

Social Media Marketing in Midterm Political Campaigns & Its Effect on Political Activity

The Honors Program

Senior Capstone Project

Student's Name: Samantha M. Beaupre

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carol DeMoranville

May 2015

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Literature Review	4
___ Historical View of Midterm Elections:	5
___ Today's Midterm Elections:	5
___ Impacts on Voter Turnout:	6
___ Political Branding:	7
___ Internet Political Media:	8
___ Political Social Media:	9
___ Impacts of Political Social Media:	10
___ Strategy and Content for Political Social Media:	11
___ Gaps in Available Research:	11
___ Study Methodology:	12
Hypotheses & Research Questions	13
Methodology	13
___ Survey Instrument:	13
___ Survey Recruitment:	14
___ Sample:	14
___ Political Awareness & Political Knowledge:	15
___ Political Advocacy:	15
___ Political Participation:	15
___ Social Media Use:	16
Results	16
Discussion	17
___ Hypothesis H1a: Not Confirmed	18
___ Hypothesis H2a: Confirmed	18
___ Hypothesis H2b: Confirmed	19
___ Hypotheses H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b: Not Confirmed:	19
___ Limitations:	20
___ Suggestions for Future Research:	21
___ Implications for the Presidential Election in 2016:	22
Conclusions	22
Appendices	24
___ Appendix A:	24
___ Appendix B:	24
___ Appendix C:	25
___ Appendix D:	25
___ Appendix E:	26
___ Appendix F:	26
___ Appendix G:	27
___ Appendix H:	27
___ Appendix I:	27
___ Appendix J:	28
___ Appendix K:	28
References	29

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between political marketing (via online media) and the political, knowledge, advocacy, and participation of the Millennial Generation. Additionally, this study emphasizes the impact of social media on these relationships. Engaging voters online has transformed 21st century political campaigns by creating additional points of contact between campaigns and Millennials, young voters characterized by their dominant presence on social media. Educating, engaging, and motivating the participation of this voter segment through successful political marketing will continue to shape campaign strategies for future midterm and presidential elections. Quantitative survey research conducted via Qualtrics measured political knowledge and media habits of Millennials 18-25 years old living in the Northeast. The 2014 midterm races in seven states encompassing the New England region and New York comprised the study's domain. Positively correlated links between political awareness, knowledge, advocacy, and participation were identified. Advocacy was influenced by political knowledge, and in turn influenced the nature of political participation. Implications for the upcoming 2016 presidential election and the future of political marketing are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns in the internet age integrate social media into online marketing strategies. The increased points of contact with voters is designed to engage voters to vote and participate in the political system. Therefore, the “brand” that a candidate chooses to embody and personify in their marketing must break through today’s advertising and media clutter to be successful in recruiting votes. As popularity of social media marketing has grown and is predicted to be a significant element in the 2016 presidential campaign, the study focused on Millennials in the 18-25 age bracket who predominantly use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition to social media, exposure to other forms of online marketing communication can impact citizens’ political awareness, knowledge, and participation. Political campaign advertising is a function of a greater marketing strategy. The study reinforces the impact of marketing on the ultimate success of the political candidate based on how online marketing impacts voters’ awareness, knowledge, advocacy, and participation. Additionally, the framework complements the larger metaphor of a voter acting as a consumer through the decision making process of participating in the political system, including post purchase processes after campaigns have ended. The aforementioned metaphor exists in response to the changing political environment, a shift to reflect a more efficient business perspective on voters. In this model voters serve as the entity’s consumers, with needs and desires that must be satisfied, and cognitive dissonances that must be dispelled to ensure brand loyalty (future votes for a party or candidate in subsequent elections). Political branding emulates the branding of consumer products and services; a target market of potential voters is identified on the basis of past “purchasing” (voting) behavior as well as demographics including geographic, psychographics, and benefits derived from purchase behaviors (voting and political participation). Social media begins to fill the information gap for Millennials that traditional media does not satisfy, because Millennials comprise the youngest voter segment, many of whom are disengaged from the greater political process. Social media content is considered successful when it positively impacts voter participation or voters feel they possess a higher level of political knowledge and awareness after exposure to the media.

As political campaigns have evolved in recent decades to inform and disseminate full-fledged marketing programs to voters, the internet and social media has risen to the forefront

of political marketing for the Millennial Generation. The overarching goal of the study was to better understand modern day political campaign methods and strategies of marketing during midterm elections where voter participation is historically very low.

The 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns by President Barack Obama became a case model for how social media influences the public and how brand popularity can promote action from voter segments with historically low turnout rates (racial minorities and young voters). Using the recent successes of those presidential campaigns, the project aims to better understand assertions regarding social media effectiveness in a similar manner during midterm elections which typically have a very low voter turnout rates. A goal of the project is to determine how, when, and to what extent voters attain political awareness and knowledge from social media platforms and how they engage with the content. The underlying hypothesis of the study is that regular exposure to online marketing communications, specifically social media content by political campaigns, will cause the politically quiet to engage in the greater political conversation online and to become politically active in advocacy. Therefore the individuals will become more likely to participate in the political system by voting on November 4th. By understanding the impact of social media in politics, one will gain a better understanding of how implementation of future strategic marketing campaigns will affect the upcoming presidential election of 2016 and other midterm elections.

Currently, there is a plethora of research available on political campaigns and young Millennials, but since the 2012 election there has been mass speculation on how social media will impact future campaigns. Recent studies have begun to examine how social media platforms can impact voters' behaviors, but gaps exist within current research, failing to identify target voter segments namely Millennials, a generation that engages in use of social media in an unprecedented way. This project will contribute to existing research by establishing a scope which includes popular social media platforms, young Millennial voters, and execution during the midterm election (as opposed to presidential elections), and thus, it differentiates itself from what other studies have focused on. As a Marketing major with a minor in Legal Studies, this project allows me to explore my business foundation to apply it to a unique business, political campaigns, which more closely aligns with my passion for law and the political system. Social media's timely relevance in business, politics, and leisure present the necessity for further research into how the most technologically connected

generation, the Millennials, interact with social media for political purposes, and where potential lies for growth of political marketing on these platforms..

Although not relevant to the study itself, my final undergraduate semester is being spent in Washington D.C. where I am working for a high-tech defense and cyber security lobbying firm; this contributes to the broader perspective that I am portraying with this project, including new applications of business knowledge, and how the result of political campaign media can impact elected officials during their careers in federal office. Given that the study was conducted during the recent 2014 midterm elections, I am able to follow how candidates became winners and their subsequent work in the legislature through my duties with Congressional committees. My experiences and interactions with the political system in Washington reiterates my passion for politics and contributes fresh motivation to explore social media applications during the campaign process while I observe currently elected politicians and engage with a highly politically motivated population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media and online media influence daily communications; this impact permeated political campaign advertising processes as demonstrated in the 1990's when President George Bush ran his reelection campaign, and more recently, President Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 campaigns. This study aims to examine how these changes have impacted young Millennials whose voter participation is historically low especially during midterm elections. Research indicates that midterm elections typically have low voter turnout and engagement for a variety of reasons including: lack of media attention, decreased partisan attachment, socialization, and education of Millennial voters. The Internet has created a new medium for political conversation and for news gathering, posing as a potentially viable platform to support social media marketing campaigns to engage Millennial voters. Traditional political marketing research and strategy form the foundation of political marketing; future campaigns can capitalize on social media to increase participation among young voters by implementing new branding, acquisition, and engagement practices. Given the cynical attitude of Millennials toward the American political system, the study's methodology frames knowledge and awareness without subjective platform and issue based opinions, and will standardize opportunities for campaigns to best serve their "customers," the potential voters.

Historical View of Midterm Elections:

Desilver (2014) of the Pew Research Center explained the significance of lower voter turnout in midterm elections, a historical trend continuing since 1840. Attributed to a variety of factors (discussed below), American citizens are less likely to engage and participate during governor, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House of Representative races than during presidential elections. The 2008 Barack Obama campaign for presidency against John McCain drew out 57.1% of the voting-age population which was uncharacteristically high, however just two years later, only 36.9% voted in the midterm elections (Desilver, 2014). Republicans reclaimed the House of Representatives. Desilver continued to predict a loss of Democratic seats in the legislature based on the principle that midterm elections lack the “wow factor” that presidential elections possess which polarize independents and party affiliations away from the moderate. This characterization is significant in understanding why fluctuations in voter turnouts exist across citizens of all party affiliations. Darrell West (2013) indicated in “*Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns*” that 95% of House of Representatives and 90% of Senate incumbents win reelection during midterm campaigns. West attributes this to lower voter engagement because less national media attention is allotted to these campaigns. This lack of coverage, in conjunction with fewer debates and major events, make political advertising more significant in influencing the outcome of the campaign. On average, marketing and advertising allotment comprises 40% of a campaign’s total budget; increasing the success of marketing campaigns and the delivery of campaign messages will be a major factor in midterm elections (West, 2013).

Today’s Midterm Elections:

Convenience can impact who chooses to participate on Election Day. In general, Millennials and first-time voters are more mobile than other age brackets of potential voters, therefore the availability of absentee ballots and extension of voter hours are noteworthy in impacting voter turnout. In this study’s geographic domain, absentee ballots are obtainable in New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut with a valid excuse, in contrast to Maine and Vermont which have more liberal policies where no excuse is required to obtain an absentee ballot (Shea, 2013). Early walk-in voting is also permitted in

Maine and Vermont (Shea, 2013). Many young voters are likely away from their home while attending colleges and universities, or lack the knowledge of where to vote in their area, making access to the polls an obstacle to increasing voting participation; a lower turnout for Millennials and first-time voters may be attributed to the aforementioned state determined ballot availability.

Impacts on Voter Turnout:

According to Turner and Dulio (2008), another significant principle that may explain decreased voter turnout is the lack of partisan attachment. Partisan attachment is defined as sentiments that are evoked in favor of a particular political party or candidate, as provoked by media. Political attack ads are the formidable method in which partisan attachment is exhibited, given their inflammatory nature (Turner and Dulio, 2008). This factor has not been as evident in recent elections as candidates' platforms are blurred on issues, either because they are moving toward the middle of the political spectrum or because candidates fail to take a specific stance. Specifically, social values are avoided in order to prevent alienation of far-winged voters on the other end of the spectrum. Daniel Shea (2013) in "*Let's Vote*" acknowledged that recent changes in platforms make it more difficult for voters to distinguish between multiple candidates in a race, reinforcing the theory presented by Turner and Dulio on decreased partisan detachment.

Additionally, Shea (2013) reports that nonvoting may also be a statement of complacency or an act of political protest. Political activity and participation are not solely defined as voting, as many studies note, and that the following activities are included: volunteering, donating monetary funds to campaigns, attending political rallies, putting up yard signs, or wearing stickers/buttons to show support for a candidate (Shea, 2013). Partisan attachment is in part driven by campaign advertising, as negative ads have the tendency to polarize citizens on issues and candidates. This polarization sparks a higher level of engagement among voters to support their preferred candidate who is the target of attack advertising or negative media attention. In turn, higher levels of engagement and attachment are indicative of greater amounts of political activity. In juxtaposition, if attack advertising existed less, as is the case during midterm elections, voters are more likely to experience the aforementioned lack of partisan attachment (Turner and Dulio, 2008).

Another theory that helps explain the psychology behind voter turnout is the socialization of children and young adults by society to believe that voting is the duty of a good citizen. 90% polled believe this theory because they were raised to be involved in the process; socialization by parents and families is also present, influencing children's political preferences and voting participation later in life (Shea, 2013). Shea relatedly notes that increased levels of education begin to shatter the "myth of elections," which he describes as an unrealistic mindset that one's vote can truly impact and define an election's results; this namely impacts those with lower educational achievement, less than a Bachelor's degree. However that those with college educations are actually *more* likely to become interested as well as involved in elections, even though they believe their individual vote may be less impactful (Shea, 2013). Shea also identifies online media as an agent of socialization, one that regularly takes on a negative view of the political system (2013), which may correspondingly impact turnout. Levels of parental/familial involvement in the political process is directly correlated to one's involvement in the political process later in life (Shea, 2013). Engagement and participation are impacted by this socialization, indicating that a portion of one's actions are driven based on their nurturing.

Political Branding:

Political branding is at the forefront of political social media applications for a number of reasons. As Needham (2005) described in "Brands and Political Loyalty," brands simplify the choice a potential voter has through the flow of necessary and choice dependent information, as well as the sense of congruence and standardization that comforts the individual in order to begin developing trust. Although previous studies of branding depict it as a series of separate components, Needham (2005) defines a brand as a collection of facets including traditional candidate metrics such as image and reputation, which indicate the potential that the candidate will be successfully elected. Needham employs the metaphor of voters as consumers, and elections as purchase decisions both large and small; major presidential elections are classified as "big" and local elections as the "second-order" i.e. smaller variety (Needham, 2005). "Brands provide a basis for long-term loyalty in an environment where products (policies) are fairly fluid," Needham (2005) noted. This frames the future necessity for frequent and accurate measures of participation and market

acquisition, which are characterized by regular voting participation and engagement of new and younger people into the potential voter market. Needham lays the groundwork for Shea (2013) and Towner and Dulio (2008) by opening the door for further study of participation and market acquisition, aforementioned as voter engagement and partisan attachment. By identifying how voter segments act and what drives them to participate in political processes, areas of strategic improvement can be formed for increased success in the future.

Reformulated political marketing strategy may result in standardization of voter data and information that campaigns and the media will capitalize on for the sake of increased efficiency of political marketing in a technological age.

Internet Political Media:

Platforms that consumers utilize to access political information have changed in recent decades with the expansion of technology and the advancement of the Internet. Haridakis and Hanson (2008) in their study, *Youtube, Social Networking and Other Media Use Among Young and Older voters* found that sources of political information vary among age segments of voters. The Internet has recently displaced television for voters under the age of thirty-five, and first-time voters are the most motivated to use media as a primary (mode, source, method, etc.) of retrieving information. The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2008) extends the conclusions previously mentioned, determining that 40% of people utilize the internet as a means of retrieving most news, rather than just political news (Shea, 2013). Contributing additional detail to the foundation of Haridakis and Hanson, Towner and Dulio in "*The Web 2.0 Election*" expanded the hypotheses and results to determine the extent that the aforementioned use of online sources impacts factual and issue political knowledge. Knowledge is segmented by facts, such as dates, names, and issue identification, whereas issue political knowledge transcends recall and allows the citizen to form opinions on issues and current events based on facts, experiences, and innate tendencies (Towner and Dulio, 2008). The segregation of Internet sources of social networking and online news are examined to determine more direct links and greater statistical significance. Integrated knowledge, as the study described, transcends previous studies' single dimension exploration, alluding to a categorical split between personal, current event, and issue knowledge rather than as a related spectrum (Towner and Dulio, 2008). The following conclusions were derived: gender and

factual knowledge are significantly related, however gender and issues knowledge are not, more interest in politics is directly related to more factual and issue based knowledge, and finally social media and online news sources are unrelated to both issue and factual knowledge (Towner and Dulio, 2008).

Political Social Media:

From 2008 on, social media established itself as a conversational method to promote citizens' user generated content as a means of raising online engagement. The necessary means to distribute new content via online platforms, as well as engage in conversations online about aforementioned media was a viable concept (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, & Ponder, 2010). "*Social Media and Voting*" by Lee Rainie (2012) illustrated how using verbal and online advocacy to promote voting for a particular candidate has permeated society as 48% and 30% of participants in the study reported recently being encouraged to vote by face-to-face conversation and on social networking sites, respectively. As the study was unable to identify partisan lean in Republican/Democratic candidates being the focus of "go vote" promotion, Rainie's study demonstrated how the 18-29 segment was more politically engaged in face-to-face advocacy than on social media in 2012

Jerpi (2014) in the article titled "*Political Campaigns and Social Media - Tweeting Their Way Into Office*," noted an impact of social media political interaction is not as direct as other studies have previously indicated. Jerpi maintains, it is more likely that citizens following and subscribing to candidates' pages are also the most politically active, and therefore would influence the opinions and content that their less engaged network sees, in turn creating a channel for influential political advocacy and means of information distribution. This complements Rainie (2012) and the promotion of "go vote" efforts, previously described. Online advertising by political campaigns delivers a carefully crafted message, and is deemed successful for one of the following reasons: the individual has already been exposed to the campaign in another form or at another time, the individual found it compelling enough to take action, or that individual chose to join/support the cause that the advertisement presented, as noted by Turk in "*Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*" (2013).

Impacts of Political Social Media:

In the future, maintaining an engaging online presence will be crucial to the success of political campaigns. Currently obscure platforms will become more accessible to campaigns as the science of social media marketing for political means becomes more defined and more efficient. Google+ was identified to be a potential method of future meaningful marketing with rapidly increasing growth rates, and the power of Google Ads is a major asset for campaigns with deep pockets and broad scope because they can be broadcast to over 2 million websites (Susskind, 2013). In conjunction with Google+, images and real time video will be fine-tuned and utilized in online political marketing strategies hoping that the increased engagement with the viewer results in more memorable content for potential voters. Video and images must be released on existing networks including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even Snapchat broadening the targeted market of young voters that serve the targeted segment of political advertising (Susskind, 2013). Delivering content when, how, and where young voters desire it will be crucial in motivating the next generation of voters.

Social media marketing campaigns during political elections are significant in influencing the two-way conversation between citizens and candidates (Elahi, 2013). Elahi (2013) maintains that the creation of online political marketing strategy that does not intend to directly sell the candidate as it too closely emulates traditional political advertising. Social media allows for authenticity and genuine personality compared to traditional marketing channels; the use of social media should be designed to complement existing advertising and media, rather than to supplement it (Elahi, 2013). Kushin & Yamamoto (2010) comment on this theory in more generalized terms, noting that social media is influential in producing positive democratic effects. Turk in "*Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*" (2013) approves of these positive democratic effects, indicating that social media has created a virtual community for citizens to participate in and share views. Turk also indicates that the general attitude of campaigns are moving into a new era, that voters will now be viewed as customers and will be the driving factor around which campaigns must be focused under the premise of customer relationship management (CRM). Micro-targeting and multiple points of contact may best fulfill the needs and desires for information of these potential customers (Turk, 2012).

Strategy and Content for Political Social Media:

Expanding on Elahi's perceptions of political strategy creation, Schossow (2013) remarked that the most crucial rule of social media presence is not to spread the strategy thin by joining more networks than can be regularly updated with meaningful content. To avoid this, representation of "The Big Four", the networks that should be included in core political marketing strategy are: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr (Schossow, 2013). The aforementioned sites have a variety of users and a range of media to distribute content; the uniqueness of each platform contributes another point of contact with potential voters, and therefore would lead to a more comprehensive online presence that gives the candidate higher exposure.

Content of social media campaigns is also relevant as validated by Granato & Wong (2004), who noted that crystallization of political opinions is directly affected by the volatility of messages and the frequency of its distribution. As social media is rapidly changing and is typically distributed in few written characters, reiterating a consistent thematic concept in a push advertising strategy is increasingly difficult to successfully execute across multiple platforms, and may potentially be a downfall of candidates' online media presences.

Hanson et al. (2010) concluded in "*The 2008 Presidential Campaign: Political Cynicism in the Age of Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube*" that interpersonal media platforms are utilized by citizens who have become skeptical of conventional media and to seek information from sources deemed more trustworthy than traditional sources. This suggests that users may be interested in seeking newsworthy and political information via online interpersonal platforms i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Internet sources of political information are sought for two distinct purposes, to gather information, and to interact with others within an online community (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). In the study, the platforms are categorized by traditional Internet sources and information sources, within which social media falls. Given this premise, the study confirmed prior research findings the Internet has positive effects on democracy (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Gaps in Available Research:

Although research strongly indicates reasons for lower voter turnout during midterms, and has framed opportunities, strategies, and uses of social media for political campaigns, the research fails to identify where Millennials fit into the equation. Many studies widely segment

voter age brackets. However it may be more appropriate to study young voters separately, given their background and extensive reliance on technology, the Internet, and social media networks. Social media and the Internet are still in their infancy, and there is a pivotal shift in dominant communication methods for the Millennial generation in comparison to other generations. Therefore studies designed to appeal to more mature voters or to a mass audience may not accurately support conclusions for the Millennial generation. Due to the ever changing landscape of the Internet and new technology, Millennials should be the focus of increased studies as they do not recall a world before these technologies and best reflect the future practices of society. An arbitrary age bracket fails to encompass these dynamics and behaviors as they are too narrowly focused and artificially segment society on numbers rather than drivers of behavior.

Young voters are a large portion of the total population, and will have significant impact in determining major election results in upcoming decades as they integrate fully into society and reach voting age. The impact of failing to engage and motivate this segment in the future via the mediums where they predominantly participate and seek information will likely result in lost elections and lower voter turnout.

Study Methodology:

Current studies fail to examine more than one major facet of the political process. Although the details are relevant to the current political media climate, and include participation, knowledge, and engagement, the determination of the level of political activity a citizen partakes in is the major focus of most studies. Political preference and interest in campaigns depends on a variety of factors including familial socialization and partisan attachment in addition to the media. Media coverage influences voters through its coverage of current events, airing of political ads, even commentary and partisan lean. This becomes less present online, particularly on social media as individuals, rather than entities, project sentiments and opinions in a two-way manner that invites conversation, unlike traditional media. This is why it is more appropriate to utilize marketing research theory to study Millennials on the web and on social media platforms given that strategies and opportunities have already been vested in the business world as a means of customer relationship management. By employing the metaphor of voter as consumer, these theories become more

applicable, particularly as campaign management becomes less political and more like running a business.

HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After review of relevant literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

- H1a: Political awareness will be highly positively correlated with levels of political knowledge.
- H2a: Political knowledge will be highly positively correlated with political participation.
- H2b: Political knowledge will be highly positively correlated with political advocacy.
- H3a: Social media usage will be positively correlated with political awareness.
- H3b: Social media usage will be positively correlated with political knowledge.
- H4a: Levels of social media reliance will be positively correlated with political awareness.
- H4b: Levels of social media reliance will be positively correlated with political knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

To test the hypotheses, this study employed an online survey that measured political awareness, knowledge, advocacy, participation, and social media use among Millennials. Multi-item measures were incorporated from previously published studies and modified to focus on Millennials in the Northeast and political applications of business marketing principles. Millennials' social media use is highest of all user demographics, therefore the selection of undergraduate students is an appropriate population (Towner and Dulio, 2010). The sampling methodology was comprised of a convenience sample of undergraduate students ages 18-25 at Bryant University and the University of New Hampshire. These students while a part of the relevant population, were expected to have higher levels of political awareness, knowledge and advocacy than non-college students. Thus, the convenience sample used in this study is appropriate.

Survey Instrument:

The survey consists of items measuring political awareness, knowledge, advocacy, participation, and social media use. Political awareness and knowledge were tailored to the

Social Media Marketing in Midterm Political Campaigns & Its Effect on Political Activity
Senior Capstone Project for Samantha M. Beaupre

participant's location of voter registration or if not registered to vote, his/her permanent home address. Awareness measures asked for recollection of the election date and what races were in contention in the participant's area and who was in contention. For questions that asked for identification of actual candidates running for office, distractor names were also utilized. To maintain a reasonable scope of the survey and data analysis, elections in: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York were included. Thus, only participants who resided in one of those states were permitted to participate.

Survey Recruitment:

The sample was recruited based on course enrollment at Bryant University and UNH. Courses were selected across liberal arts and business fields including freshman through senior courses to evenly distribute participant demographics. Surveys at Bryant University were administered during course time by the researcher or outside class time for extra credit. At the University of New Hampshire professors distributed survey links to students via email and surveys were completed outside normal course hours; a follow-up email was sent after the first week of data collection to remind students to participate.

Sample:

Respondents younger than 18 were directed to the end of the survey as they were not of voting age; those older than 25 were also removed as the study aimed to sample college-aged Millennials. As the questionnaire required recall of local and state political information, the sample narrowed state of residency to the following region where majority of the enrolled students resided. The states included were: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. A total of 26 respondents were removed for the above reasons and for failing to complete the questionnaire in its entirety. The result was a sample size of 122. The sample was 47.5% men (coded 0) and 52.5% women (coded 1). Participants age 18-19, first time voters, accounted for 19.7%, 20-21 for 67.2%, 22-23 for 12.3%, and 23-24 for .8%, respectively (Appendix D). They reside or attend post-secondary education in all 7 selected states, Massachusetts accounting for 50% of respondents, followed by Connecticut at 18.9%, and New Hampshire and Rhode Island at 12.3% (Appendix B). The

basis of the theoretical model assumes highly positively correlated links between political awareness, knowledge, advocacy, and participation, as noted in *Appendix A*.

Political Awareness & Political Knowledge:

Blocks of related political awareness and knowledge were directed to respondents based on state of residency or voter registration. Measurement of awareness was formulated by recall of the midterm election date and which races were being contested. Participants' states and voting districts controlled the content of the multiple choice questions; identification and recall of potential candidates, incumbents, and highly publicized issues comprised the knowledge score for each race that was summed to generate the final political knowledge score. Participants were categorized as politically aware or unaware.

Additionally, political knowledge was coded on a 3-15 point scale and categorized into low, moderate and high knowledge based on the scale. A higher level of knowledge is observed with familiarity of candidate platforms and issues of major concern by constituents that will impact the election results. Higher scores indicated a higher level of awareness and knowledge.

Political Advocacy:

Two components of political advocacy were defined, as politically active, or politically quiet which is determined by whether subjects do or do not communicate online about political events or views. The politically active classification is derived from methods of communication, whether communication was initiated or responded to, and the following activities: retweets, likes/favorites, posts communicating political views or recent events, and motivation for communicating. Relevant aspects that will also be taken into account to determine level of political advocacy include frequency and timing of communications and passive engagement activities (i.e. likes, favorites, and retweets).

Political Participation:

Political participation scores were comprised of registering to vote, or voting, donations to campaigns, attending political rallies or fundraising events, and volunteering time to a campaign; the purpose of including voter registration as activity is to acknowledge

the hassle college students face in obtaining an absentee ballot, or traveling to their city of residence to vote.

Social Media Use:

The study classified social media use through two measures, self-reported use per day and reliance on access to social media. Daily use was measured on a 6 point Likert-type scale between less than 10 minutes to more than 3 hours. Respondents were asked, “In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes per day have you spent on social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram?” and “Many people would feel out of touch if they were unable to access their social media accounts for a period of time. Move the slider to indicate how many hours you could go without connecting or checking your social media accounts before you would feel out of touch.” The respondent was then asked to indicate how many hours they could go without checking social media accounts without feeling out of touch; measurement of this was determined by classifying the results into thirds to demonstrate low, medium, and high levels of reliance and attachment to social media. These were combined to create each respondent’s social media rating, with high reliance and high daily use indicating a significant tendency for higher political awareness and knowledge.

RESULTS

To test the hypotheses, Pearson correlations were conducted for significance at $\alpha = .05$. Of the 148 responses, 122 were considered in the analyses, after incomplete surveys were removed along with ineligible participants. 52.5% of participants were female and 47.5% male (Appendix C); in comparison to Bryant University’s 40/60 female to male split, and University of New Hampshire’s 44/56 male to female gender split, the findings are reasonably appropriate. The age division between participants relied predominantly between ages 20-21 at 67.2% as these ages are commonly between sophomore and junior years (Appendix D). Massachusetts was the most represented state with 61 participants reporting voter registration or permanent address, followed by Connecticut with 23 participants, and New Hampshire and Rhode Island with 15 respectively (Appendix B). The large number of business majors, 35 from marketing, 16 from accounting, and 13 from management alone (Appendix E) was reasonable given the large enrollment of students in business programs at both institutions and the distribution of the survey. Majority of participants indicated high social media usage

above an hour a day. Reliance on access to social media platforms was more evenly spread among participants (Appendix H).

Hypothesis H1a is not supported, as the null is affirmed; the negative correlation of $-.229$ is statistically significant ($P > .05$). This indicates that higher levels of political awareness is correlated with lower levels of political knowledge. Hypothesis H2a is upheld as significant with a positive correlation of $.378$ ($P > .05$). Political knowledge is confirmed to indicate a positive correlation to political participation levels. Additionally, H2b is supported as well with a correlation of $.393$ ($P > .05$). H3a was not supported, with a low correlation of $.117$ and was not statistically significant ($P = .099$). Social media use was not correlated with either political awareness from H3a nor political knowledge from H4a ($C = .098$, $P = .142$). H4a fails to confirm the study's expectations, indicating that social media reliance (attachment) is not a statistically significant correlating variable to political awareness ($C = .105$, $P = .124$ at $P > .05$). Finally, H4b results do not support the prediction; rather it supports the opposite conclusion with a negative correlation of $-.221$ ($P = .007$ at $P > .05$). This demonstrates that levels of social media reliance is negatively correlated with levels of political knowledge.

DISCUSSION

The study concludes use of social media is unrelated to increases in political knowledge, advocacy, and participation, contrary to the study by Hayes (2008). This framework assesses more accurate and current understanding to how voters operate, and will lead to more effective polling and marketing campaigns. Polling, the generally accepted basis of projection of end results is typically inaccurate as highlighted by Real Clear Politics which averaged polling data from large media and news organizations such as CBS, FOX, and ABC during the final two weeks of the midterm election cycle. Real Clear Politics' (2014) actual results placed the GOP $+5.7$ over the Democrats across the country, while the polling numbers had the GOP winning overall by $+2.4$, a significant discrepancy given that half of the organizations that submitted data had the Democrats winning. Greater voter understanding results in more accurate predictions and use of campaign funding. However, the conclusion of this study is not irrefutable; the method of social media engagement and motivations of citizens to use media require further research to make more detailed statements about

generalizable behaviors of the Millennial generation. Future research must also encompass and measure types of advocacy including candidate and issue based support.

Hypothesis H1a: Not Confirmed

Political awareness is not correlated with levels of political knowledge. Exposure to media and others were informed about public policy and events failed to increase participants' political knowledge. It is not rational that one can identify the election date and all of the specifics of the races being contested in their geographic area but cannot identify the correct candidates in their region or anything about political issues that are noteworthy. Given this, the result is likely attributed to a faulty awareness measure as the variable was not fully developed for a pre-test before dissemination to the larger sample of participants. However, this finding does not impact the foundation of the major theoretical model in *Appendix A*; instead it demonstrates that knowledge is the original driving factor in understanding how to engage Millennial voters.

Hypothesis H2a: Confirmed

Political knowledge is highly positively correlated with political participation. This supports the theoretical models detailed in *Appendix A* which demonstrates how the flow of information, awareness, and knowledge impact systemic behaviors within the political process. The link is statistically significant with a p-value of .000, supporting a strong positive correlation of .378. Supported by the data and personal assumptions and experiences about Millennials, this link may be the most effective opportunity for political parties to engage their affiliated potential young voters. Non-partisan groups whose mission is to promote participation in the political process including Rock the Vote, the Center for Voting and Democracy, and the New Voters Project may benefit from this study's findings and begin to target certain Millennials on social media to promote engagement with the political process. Understanding the behavioral process behind Millennials' political participation, or lack thereof, assists in the ongoing efforts to engage young voters in the political process. Given the election results by Real Clear Politics (2014) of a 5.7% spread on average, the margin of error in projections and polling can drastically change the outcome of an election. Thus those who can increase Millennial's knowledge will have a greater engaged voter population to

capitalize on and will be able to better forecast turnout and polling numbers to strategize campaign actions more effectively.

Hypothesis H2b: Confirmed

Political knowledge is highly positively correlated with political advocacy with a correlation factor of .393 and p-value of .000, indicated a highly positive relationship. This connection is crucial to understanding how to motivate citizens to share political thoughts and opinions and to engage in open dialogue about public policy. Anecdotally, one can think of various instances in life where the least politically educated person in the room was the most vocal about their beliefs. Using the metaphor “knowledge is power” one can use this information in future campaigns to more accurately predict how informed a supporter must be before they advocate to their own network about the issue or candidate. Networking and word-of-mouth marketing in this manner, if predictions can be reliable, can increase the grassroots campaigning sector to combat citizens’ indifference to campaign produced marketing. Additionally, social media can be integrated more effectively and cost efficiently if content is educational and truthful. Thus greater exposure to the content would result in higher levels of political knowledge, and in turn the individual would have higher levels of engagement in the political process by advocating their opinions, thoughts, and interests.

Hypotheses H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b: Not Confirmed:

Social media usage is neither positively correlated with political awareness nor political knowledge. Both H3a and H3b exhibited positive correlation coefficients at .117 and .098 respectively however failed to demonstrate statistical significance at a .05 level. In addition, Levels of social media reliance are not positively correlated with political awareness or knowledge. H4a failed to demonstrate statistical significance with a correlation factor of .105, however this can be attributed to the faulty measure of political awareness (aforementioned) that was disregarded as it did not impact the foundation of the political model. Although not supportive of the study’s original predictions, H4b contains valuable findings, with a negative correlation factor of -.221 and demonstrates statistical significance with a p-value of .007 ($P < .05$). The results are the opposite of original predictions, but relay that the more attached Millennials were to their social media accounts (higher reliance), the

lower their political knowledge. This is attributed to their increased daily use of social media which likely takes time away from face-to-face interactions and reduces the time for political information gathering through other media channels.

Expanding on the basic theoretical model outlined (Exhibit A), these findings indicate that social media may not be a viable platform for political marketing as a means to engage Millennials with high social media use. This is because the primary motivating factor for maintaining an active social media presence is for social purposes, rather than educational. Additionally this segment of Millennials will have more content to sift through on their feeds, creating an obstacle for political marketers to break through the rapidly updating media clutter. Given the under-performance of younger voters in the political process, social media creates an avenue to inform, engage, and encourage participation of targeted segments of Millennials, likely those who have smaller followings and utilize their social media accounts less often. Given this, political marketers must be aware that grassroots social media marketing may be less strong or occur at a slower rate, The highest social media users will be the least likely to be informed about relevant political information, as well as least likely to engage with the content. Further research specifying user preferences of social media platforms and content is required for campaigns to properly allocate resources to best serve this cliental. Capitalization of Millennial votes will be of great contest in the 2016 presidential campaign as both major parties struggle to inspire participation in a more impactful way than President Obama did in his first election in 2008, which forever changed the campaign marketing and fundraising landscape.

Limitations:

Limitations of the study arise from minimal diversity of the population; although attempts were made to increase demographic and academic diversity among participants, access to potential subjects was limited given the homogeneous nature of the universities. The narrowed geographic focus of the study aims to classify findings in a manner that is generalizable to a small segment of the Millennial generation. Participants likely understood that the study's design made connections between political knowledge and participation, and media's role in the larger picture. Additionally, participants indicated that the survey was too cumbersome throughout the political knowledge section, and many noted that they felt guilty

for the questions they did not know the answers too, leaving them to reflect on how unaware or uninformed they were this election cycle. The online administration of the survey and chosen distribution via email admittedly lowered the response rate. The potential population of Millennials were accessed by means of university email accounts indicating current enrollment in undergraduate programs; time of day and date likely impacted response rates. Anecdotally, many undergraduate students are notorious for skimming emails that request completion of surveys or bypass them unless compensated. It was assumed that professors' distribution and request for completion would increase the response rate, however this made tracking the spread of distribution difficult.

The study lacks a partisan attachment measure as noted by Towner and Dulio (2008) which could have identified citizens most open-minded to changes of opinion and swing voting, perhaps where marketing strategy would be the most impactful to campaigns. The study by Granato and Wong (2004) on how volatility of political media impacts crystallization of opinion complements the conclusions of Towner and Dulio (2008). This indicates potential for further detailed studies of political media and marketing messages as they act in conjunction to finalize political opinions and voting preferences

Suggestions for Future Research:

The participant population could be expanded to include the complete age range of Millennials or expand geographically to encompass Millennials nationally, representing a greater diversity of socio-economic characteristics and demographics. The enriched data provided increasingly generalizable to Millennials as a generation. Had the entire age spectrum of the Millennial generation been included, responses between the youngest and oldest Millennials may have characterized tendencies and demonstrated polarization and the shift of behaviors that occur with age. Additional study to understand the motivating factors of social media use and what subsections of the Millennial generation will be most receptive to political marketing via social media are required to develop future political marketing strategy. The study could be prolonged in a longitudinal manner by testing the same variables on the participants after the 2016 presidential election allowing for juxtaposition between midterm and presidential elections and furthermore, measuring changes of the individuals with increasing age of the generation.

Implications for the Presidential Election in 2016:

The study's findings demonstrate the integral and causal relationship of political awareness, knowledge, advocacy, and participation. Additionally, social media and face to face conversations about public policy and political current events were shown to correlate higher levels of knowledge and participation. As campaigns have adapted in the 21st century to incorporate social media and online media sources into fundraising and marketing strategies, these findings confirm how to best engage and educate college-aged Millennials in the Northeast. Upon standardization of social media as a campaign tool to increase citizen engagement, campaigns and online media alike will require further practice in development of long-term strategies to educate young Millennials and increase their participation as they become more accessible online. Increasing access to aforementioned Millennials at a lower cost than by traditional media platforms is likely to benefit campaigns that are most successful in engaging young voters that consistently demonstrate the lowest percentages of voter participation in midterm elections.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings support existing research in the political marketing sphere, and current trends in both business and politics indicate that social media will be implemented more fluidly into existing marketing strategy to promote greater engagement and increased voter participation in the highly technological 21st century. As other generations integrate social media into daily life as Millennials have already done, further research will be necessary to most effectively target this growing segment of users.

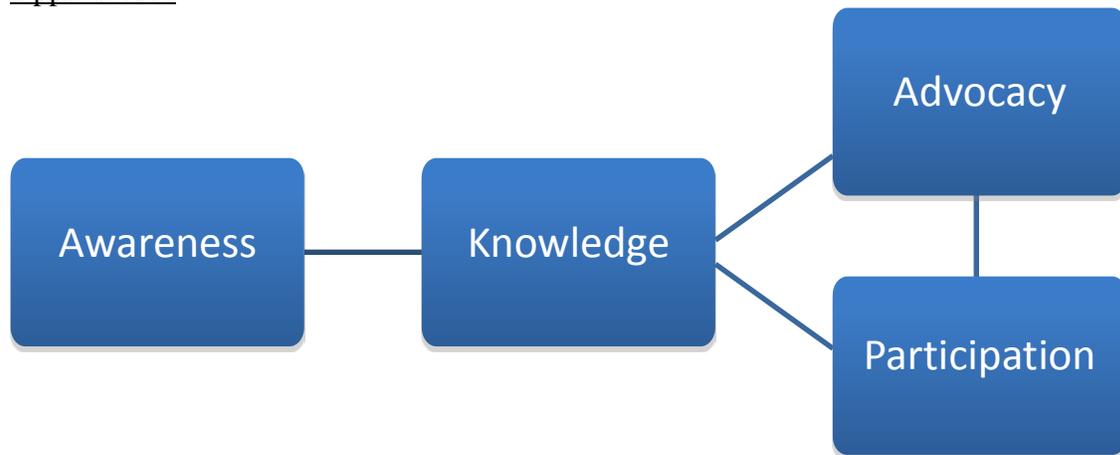
My conclusions are strategic in nature rather than directly connected to an internal entity's content generation and branding decisions; the implications of social and online media is accelerated word-of-mouth phenomena regardless of the original source of content. Given this, embracing positive media from outside sources is crucial to social media marketing strategies, as well as mitigating public relations mishaps that can spread online like wildfire and damage a brand's reputation and image. In the political realm, this arises from online newspapers, television stations, bloggers, consultants, and direct attacks from the competing party. As none of it can be directly controlled, understanding the potential impact

on voters who use social media is indispensable in creating a dynamic branding strategy that reacts to all media threats in a positive manner. The genuine nature of social media marketing must be supported and felt by Millennials, avoiding traditional media such as campaign attack advertising. This eliminates some partisan attachment that drives engagement and greater voter turnout, that Needham (2005), Turner and Dulio (2008) and Shea (2013) detailed.

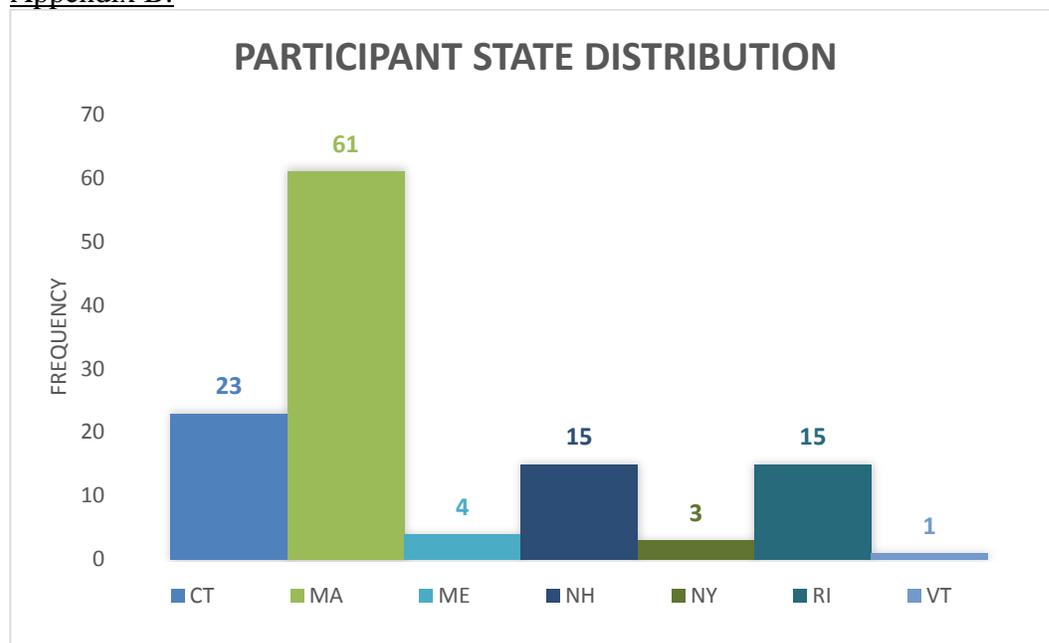
Formation of new strategies and tactics to educate and engage Millennials will be necessary, and likely created by members of the generation who work for campaigns and political consulting agencies. Framing the voter as a consumer was found to uphold traditional business marketing theories in marketing application for political campaigns, demonstrating the importance of expert marketing professionals in campaign marketing. Additionally, viewing campaign management as a business can change one's perspective on its operational processes and how it fundraises to have enough capital to produce effective marketing. However, it is important to note that branding and marketing does not end with a successful campaign, it must be consistently maintained during an official's term in office in order to continue brand loyalty and favorable participation (voter purchases) in the future for both the candidate (product) and the party (product line).

APPENDICES

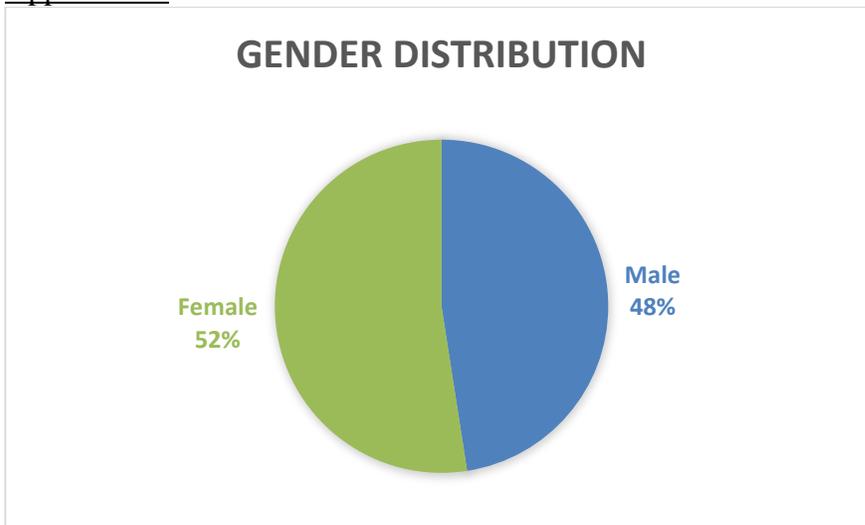
Appendix A:



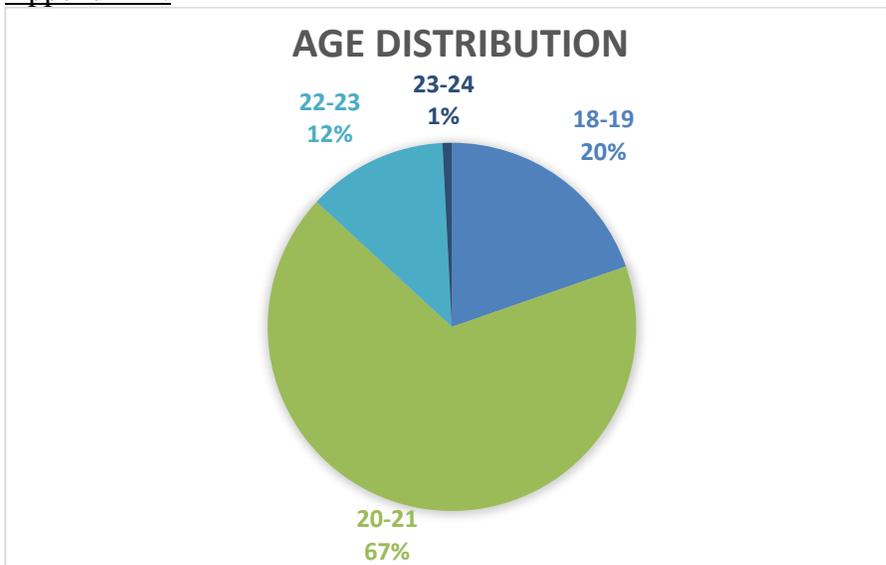
Appendix B:



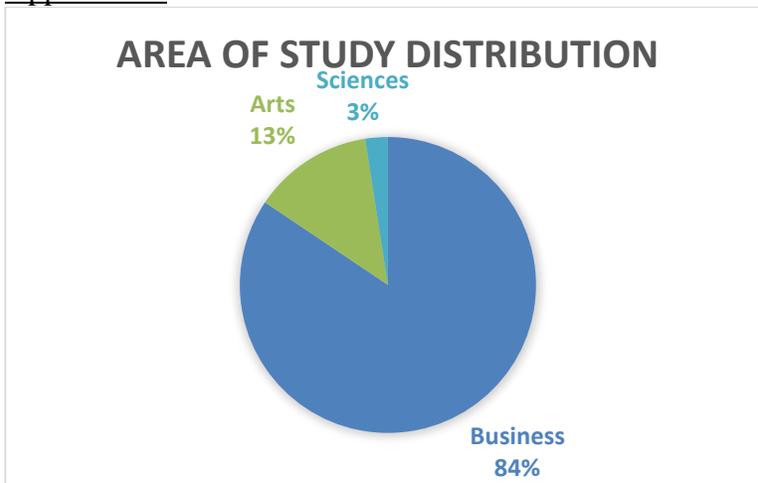
Appendix C:



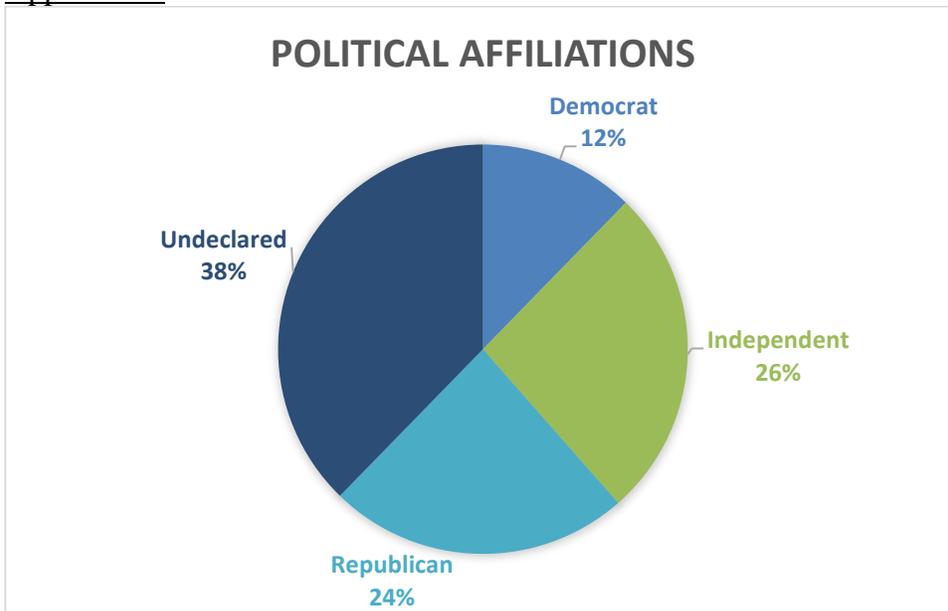
Appendix D:



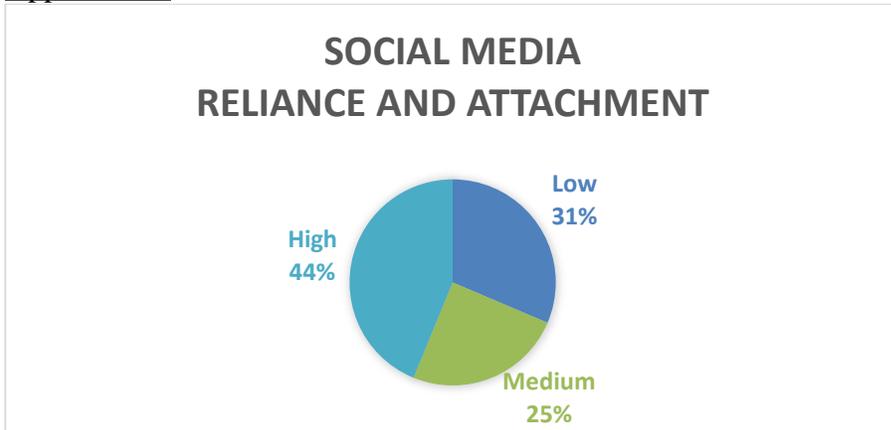
Appendix E:



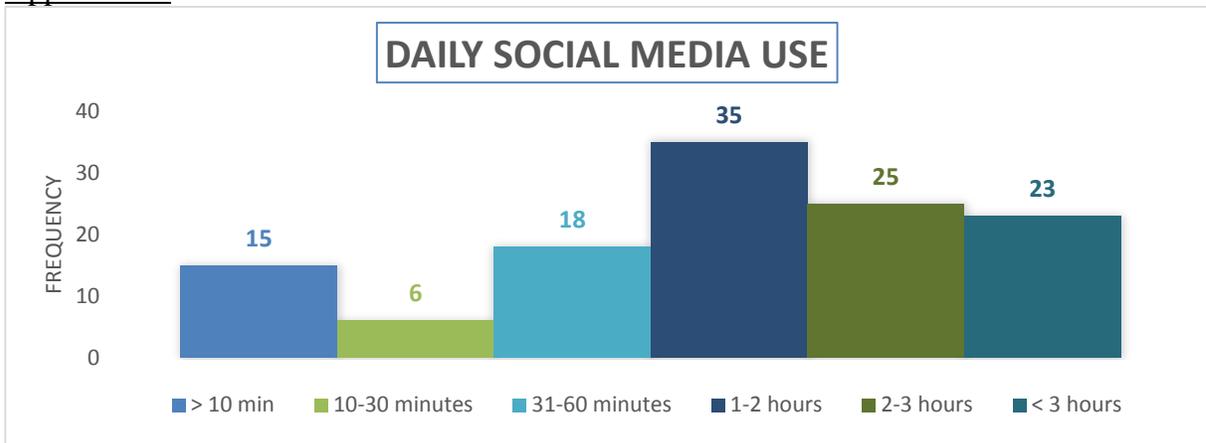
Appendix F:



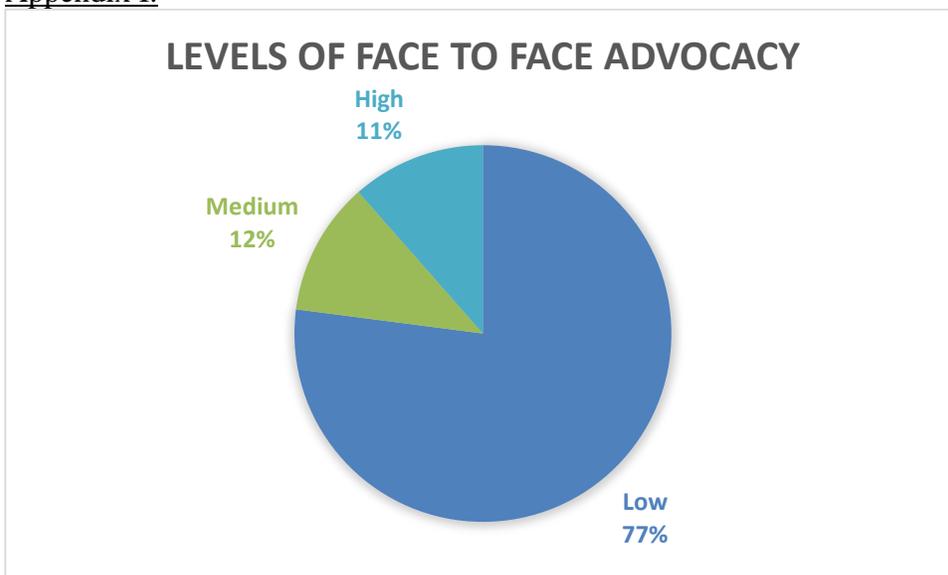
Appendix G:



Appendix H:



Appendix I:



Social Media Marketing in Midterm Political Campaigns & Its Effect on Political Activity
Senior Capstone Project for Samantha M. Beaupre

Appendix J:

Variable	Correlation	Awareness	Knowledge	Advocacy	Participation	SM Use/Day	SM Reliance
Awareness	Pearson						
	Correlation	1	-.229**	-0.117	-.351**	0.117	0.105
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.006	0.099	0	0.099	0.124
N		122	122	122	122	122	122
Knowledge	Pearson						
	Correlation	-.229**	1	.393**	.378**	0.098	-.221**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.006		0	0	0.142	0.007
N		122	122	122	122	122	122
Advocacy	Pearson						
	Correlation	-0.117	.393**	1	.574**	0.132	-.269**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.099	0		0	0.073	0.001
N		122	122	122	122	122	122
Participation	Pearson						
	Correlation	-.351**	.378**	.574**	1	0.141	-.251**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0		0.061	0.003
N		122	122	122	122	122	122
SM Use/Day	Pearson						
	Correlation	0.117	0.098	0.132	0.141	1	0.058
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.099	0.142	0.073	0.061		0.263
N		122	122	122	122	122	122
SM Reliance	Pearson						
	Correlation	0.105	-0.202**	-0.264**	-0.242**	0.058	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.124	0.013	0.002	0.004	0.263	
N		122	122	122	122	122	122

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Appendix K:

Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Awareness	122	0	4	1.44	1.029
Knowledge	122	0	15	7.52	3.147
Advocacy	122	0	40	9.63	9.993
Participation	122	2	11	4	1.466
SM Use/Day	122	1	6	3.97	1.558
SM Reliance	122	1	4	2.14	0.875

REFERENCES

- 2014 Generic Congressional Vote. (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2015, from http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/generic_congressional_vote-2170.html
- Desilver, D. (2014). Voter Turnout Always Drops off for Midterm Elections, but Why? *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/24/voter-turnout-always-drops-off-for-midterm-elections-but-why>
- Elahi, A. (2013, September 3). How Social Media Strategy Influences Political Campaigns | Sprout Social. Retrieved December 1, 2014, from <http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-political-campaigns>
- Granato, J., & Wong, M. (2004). Political Campaign Advertising Dynamics. *JSTOR*. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3219846>
- Hanson, G., Haridakis, P., Wagstaff Cunningham, A., Sharma, R., & Ponder, J. (2010). The 2008 Presidential Campaign: Political Cynicism in the Age of Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13(5), 584-607.
- Haridakis, P., & Hanson, G. (2010). *Techno politics in presidential campaigning: New voices, new technologies, and new voters* (J. Hendricks, Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Hendricks, J., Lee, L., Towner, T., & Dulio, D. (2010). *Techno politics in presidential campaigning: New voices, new technologies, and new voters*. New York: Routledge.
- Jerpi, L. (2014, January 1). Political Campaigns and Social Media - Tweeting Their Way Into Office. Retrieved from <http://source.southuniversity.edu/political-campaigns-and-social-media-tweeting-their-way-into-office-106986.aspx>
- Kushin, M., & Yamamoto, M. (2010). Did Social Media Really Matter? College Students' Use of Online Media and Political Decision Making in the 2008 Election. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13(5), 608-630.
- Needham, C. (2005). Brands and Political Loyalty. *Journal of Brand Management*, 13(3), 178-187.
- Rainie, L. (2014, November 6). Social Media and Voting. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/11/06/social-media-and-voting>
- Richard, S. (2013). Voter Mobilization - Into the Future. In *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge*. Thousand Oakes, CA: CQ.
- Schossow, C. (2013, August 21). Using Social Media in Political Campaigns. Retrieved from <http://www.newmediacampaigns.com/page/using-social-media-in-political-campaigns>
- Shea, D. (2013). *Let's vote: The essentials of the American electoral process*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Susskind, J. (2013, December 30). 5 Ways Social Media Will Change Political Campaigns in 2014 - IVN.us. Retrieved from <http://ivn.us/2013/12/30/5-ways-social-media-will-change-political-campaigns-2014>
- Turk, M. (2012). Social and New Media - an Evolving Future. In R. Semiatin (Ed.), *Campaigns on the cutting edge, 2nd ed. political behavior of the american electorate, 12th ed...* S.l.: Cq Press.
- West, D. (2013). *Air wars: Television advertising in election campaigns, 1952-2008* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.