. Respondents also mentioned that while it was important to see how many people would be attending a campaign event, it was hard for them to gauge constituent activity based only on a Facebook event, because as one interviewee said, *“the candidate will cast a net pretty widely and hope to get as many as he can get”* interviewee #1. Thus, most respondents hesitated to judge constituent activity level based on an event like this, since many constituents who were invited may have geographical barriers to attending the event.

While respondents were reluctant to gauge constituent activity in an electoral campaign based on a Facebook event, many respondents said they were turned off from the event based on how much it cost to attend, although they were not asked to comment on the price of admission, (Screenshot 11, Appendix B). Respondents mentioned that the cost of attendance to the event could have also contributed to the amount of users who RSVP’d on Facebook that they would attend. One interviewee said, *“if you’re having an event and you have to bring a check to the candidate to attend, I guess there wouldn’t be many people in the first place because you have to pay”* interviewee #7. In general, respondents perceived an admission cost to be too great of a barrier to attend an electoral candidate’s event, and said that they probably would not attend a candidate’s event if they had to pay to attend.

Overview of Offline Participation

Offline participation emerged as one of the main patterns of engagement on Facebook, in which both constituent participation and candidate participation were crucial. The perceived offline participation of constituents in an electoral candidate’s Facebook campaign was demonstrated in photos of constituents at events and was not perceived to be demonstrated via the “Events” section of an electoral campaign. Respondents perceived the offline participation of an electoral candidate to also be important in the candidate’s social media campaign. The responses from interviewees suggest that candidates can demonstrate their engagement in the campaign, as well as their transparency and identity via Facebook. Thus, Facebook photos impact the perceived offline constituent involvement and the perceived involvement of electoral candidates demonstrates engagement in an electoral social media campaign.

4.5 Skepticism

Although the research focused on authenticity and the four dimensions as defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), another pattern continually arose in nearly every interview that was not brought up by the interviewer. Voter skepticism was discussed and brought up in most of the interviews, and mostly arose in relation to questions in relation to two of the dimensions of authenticity: authority and identity. While the issue of skepticism arose in response to questions from every section, it emerged the most when respondents were asked to discuss how sincere candidates seemed. An overview of how and when skepticism arose in relation to these dimensions is discussed below.

In questions that were meant to regard authority and from which the issue of candidate credentials arose, many respondents also brought up their mistrust and skepticism of politicians and electoral candidates, and as interviewee #5 said, *“it’s like an oxymoron when you ask for a candidate’s character. We’re kind of attuned to being skeptical of a candidate’s character.”* This issue particularly came up when respondents were asked about how important information about the candidate’s marital status or religious beliefs were in judging a candidate’s credentials on Facebook. Here several respondents said that married candidates gave off the image of leading a stable life, and might signal to constituents that they would not fall victim to scandal when in office. As interviewee #8 said,

with all the scandals that go on, and how much that affects some people’s view of politicians and their ability to do their job, whether they are in a bathroom stall with some young gentleman or sleeping with interns. So to say you are happily married sometimes paints a less threatening picture.

One interviewee said that all politicians appear to be happy with their families until they get caught in a scandal. Based on these responses, it appeared that respondents were mistrustful and skeptical of candidates based on their previous experiences with politicians who have been involved in scandals involving their sex lives.

Skepticism also frequently emerged when respondents were asked to discuss the content in Screenshots 4-7 (Appendix B), all of which dealt with the identity of two electoral candidates. Respondents said that they found it hard to distinguish between genuine politicians and those which try to manipulate voters into supporting them. Overall, while nearly every respondent said that they felt a candidate came across as a “family man”, and a

“human” in a photo of himself with his family that he posted, many respondents said that in spite of their perception of him as a family man, they weren’t sure about his motivations to post the photo on Facebook. As one respondent said, *“I don’t know what his reasoning behind it is, maybe it’s just a nice little picture of his family, but it could also be a tool to get the public to sympathize with him”* interviewee #10. Several interviewees said that they felt that the candidate wanted to *send the message* that he was a family man, demonstrating that interviewees perceived the family photo as a purposeful inclusion on his campaign’s Facebook page to evoke a specific emotion from voters. Thus, despite the seemingly positive image of the candidate as a “family man,” interviewees remained skeptical of his motivations for using such a picture.

Voter skepticism also frequently arose when respondents were asked to read the information in Screenshot 6, which showed a Facebook Note from the candidate written about Thanksgiving, and from which the pattern of insincerity frequently arose, as discussed in chapter 4.2.1. Overall, most respondents said that they were skeptical of the candidate’s motivations and reasons for engaging in community service and said that they weren’t sure if the candidate was engaging in community service because it came from his heart, or if he was doing it as a campaign stunt. Respondents were asked to discuss the candidate’s sincerity and character when discussing the content in this screenshot and many brought up their own skepticism against politicians in general when discussing that they felt the candidate seemed insincere. As interviewee #9 said, *“he incorporates his volunteering work into his PR machine. And then if you think about it, does this Thanksgiving dinner get better or more financed if more people are away of it? That doesn’t seem to be the case.”* Several respondents noted that while they were skeptical of his motivations for community service, they felt that it was an important thing for the candidate to do, even if it was only for his campaign. They noted that while his motivations may have been misplaced in the campaign, that it was still important for a candidate to be active in the community, and to promote his/her activity in the community on Facebook. Many respondents also mentioned that skepticism is a civic duty, as interviewee #5 said, *“I just think it’s our job as citizens to be skeptical.”*

While skepticism was not a dimension of authenticity, nearly all respondents brought it up and it emerged as a pattern that did not fit with the other dimensions of authenticity. Although the other dimensions of authenticity help to define what the crucial factors of authenticity are, skepticism was one of the most common patterns. Overall, respondents were

skeptical of candidate's motives for sharing information on Facebook, and many respondents said that even while they perceived the candidates as having what seemed to be positive attributes they remained skeptical because they weren't sure if they were getting an accurate impression of the candidate, or if they were being manipulated into perceiving the candidate how they wanted to be perceived. Several respondents brought up the previous scandals of politicians in response to questions about the importance of sharing a candidate's family life, demonstrating that the famous scandals of politicians may have been influential in shaping how voters view electoral candidates.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the results that were drawn from the ten individual semi-structured interviews. Seven patterns emerged from the results, of which six: tech savvy-ness, credentials, ability to relate, insincerity, open communication, social media participation and offline participation, were directly related to the original dimensions of authenticity as had been defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010). The seventh emergent pattern, skepticism, deviated from the other patterns and may help explain why constituents desire authentic electoral candidates. These seven emergent patterns can be used to refine and reshape the dimensions of authenticity as they relate to electoral social media campaigns, and show how the many different features of Facebook can be used to demonstrate authenticity. Further discussion of the conclusions to the research questions, theoretical and methodological lessons gained from this research, as well as suggestions for future research based on these results follows in chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter provides a summary of the insights gathered from the research as discussed in the results chapter, answers the research questions, and provides conclusions about the role that authenticity plays in electoral social media campaigns. The chapter begins by reviewing and answering the research questions and discussing the findings in relation to previous research. Next, the chapter discusses considerations for future research, and methodological lessons of this research are discussed. Finally, the scientific and social relevance of these findings is discussed.

5.2 Research Questions and Findings

This thesis began with the main research question: *how does authenticity play a role in electoral social media campaigns?* In order to answer this question, the grounded theory approach to qualitative content analysis was used to analyze text from ten individual semi-structured interviews. The four sub-research questions are answered here first before offering a concluding answer to the main research question.

Authority in electoral social media campaigns

The first sub-research question focused on the authority of electoral candidates in an electoral social media campaign, as it was informed by previous research to be shown by the communication of experienced and expert leaders in Washington (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010, pp. 270-271). It asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate authority in an electoral social media campaign?* Results reveal that authority is perceived to be demonstrated via information about the candidate's credentials and via the candidate's technological savvy-ness on Facebook.

Respondents perceived authority as exhibited in an electoral social media campaign through biographical information about the candidate's professional, educational, and leadership credentials in the About section of a campaign's Facebook page, showing that these experiences demonstrate expertise. Additionally, the research showed that constituents think electoral candidates with political or military experience have more authority than those without political or military experience. Despite these being important determinants of credentials, respondents had no general consensus about what specific experience or

credentials qualify a candidate for office, as many said that having no political experience did not disqualify candidates, showing that there may be no exact formula for what determines a qualified or credentialed electoral candidate. Therefore this research suggests that electoral candidates' authority can be demonstrated on a campaign's social media page by providing information about the candidate's professional, educational, and leadership credentials in the "About" section of the campaign's page.

Unexpectedly, respondents found the tech savvy-ness of electoral candidates to be an indicator of authority, as tech savvy-ness could show that the candidate had expertise in current technological and social media trends, which the candidate could vote on as a politician. This finding supports research that suggested that citizens expect candidates to be at least as active online as the citizens themselves, and that citizens expect candidates to be at least as tech-savvy as themselves (Wagner and Gainous, 2009; Trent and Friedenber, 2007; Chadwick, 2006; Foot and Schneider, 2006). Tech savvy-ness also demonstrated to respondents that the candidate was relatable and understood how to communicate with his constituents -- related to another dimension of authenticity: identity. Electoral candidates' and campaigns' use of social media also exhibited tech savvy-ness to respondents, relating to social media participation, an emergent pattern of engagement. These relationships demonstrate how the emergent patterns could support other dimensions of authenticity, i.e. a candidate with a higher level of tech savvy-ness could be perceived as having more authority, as being more relatable, connecting authority and identity and as participating in social media, connecting authority and engagement (see Figure 2, p. 41). The dimensions of authenticity are shown to be related and it has been shown that multiple dimensions of authenticity can be expressed at once through the features of Facebook. Therefore, understanding Facebook and demonstrating the ability to use it by taking advantage of its features to provide constituents with more information and using it to communicate with constituents is crucial to a candidate's perceived authority.

The emergent pattern of credentials fits Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) dimension of authority, as they state "an actor's perceived authority is based on his or her expertise in the content being discussed and his or her credibility" (p. 262), and respondents perceived candidates' educational, professional and leadership experience as demonstrating their credibility as an electoral candidate. Although an electoral candidate's tech savvy-ness is not directly addressed by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) definition of authority, it fits in with their notion that authority is based on expertise and credibility as respondents

viewed politicians as being more credible for making decisions on laws that would affect the internet if they had a degree of internet expertise, and lends more credibility to the candidate in general because the candidate is perceived by voters to be more competent in communicating with his constituents. That tech savvy-ness can also demonstrate how relatable a candidate is and that he/she participates in social media, shows that the dimensions of authenticity can be related to each other, and are not exclusive. Therefore, the demonstration of a candidate's authority can also have implications for how voters perceive his/her identity and engagement.

Identity in electoral social media campaigns

The second sub-research question focused on the concept of identity. It asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate identity in an electoral social media campaign?* Findings revealed that an electoral candidate's identity was perceived to be an important determinant of authenticity, as two patterns emerged that demonstrated identity: the ability to relate and insincerity. Interestingly, respondents said it was very important to see a 'human' candidate, and they noticed insincerity rather than sincerity in Facebook posts. Overall, the findings showed that candidates can demonstrate their ability to relate to constituents by including information on Facebook about their hobbies and interests outside of politics in the "About" section of their campaign pages, and by showing themselves in an informal setting by posting personal photos of themselves with their families or participating in a non-political activity in their free time.

Based on the responses about the importance of the ability to relate, it can be defined as the 'human' side of a politician or electoral candidate, which allows constituents to see a candidate outside of the political realm, to whatever extent that is possible. Respondents generally said that they could better assess how the candidate would perform in office by getting an overall picture of the candidate's persona on Facebook, supporting research by Loudon and McCauliff (2004) that showed that voters assess a candidate's future performance on their character. On the other hand, respondents viewed a candidate as insincere when he discussed his recent volunteer opportunities by promoting the community service he had performed. In general, electoral candidates who were only seen in formal settings and used Facebook to promote their volunteer work with no evidence of them volunteering were perceived to be more insincere than other candidates. While respondents

picked out what they found was insincere, there are no conclusions about what voters perceive to be sincere.

For an electoral candidate to demonstrate his/her authentic identity to constituents, it is important for them to share personal information about themselves on Facebook, via photos and Timeline posts, that give constituents insight into the candidate's everyday interests and hobbies. Sharing this type of information can set the candidate apart from politicians and show a relatable side that constituents can connect to and perhaps sympathize with if the candidate demonstrates an identity beyond that of a politician. Posting formal pictures on Facebook and using Facebook to exclusively share campaign information, however, demonstrates insincerity and perceived candidate insincerity was found to be related to skepticism. The perceived insincerity of political candidates on Facebook may result in part from the skepticism of constituents against politicians and political candidates in general, and may not stem solely from the content that is provided on electoral social media campaigns.

Authentic identities were said to be perceived as reliable and genuine, and inauthentic as unreliable or generic (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010, p. 265), however based on these results, authentic identities might be better defined along a continuum of sincere to insincere. Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), describe an inauthentic identity as one that is generic, (p. 265), however they do not include how relatable an identity is perceived to be in their definition. The concept of how relatable a candidate seems to be deviates from their suggestions, since respondents perceived how relatable a candidate was as the most important component in determining identity. Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010) argue that identity is crucial to demonstrating authenticity and that it is determined by voice and dialogue, which was unsupported in these findings. Instead, respondents found the candidate's ability to relate to constituents and insincerity to be the biggest determinants of identity.

The importance of sincerity has been studied by Benoit and McHale (2004) who found that voters perceive sincerity to be the most important quality in candidates, but found that sincerity is not frequently addressed by candidates in campaign messages. This may demonstrate that because sincerity is not frequently addressed in electoral campaigns, voters may only be able to determine what they perceive as insincere rather than sincere. In research on the political discourse of authenticity, Liebes (2009) suggests that there is a "discrepancy between what it takes to be elected, and what it takes to do your job once you are there" and

argues that demand for politicians to be popular has led sincerity to be important in elections and important while the candidate is in office (p. 510). Therefore, the previous research suggests that sincerity is so important to voters that it must be maintained, perhaps putting so much pressure on sincerity that attempts to demonstrate it seem insincere to voters.

Transparency in electoral social media campaigns

The third sub-research question focused on transparency. It asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate transparency in an electoral social media campaign?* Results revealed that open communication between the electoral candidate and constituents was perceived to demonstrate transparency. Respondents perceived open communication to be demonstrated via communication between the candidate and constituents on the campaign's Facebook page, especially when the candidate quickly responded to a constituent's comment. Open communication was also demonstrated by a candidate who allowed a negative comment to be posted on his Facebook page and a who addressed the negative commenter with advice on how to learn more about the candidate's campaign and public services.

Unexpectedly, offline participation was also perceived by interviewees to demonstrate open communication, as candidates who were seen with their constituents offline were perceived to be more willing to talk to their constituents and listen to them (see Figure 4, p. 54) Respondents perceived a photo of an electoral candidate at a house party to demonstrate open communication because he was pictured addressing constituents in an informal environment, i.e. at an intimate event that seemed to be organized by constituents, rather than a public event like a speech at a university or in a town hall. That offline participation, one of the patterns related to engagement, was perceived to be related to transparency shows a relationship between the two. Facebook posts that exhibit transparency can thus also be used to exhibit engagement, showing how the features of social media can be used to demonstrate more than one dimension of authenticity at a time. The results show that transparency can be determined by offline communication between the electoral candidate and his/her constituents and that the dimensions of transparency and engagement are interrelated.

Therefore, electoral candidates can demonstrate their transparency by openly communicating with their constituents, i.e. responding to constituents' comments on their Facebook pages in a timely fashion and allowing constituents to post negative or critical

comments, and by sharing posts such as photos that show the candidate communicating with constituents in an informal offline environment. The Facebook Timeline, and constituent comments on the Timeline and on the posts from the electoral candidate and other constituents are key features in demonstrating transparency.

Open communication is closely related to the definition as provided by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), who wrote that it refers to the “effort to reveal the inner workings of an organization, and providing information that constituents can subject to rational scrutiny” (p. 273). Open communication allows constituents to criticize electoral candidates and shows an effort by the candidate to show his constituents what services he provides for those he represents, supporting research that showed that there is a demand for person-to-person interactions (Henderson and Bowley, 2010) and that organizations are pressured to provide more transparency and openness (Moleda, 2010), both of which are possible on social media. All respondents said that responding to other Facebook users showed that the candidates were open to communication, and that criticism should be addressed. These findings contradict Sisco (n.d.) who found that dialogic communication in social media did not influence the public’s perception of transparency, however support Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody’s (2010) definition of transparency and provide insight into how electoral candidates can demonstrate their transparency in their Facebook campaigns.

Engagement in electoral social media campaigns

The fourth sub-research question focused on engagement in electoral social media campaigns. It asked the question: *how are the features of social media used to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign?* Findings revealed that social media and offline participation of both constituents and the electoral candidate were perceived to demonstrate engagement in an electoral social media campaign. Electoral candidates can demonstrate offline participation by posting photos or videos of themselves at offline campaign events to their campaign’s Facebook page. Candidates’ offline participation also influences their perceived transparency and identity: candidates who were seen engaging with constituents in an informal environment were perceived to be more relatable (identity) and more open to communication with constituents (transparency), (see Figure 5, p. 57). This relationship to these two other dimensions of authenticity demonstrates the complexity of the interrelationships between the dimensions, shows how thoroughly authenticity can be

expressed through only one feature of social media, and that the dimensions are interrelated and support each other.

The social media participation of constituents was demonstrated via the amount of “likes” and “shares” posts on the campaign page had, however there was no consensus about how many “likes” or “shares” were necessary to show significant constituent participation. This differs from open communication, as respondents regarded comments or messages between constituents and electoral candidates as open communication, and regarded “likes” and “shares” as social media participation. Interestingly, social media participation was perceived by constituents to only be a reflection of constituent engagement in the campaign, while offline participation reflected both the constituents’ and the electoral candidates’ engagement. These results suggest that constituents perceive the social media and offline participation of other constituents to signal that there is something of interest happening in the campaign, and may encourage other voters to become interested in the campaign, or to participate themselves. It should be noted, however, that the social media participation of constituents is user determined and is dependent on how actively constituents interact with the campaign’s Facebook page, so candidates themselves can only demonstrate constituents’ social media participation by allowing constituent activity on their Facebook page to be public.

Overall, respondents perceived offline constituent participation in an electoral campaign to be more telling of their engagement than social media participation, as several noted that it required much more effort to participate offline compared to participating online. Although online constituent participation is important for voters to see on an electoral campaign’s Facebook page, offline participation is more important and shows more commitment and interest in a political campaign because it takes more time and effort from constituents than clicking “like” or “share” on a Facebook page does. Voters are thus more likely to take constituent engagement seriously if they see evidence of offline participation. These results show that while constituent activity on social media has become an integral part of political campaigns, it has not replaced offline participation and that offline participation is a better indicator of overall interest in an electoral candidate. Therefore, Facebook can be an important platform for electoral campaigns to both allow for online participation, and to show hard evidence, i.e. photos or videos, of constituents and electoral candidates participating offline, demonstrating two possible means of engagement in the campaign.

These results supported Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody's (2010) definition of engagement, as they stated that engagement was determined by interaction between members of the online community and the organization, or in this case, the campaign, as online participation was perceived by respondents to be determined by the social media and offline interaction constituents had in an electoral candidate's campaign. The pattern of offline participation also supported this argument since the offline participation of candidates was perceived by respondents to signify a greater ability to relate to constituents, (identity), and a greater willingness to communicate with constituents (transparency). The authors, however, did not distinguish between social media and offline participation in their definition, and these results show that both are integral components of how constituents perceive engagement in an electoral social media campaign. The social media participation of constituents adds specifics to the concept of engagement, and suggests that there are several means of engaging in an electoral social media campaign.

Authenticity in electoral political campaigns

These sub-questions have helped inform the answer to the main research question: *how does authenticity play a role in electoral social media campaigns?* Overall, the results revealed that authenticity plays a role in shaping voters' perception of electoral candidates. Electoral candidates can help shape how their constituents or possible constituents perceive them via the content that they post to their Facebook campaign pages. All the features of Facebook that were shown in the screenshots, including both content from the candidates' campaigns and from the constituents themselves, were relevant in shaping the respondents' view of the candidate, demonstrating that all of Facebook's features can be utilized to demonstrate the candidate's authenticity. This reinforces that authenticity is determined by many factors and is a reflection of the electoral candidate overall rather than determined by one characteristic of the candidate or the campaign's Facebook page.

The emergent patterns supported and reinforced the dimensions of authenticity that provided the theoretical basis for this research, showing that there are several ways in which authenticity is demonstrated in an electoral social media campaign and that each of the emergent patterns is a determinant of an electoral candidate's perceived authenticity. Results also showed that the dimensions of authenticity may influence each other, therefore the dimensions of authenticity are not mutually exclusive, but support each other in demonstrating the authenticity of a candidate overall, (see Figure 1, p. 39). Although the

relationship between patterns is complex, it shows that posts to Facebook campaign pages can demonstrate more than one dimension of authenticity at a time.

Authenticity is crucially important to electoral candidates as six out of seven emergent patterns related to the original four dimensions of authenticity. The area of inquiry in this thesis was how authenticity plays a role in electoral social media campaigns, and how authenticity is demonstrated on social media, in regard to four dimensions of authenticity, as previously defined by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010). Thus, the perceived authenticity of an electoral candidate plays a role in electoral social media campaigns as it helps voters in shaping their opinion of the candidate and in helping to shape their decision to or not to support an electoral candidate. While the results revealed that authenticity is crucial in shaping voters' perceptions of an electoral candidate, the results also showed that most respondents were skeptical toward political candidates. Voters' skepticism toward candidates is discussed in the following section, which provides insight into how future research might be informed by these findings and further investigate the subject.

5.3 Considerations for Future Research

Voter skepticism emerged as a deviant pattern from the results and it deviated from the four dimensions of authenticity that were used as the basis for this research. While this research focused on the role that authenticity plays in electoral social media campaigns, skepticism emerged as a pattern as nearly every interviewee brought up their skepticism of electoral candidates without being prompted to do so. These responses supported previous research by Loudon and McCauliff (2004) who stated that "politicians as a class are presumed to be self-serving and are granted only provisional trust" (p. 92). Previous research on political identity showed that citizens looked for genuine and authentic politicians in response to political scandal (Parry-Giles, 2001) therefore it may not be surprising that respondents overwhelmingly discussed their political skepticism. As political skepticism emerged from the results as a deviant pattern, it shows that this topic is worth further investigation in relation to authenticity. It has been suggested that political scandals have created voters' desire for authentic candidates, (Parry-Giles, 2001), showing that there may be a relationship between voter skepticism and their resulting desire for candidates whom they perceive to be more authentic.

Electoral candidates were presumed to be potentially manipulative, untrustworthy, and selfish, as described by respondents who regarded some candidate communication on their Facebook campaign pages to be a tool to lure in voters. Voters' perceptions of electoral candidates overall do seem to have been influenced by the most recent and famous political scandals like those involving John Edwards and Larry Craig, as these scandals were mentioned by respondents. Several mentioned that electoral candidates may try to project a stable family life to express to voters that their time in office would not be hindered or distracted by scandal and also mentioned that electoral candidates were purposely trying to show their potential constituents that they were family men. Voters are skeptical of candidates because of scandal and perceive electoral candidates actively trying to project the image of familial stability. This finding supports previous research that has shown that "politicians are assumed to be dishonest schemers who present a false image to the public in order to advance their quest for power" (Jamieson and Waldman, 2003, p. 30), underlying the findings of voter skepticism toward electoral candidates. This might imply that voters may think electoral candidates compensate for other politicians' scandals by trying to appear to be a stable candidate. Interestingly, several respondents also said they were skeptical of politicians in general and that they felt it was their job as citizens to question and be skeptical of politicians, which might imply that skepticism is a result of civic duty rather than a result of political scandal, a research topic that could be explored further. Furthermore, Geissel (2008) suggested that the idea that political criticism is a civic duty has been scientifically neglected and suggests that it might be crucial for the development of democracy.

Based on the feedback from respondents, future research might focus on voter skepticism in relation to authenticity. More specifically, future studies could dig deeper into this issue by researching whether voters are less skeptical of electoral candidates and politicians that they perceive to be more authentic, building off of Pels' (2003) argument that a politician's perceived authenticity helps build trust between citizens and the politician. This could provide insight into the role that the perceived authenticity of electoral candidates plays in determining voter skepticism. The pattern of skepticism suggests new topics for consideration, such as the following questions: does voter skepticism interfere with their perception of candidate authenticity? Are voters skeptical of a candidate's authentic self? Do voters perceive a candidate's authentic self as a campaign tool?

Additionally, interview results show that the dimensions of authenticity proposed by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), authority, identity, transparency and engagement, are

generally applicable to electoral social media campaigns, however, as the emergent patterns show, they are not specific enough, since the interviews gave insight into how, specifically each dimension is or is not demonstrated on Facebook. These findings propose revised dimensions of authenticity: authority should be defined as determined by an electoral candidate's tech savvy-ness and credentials; identity should be defined as determined by the candidate's ability to relate and level of sincerity, ranging from sincere to insincere; transparency should be defined as determined by how open the candidate is to communication with constituents, and engagement should be defined as determined by social media participation and offline participation. Additionally, skepticism should be added to the theory as a dimension that emerges out of constituents' uncertainty of the candidate's motives for sharing certain information. These revised dimensions contribute to the field of internet politics by providing insight into how voters perceive authenticity in electoral social media campaigns. This research has provided definitions of the emergent patterns, however it is recognized that these definitions may be limited and are worthy of deeper investigation. To further build upon these findings, future research should investigate the revised dimensions of authenticity, focusing specifically on the seven emergent patterns to provide more thorough definitions, and to allow for sub-patterns to emerge from the patterns identified by this research.

5.4 Methodological Lessons

Methodologically speaking, semi-structured individual interviews allowed the researcher to get a thorough look at interviewees' perceptions about the dimensions of authenticity. Future research might also use surveys as well as semi-structured interviews to gather data. Interviewees may have felt less hasty in sharing their opinions during the interviews, and had the opportunity to give vague answers or to change their minds, which many respondents did. Due to the synchronicity of these interviews, the interviewer had to concentrate on both the questions to be asked and the answers which were given, leading to what Wengraf (2001) calls "double attention" (p. 194). Surveys might help to temper this issue by providing a Likert scale in which respondents would choose how much they agree or disagree with a statement, giving only one answer, which provides less ambiguous answers and the opportunity for respondents to make specific choices (Bernard, 2000, p. 243). Using surveys would help to ensure that the results aren't misinterpreted and that the opinion that is closest to that of the respondent's is recorded, rather than the verbal voicing of the internal debate that many respondents gave during the interviews.

Screenshots from four electoral candidates' Facebook campaign pages were used to gather the opinions and perceptions of respondents on the four dimensions of authenticity. Although some screenshots remained anonymous, several respondents noted that they saw the same electoral candidate recurring in photos. This might have biased the interviewees, as their opinions and perceptions from the previous screenshot of the candidate may have influenced their answer to the following question if they recognized the candidate. That being said, future research on authenticity in electoral social media campaigns might focus on several campaigns as a whole, i.e. to show respondents each campaign's entire Facebook page, which could provide deeper insight into how the different demonstrators of authenticity relate to each other and impact a voter's perception of the candidate as a whole.

5.5 Scientific Relevance

This research has explored how authenticity is demonstrated in electoral social media campaigns. While previous research focused on how authenticity is constructed in online public affairs communication and provided four dimensions of authenticity (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010), this research focused on electoral politics and how authenticity is demonstrated in an electoral social media campaign, as perceived by voters, revealing that the dimensions of authenticity must be revised to adapt to electoral campaigns.

Further than building on research by Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody (2010), these findings help build upon Louden and McCauliff (2004) who suggested that authenticity in relation to electoral politics is vaguely defined, and the suggestion that authenticity is associated with presenting a genuine self (Kreber *et al.*, 2007) by providing a specific definition of how authenticity can be demonstrated in electoral social media campaigns. Henderson and Bowley's (2010) previous research is expanded upon by specifically showing how constituents determine authenticity. The findings also build upon research by Corner and Pels (2003) who argued that constituents scrutinize politicians for an authentic identity, by showing that constituents scrutinize a candidate's identity for their ability to relate and level of insincerity. In addition to Lilleker and Malagón's (2010) notion that interaction between voters and candidates helps reinvigorate democracy and build a public sphere, these findings suggest that interaction between voters and candidates also adds the aspect of authentic transparency. Theoretically, a new definition of authenticity has emerged that can be used to determine authenticity in electoral social media campaigns. Constituents are more

likely to perceive electoral candidates as authentic if they have their credentials available on their campaign's Facebook page, if they demonstrate technological savvy-ness, if they seem relatable, if they don't seem insincere, if they are open to communication, if others are participating in their campaign on social media and offline, and if the candidate his/herself is participating in the campaign offline.

Skepticism supports Fisher's (1989: in Louden and McCauliff, 2004) argument that determining a person's motive is crucial to trust, as voters who were unsure of candidates' motives showed skepticism in the candidate.

5.6 Social Relevance

As stated in the introduction, this research has social relevance since the issue of authenticity is a popular buzz word in reference to electoral campaigns (Silverman, 2010; Fournier, 2011; Reynolds, 2011; Rosenbloom, 2011). Social media, namely Facebook, has become an important part of electoral campaigns, as nearly every electoral candidate now uses Facebook as a campaign tool. While several non-academic articles had already suggested that candidates be authentic on their Facebook pages, there was no clear evidence about what determined candidate authenticity in an electoral social media campaign. This research has showed that there are several facets which play a role in determining whether or not an electoral candidate is perceived by voters to be authentic in a social media campaign. Generally speaking, electoral candidates can follow the following suggestions to demonstrate their authenticity in a social media campaign. Electoral candidates/campaigns should:

- fully fill out the informational sections of their Facebook pages and provide biographical information with educational, professional, military and leadership experience
- stay up to date on technological trends and use all the features of technological trends
- show their informal (non-political) side by sharing information about their hobbies and interests in the About section of their Facebook page, and by posting photos of themselves in informal settings
- avoid insincerity by showing evidence of volunteer efforts via photos or videos

- allow constituents to post comments, including criticism, on the campaign pages, and address comments and criticism in a timely fashion and allow constituents to participate in social media by enabling comments
- interact with constituents in an informal environment, and provide evidence of these interactions, i.e. photos or videos, on Facebook

This research is especially relevant for elections like the upcoming US presidential election in November 2012, in which candidates will need to sway voters to vote for them and in electoral campaigns around the world as social media becomes adopted into electoral campaigns outside of the US, as was exhibited by the 2012 French Presidential election (Antheaume, 2012). The emergent pattern of skepticism shows that voters tend to be skeptical of electoral candidates and politicians in general, providing more evidence for the importance of the role that authenticity plays in campaigns. Despite Facebook being the medium of delivering the message of authenticity, results from this research revealed that offline efforts (which are documented on Facebook), depict more authenticity than just social media content alone, showing that offline participation is still important in electoral campaigns. Insight into what demonstrates authenticity in an electoral social media campaign is relevant for campaign managers to create the most authentic electoral campaign profile possible for their candidate. Although political beliefs and stances remain important factors in voters' choices, the projected authenticity of electoral candidates also seems to play a crucial role in determining how voters perceive the candidates.

Appendix A. Semi-structured Interview Guide

Topic 1: Introduction/Background information of the interviewee

Introduction: I'm Gabrielle Grow, and I'm a Master's student at Erasmus University Rotterdam. The purpose of my research is to gain insight into the role that social media plays in electoral political campaigns. Before we begin, is it okay with you if I digitally record this interview? Do you have any other questions before we start?

Topic 2: Authority in political social media campaigns

Introduction: First I would like to show you some screenshots from Democratic candidates' social media campaigns on Facebook and ask you about their qualifications for office. I am showing screenshots to ensure that all participants see the same content, since Facebook pages get updated so frequently.

This first screenshot shows some information about the candidate from his Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to read the information about the candidate and let me know when you are ready for to begin.

How would you describe this candidate's credentials for office? (Screenshot 1)

- What does the candidate's work experience tell you about his qualifications?
- How important is it for a candidate to list their education on their Facebook page?
- How important is it for a candidate to list their work experience on their Facebook page?

This next screenshot shows some information about another candidate from the candidate's Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to read the information about the candidate and let me know when you are ready to continue.

How would you describe this candidate's qualifications for office? (Screenshot 2)

- How important is for a candidate to list their previous experience in political office?
- What can you tell me about the candidate's personal life (his religious views and his marital status) in relation to his qualifications for office?

This next screenshot shows some information about the candidate from the candidate's Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to read the information and let me know when you are ready to continue.

What can you tell me about this candidate's qualifications for office? (Screenshot 3)

- *(If it hasn't already been brought up with the previous candidates)* How important is it for a candidate to list their qualifications for office on their Facebook page?

Topic 3: Identity in political social media campaigns

Introduction: Now I would like to show you some other screenshots from Democratic candidates' social media campaigns and ask you about them.

This first screenshot shows a picture of a candidate with his wife and daughter. I'll give you a minute or two to look at it and let me know when you are ready to continue.

What can you tell me about this candidate's character? (Screenshot 4)

- *(If it hasn't already been brought up by the interviewee)* What can you tell me about this candidate's sincerity?

This next screenshot shows some information about a candidate's interests. I'll give you a minute or two to read the information and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on the information you just read, what can you tell me about what kind of person this candidate is? (Screenshot 5)

- How important is it for a candidate to list their interests on their Facebook page?

This next screenshot shows a note a candidate has posted on his Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to read it and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on what you just read, what can you tell me about this candidate's character? (Screenshot 6)

- *(If it hasn't been fully addressed yet)* What do personal notes like these tell you about the candidate's personality?

Topic 4: Transparency in political social media campaigns

Introduction: Now I would like to show you some screenshots from Democratic candidates' Facebook pages and ask you what you think about the candidates' interaction with their Facebook followers.

This screenshot shows a post a candidate made to his Facebook wall. I'll give you a minute or two to read it and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on what you have read in this candidate's Facebook post, what can you tell me about communication between the candidate and his Facebook fans? (Screenshot 7)

- How would you describe the candidate's willingness to have a dialogue with his Facebook fans?
- What can you tell me about the relationship between the candidate and his Facebook fans?

This next screenshot shows a picture of a candidate with some comments next to the picture. I'll give you a minute or two to look at the picture and read the comments, and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on what you have read and seen in this screenshot, what can you tell me about communication between the candidate and his Facebook fans? (Screenshot 8)

- How open is the candidate to criticism?
- How would you describe the interaction between the candidate and his Facebook fans?

Topic 5: Engagement in political social media campaigns

Introduction: Now I would like to show you some screenshots from Democratic candidates' Facebook pages and ask you to comment on the content.

This screenshot shows a photo a candidate posted to his Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to look at the picture and read the text and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on this photo and text, what can you tell me about how active this candidate's constituents are? (Screenshot 9)

- Can you tell me about what kind of message a picture like this sends to the candidate's Facebook fans?

This screenshot shows a photo a candidate posted on his Facebook page. I'll give you a minute or two to look at the picture and the content to the right, and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on this photo what can you tell me about the political activity of the candidates' constituents? (Screenshot 10)

- How important is it to show people participating offline on a candidate's Facebook page?
- How important do you think online participation is to a candidate's Facebook campaign?

This screenshot shows a past event a candidate was organizing through Facebook. I'll give you a minute or two to look at the screenshot and read the text, and let me know when you are ready to continue.

Based on the content of this screenshot, what can you tell me about the candidate's Facebook fans' political activity? (Screenshot 11)

- How important is it for other Facebook fans to see how many guests will be attending the event?
- How important is it for a candidate to organize events through Facebook?

Topic 6: Closure of the interview

Is there anything else you would like to discuss that hasn't been brought up today? Do you have any suggestions for me? Would I be able to contact you if I have any follow up questions?

Do you know any other Democrats who might be interested in doing this interview?

I will send you the transcript of this interview once I am done transcribing.

The interview is now over. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and provide me with valuable information for my research project.

Appendix B. Screenshots

Interviewees were shown these screenshots either in person on individual print outs, one at a time, accompanying each interview question, or were sent these screenshots in individual URL's, one by one as they accompanied each interview question.

Screenshot 1. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the first interview question: *how would you describe this candidate's credentials for office?*

<https://www.facebook.com/BeraForCongress/info>

About

To support, volunteer, and donate please visit www.beraforcongress.com.

About Me

In my life I've been fortunate to serve in many different roles: medical physician and clinical professor of medicine; community volunteer and board member; husband, father, brother, and friend. In 2012, it's my hope to serve as a member of Congress for District 7 in California.

Like many of you, I grew up in a strong community, built on local schools, youth sports and neighbors watching out for neighbors. In these challenging times, we need to return to our sense of community, conversation, and responsibility to each other - truly, that's why you're finding me here on Facebook. I want to connect with you, hear your concerns, and discuss how we can make our district, state and nation a better place to live, to build our families and communities, and shape a more whole and prosperous future.

To learn more about me and how you can be part of my campaign for Congress, please visit www.beraforcongress.com.

Favorite Quotations

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is." -Albert Einstein

"Let him who hath no sin cast the first stone." -Jesus Christ

Basic Info

Hometown Elk Grove, CA

Birthday March 2, 1965

Country United States

Currently Running For Office: Congress
State: CA
District: 7
Party: Democrat

Relationship Status Married to Janine Bera

Gender Male

Contact Info

Screenshot 2. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *how would you describe this candidate's qualifications for office?*

<https://www.facebook.com/tomcarper/info>

Location	513 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510
Hometown	Wilmington, DE
Birthday	January 23, 1947
Country	United States
Current Office	Office: United States Senate State: Delaware Party: Democratic
About	This page is for respectful conversation about issues facing our state and nation. When commenting, please treat each other with respect, as that is the Delaware Way.
Biography	Serving Delaware since 1976.
Relationship Status	Married to Martha Carper
Religious Views	Presbyterian
About Me	<p>Tom Carper began his Senate career in 2001 as Delaware's junior senator, and was re-elected in 2006. When Senator Biden stepped down to become vice president in January 2009, Carper became Delaware's senior senator. Senator Carper holds seats on the Senate Finance Committee, the Environment and Public Works Committee and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and also chairs the Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety and the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services and International Security. Additionally, he continues to serve as co-chairman of the Senate Nuclear Caucus, the Senate Recycling Caucus and the Congressional Fire Services Caucus</p> <p>Senator Carper began his public service career by serving three terms as Delaware's state treasurer and five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, beginning in 1982. He became the 78th governor of Delaware in 1993, serving two terms during which he was selected by his colleagues to serve as chairman of the National Governors' Association. Before entering Delaware politics, Senator Carper attended The Ohio State University on a Navy R.O.T.C. scholarship, graduating in 1968 with a B.A. in economics. He completed five years of service in the U.S. Navy as a naval flight officer and continued to serve in the Naval Reserve until retiring from military service in 1991 with the rank of captain.</p> <p>He and his wife Martha reside in Wilmington. They have two sons, Chris and Ben. He commutes by train to Washington, DC on a daily basis.</p>

Screenshot 3. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *what can you tell me about this candidate's qualifications for office?*
<https://www.facebook.com/salpace/info>

Basic Information

Website <http://paceforcolorado.com>

Screenshot 4. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *what can you tell me about this candidate's character?*

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=93702839067&set=a.93701519067.84732.88853139067&type=3&theater>



The screenshot shows a Facebook post titled "Meet My Family" featuring a photograph of a family of four (a man, a woman, and two children) posing in a wooded area with large, gnarled trees. The post is from the page "Bera for Congress" and was posted on June 18, 2009. Below the photo, there are two comments: one from Samantha Corbin dated June 23, 2009, and another from Ashley Mina Park Walsh dated June 24, 2009. A comment input field is also visible. Below the comments, there are two sponsored advertisements: "Careers in Communications" and "ABN AMRO".

Screenshot 5. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on the information you just read, what can you tell me about what kind of person this candidate is?* <https://www.facebook.com/BeraForCongress/info>

Activities

I enjoy traveling, fishing, swimming, camping, golfing, & reading. I am a collector of experiences and an observer of the world that I encounter. In everything I do I strive to believe more in the world that is possible than the world as it is.

Favorite Music

Sting, U2, Led Zeppelin, The Who, The Rolling Stones, Tom Petty, Earth Wind and Fire, James Taylor, Cat Stevens. My musical taste is all over the place, from classic rock to soul to the 80's music of my college days.

Favorite Movies

Gandhi, Love Actually, Pretty Woman, Slumdog Millionaire, Almost Famous

Screenshot 6. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on what you just read, what can you tell me about this candidate's character?*
<https://www.facebook.com/notes/senator-tom-carper/happy-thanksgiving/304949816196213>



Senator Tom Carper's Notes

Browse Notes

- Friends' Notes
- Pages' Notes
- My Notes
- My Drafts
- Notes About Me

Happy Thanksgiving

by Senator Tom Carper on Wednesday, November 23, 2011 at 5:51pm ·

Martha and I wish everyone a safe and happy Thanksgiving. This holiday week, it's important to give thanks and spread the wonderful, contagious spirit of helping others. On Thursday afternoon, we look forward to serving Thanksgiving dinner at the Emmanuel Dining Room in Wilmington with several dozen other volunteers. There, we serve turkey platters with all the fixings – provided by Gallagher & Gallagher – to several hundred people of all ages, some homeless, some not, but all hungry. Giving back to our community in this small way brings as much joy to those of us who serve as to those who are served there. Lending a helping hand is important all year long, but the holiday seasons helps to remind us to focus on the neediest among us.

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

Like · Comment · Share

9 people like this.



Jason Dean I would enjoy it if I could afford to buy a turkey. Too bad I pumped all my turkey money into my fuel tank. Thanks Senator, enjoy.

November 24, 2011 at 4:34pm · Like



Write a comment...

Screenshot 7. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on what you have read in this candidate's Facebook post, what can you tell me about communication between the candidate and his Facebook fans?*

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150611319049068&set=a.99140214067.87974.88853139067&type=1>

Bera for Congress
February 16

Yesterday our volunteers called voters and asked voters to call Congressman Dan Lungren's office and ask that he stop his blockade against the "No Budget, No Pay" bill. This bill holds Congress to the same standard the rest of us are every day. If they can't do their job and pass a budget on time, they don't deserve to get paid.

Like · Comment · Share

18 people like this.

2 shares

Laura Delight wish I was there.
February 16 at 11:25pm · Like

Bera for Congress Laura email zack@beraforcongress.com if you want to join our next phone bank or canvass
February 16 at 11:43pm · Like

Laura Delight I helped last campaign, but now I live in Turlock for school. When I'm home I spread the word, but I don't have time to commit to the campaign =/
February 16 at 11:45pm · Like

Screenshot 8. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on what you have read and seen in this screenshot, what can you tell me about communication between the candidate and his Facebook fans?* (Picture has been removed)



Screenshot 9. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on this photo and the text, what can you tell me about how active this candidate's constituents are?*

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150656699979068&set=a.99140214067.87974.88853139067&type=1>



Bera for Congress

March 9

Another successful house party for the Bera campaign

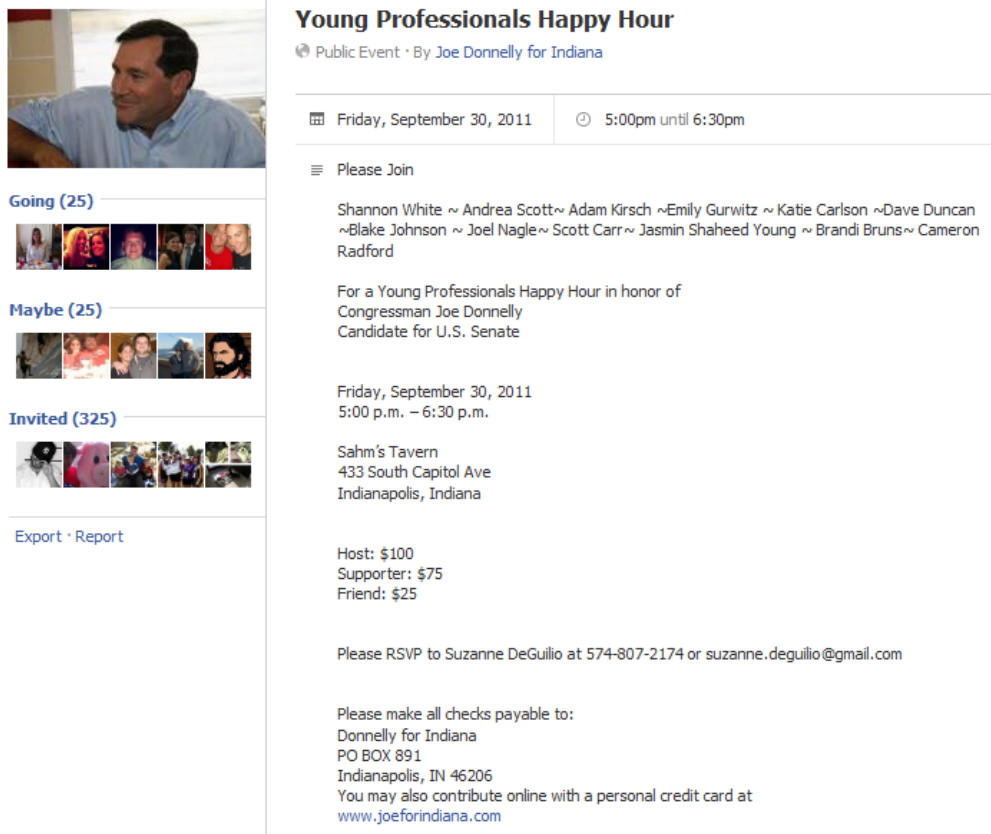


Screenshot 10. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on this photo what can you tell me about the political activity of this candidate's constituents?*

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=295939627145166&set=a.295936040478858.68727.144133758992421&type=3&theater>



Screenshot 11. Interviewees were shown this screenshot before being asked the question: *based on the content of this screenshot, what can you tell me about the candidate's Facebook fans' political activity?* <https://www.facebook.com/events/213563242037677/>



Young Professionals Happy Hour
Public Event · By Joe Donnelly for Indiana

Friday, September 30, 2011 5:00pm until 6:30pm

Please Join

Shannon White ~ Andrea Scott ~ Adam Kirsch ~ Emily Gurwitz ~ Katie Carlson ~ Dave Duncan ~ Blake Johnson ~ Joel Nagle ~ Scott Carr ~ Jasmin Shaheed Young ~ Brandi Bruns ~ Cameron Radford

For a Young Professionals Happy Hour in honor of Congressman Joe Donnelly Candidate for U.S. Senate

Friday, September 30, 2011
5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Sahm's Tavern
433 South Capitol Ave
Indianapolis, Indiana

Host: \$100
Supporter: \$75
Friend: \$25

Please RSVP to Suzanne DeGulio at 574-807-2174 or suzanne.degulio@gmail.com

Please make all checks payable to:
Donnelly for Indiana
PO BOX 891
Indianapolis, IN 46206
You may also contribute online with a personal credit card at www.joeforindiana.com

Going (25)
Maybe (25)
Invited (325)
Export · Report

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