Branding Obama as the 'Change' Agent
: A Political Marketing Perspective on the 2008 Presidential Campaign and Beyond

Noriko HIRABAYASHI[*]

The original version of this article is a paper presented by the same author at *the 2009 Annual Conference of the Japanese Association for American Studies* (Workshop A: Change and Power 1: As Seen through the Social Sciences and American Studies) held on July 6th and 7th of 2009 at Tsuda University, Tokyo. This article includes several modifications as well as additional tables and figures to the original paper.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990's, presidential candidates in the United States have taken full advantage of political marketing concepts and tools in their campaigns [1]. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush appear to have even utilized marketing for promoting their agenda to the public and Congress during their respective tenures as President.

Marketing aids modern political engineering in numerous capacities, ranging from intensive marketing research and database building on the electorate, sophisticated targeting of voting blocs, crafting winning messages, and establishing a *brand* (that is, a predominantly differentiated yet still coherent product image of a candidate or politician, and his/her policies and style of governance), to well-organized, innovative promotion strategies, such as the use of high-tech media tools.

Barack Obama, Democratic presidential candidate in 2008 and now the President, is no exception. In fact, the Obama campaign was awarded *Marketer of the Year* by *Advertising Age* magazine in October 2008, outstripping world-famous brands such as Apple or Nike.

His campaign convincingly made the case that he was *the* brand of change that could bring about real transformation in Washington, as well as in the direction of the country as a whole, and that moreover he would help America revive its ideal of government of the people, by the people, for

---

1 For reference to the historical development and strategies of political marketing, see Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President* (Thousand Oaks, CA: sage, 1994).

---

* ひらばやし・のりこ
　埼玉大学教養学部教授　政治コミュニケーション研究

the people. While proclaiming oneself an agent of change is a familiar strategy which candidates can draw upon when running against unpopular incumbents, as was the case in 2008, can we consider Obama's branding success extraordinary, and if so, in what respect?

This paper will argue that marketing skills in fact played an extraordinarily significant role in the Obama campaign, particularly in targeting, branding, and grassroots promotion. These skills served to help Obama present himself as *the* agent of change in three ways. First, sophisticated targeting helped him build a broader and realigned coalition of the electorate across party lines and other previous divisions. Second, Obama's branding of change (his product image) not only emphasized his uniqueness as a Washington outsider and/or would-be first African-American president, but also showcased his reformist values and consistent belief in positive and responsible government, the proffered reestablishment of which would bring about real change in America. Finally, his grassroots promotion and strategic public relations symbolized a drastic shift in the style of presidential governance, from secretive, dogmatic and top-down to transparent, interactive and bottom-up.

No doubt Obama was greatly aided by the prevalent anti-Bush, anti-Washington national mood and the timing of bad economic news, particularly since the mid-September financial crisis, in addition to his own personal qualities. Nonetheless, it is also significant that his campaign gave the appearance of possessing a more strategic mindset and skills which were well-suited to challenging the current market and triumphing over rivals such as Hillary Clinton, an old-fashioned marketer, and John McCain, who was not only considerably under-funded but also attempting to distance himself from Bush marketing resources.

POLITICAL MARKETING AND BRANDING

What is political marketing, and how it could help political campaigns, such as those conducted by political parties and candidates?

As product marketing aides effective commercial campaigns in a competitive market, so does political marketing in modern competitive campaigns, on such phases as (1) evaluations of the environment as well as the relative assets and vulnerabilities of competitors, (2) targeting of the market, (3) positioning and product-making, (4) branding, (5) promotion activities, and (6) feedback and adjustment in strategic development as well as resource allocation. Political marketing could not only facilitate successful electoral engineering, for example, in building the electorate coalition, in establishing the agenda which fit the needs and wants of the market, in crafting persuasive messages and in efficient mobilization, but it also could help effective governance, particularly in retaining the public support as the most essential political resource in the era of 'permanent campaigns' in politics.

In political marketing, voter behavior is approached in the same manner as is consumer

behavior in product marketing. The voter is akin to a consumer engaged in complex and high-involvement decision-making, such as when the product to be chosen has the following features: 1) It is important to the voter/consumer; 2) It is continuously of interest to the voter/customer; 3) It entails significant risks; 4) It has emotional appeals; and 5) It is identified with the norms of a group.

As Schuweiger and Adami [2] put it, in order "to orientate himself or herself on the complicated market of different candidates and parties," the voter compares the *brands*. To be recognized as a brand by the voter, the product must possess pithiness, uniqueness, constant and reliable quality, good will, and availability (in other words, the brand must evoke the "confidence of the voter that the candidate will be able to fulfill his or her future duties physically, psychically, and mentally"). Political marketing strategies aim at producing a candidate who encapsulates those messages. The candidate must be accepted as a branded product of his or her political party. The candidate's slogans, contents of policies, and personality images have to be suitable; they must be credible, authentic, and relevant for the target groups.

Brand marketing is a form of integrated marketing activities, centering on the distinctive values or meanings as well as directions that the product conveys to the voters/customers, offering them incentives for providing long-term support. Brand marketing comprises four steps: 1) Defining the values of a brand that the product is to provide over the long term; 2) Designing the symbols that will represent these values; 3) Undertaking an integrated marketing activity so that both of those who are inside and outside of the provider can share the values; and 4) Managing the brand, controlling crises, and feedback. In this type of marketing, the credibility of the product provider and its brand, as well as the sharing of values and beliefs among all the parties concerned, is the key. Such an approach can help candidates and political actors handle numerous issues with a clear vision and direction, while the voters can understand what they stand for, and await real outcomes. Thus, the brand marketing model appears to be more applicable than others to presidential campaigns, as well as to presidential politics promoting an agenda to the public continuously in a mode akin to campaigning; that is to say, it is particularly suited to the era of the permanent campaigns [3].

UNPRECEDENTED TARGETING FOR THE ACROSS-THE-BOARD COALITION

This paper focuses on three aspects of the Obama marketing processes. First, it describes how Obama earned bipartisan and across-the-board support from the electorate with the help of

---

2 Günter Schweiger and Michaela Adami, "The Nonverbal Image of Politicians and Political Parties," in *Handbook of Political Marketing*, ed. Bruce I. Newman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 348-353.

3 See Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1982). See also Norman J. Ornstein and Thomas E. Mann, eds. *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future* (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, 2000).

sophisticated targeting. An unprecedented targeting approach enabled Obama to gain new supporters, notably from the "ascendant class" or the "purple states." His broader, realigned electoral coalition gave him a clear mandate even across party lines, and thus could significantly change the universe of his presidency with a power base founded on the notion of *government of the people and by the people.*

Exit Polls Reveal Across-the-Board Support for Obama

Based on the 2008 presidential exit polls and previous presidential results, **TABLE 1** outlines in which voting blocs Obama won over McCain in 2008, as well as whether his performance was comparatively better or worse than how previous Democratic presidential candidates since Bill Clinton had fared.

First of all, "*Share of Votes*" (horizontal 100%) indicates the election results of 2004 and 2008 based on their respective exit polls. Next, *"Share of Electorate"* (vertical 100%) indicates which voting blocs had a larger or smaller share among those which appeared in the polls from 1996 to 2008. In 2008, the following blocs had a greater turnout, and thus had more say in the outcome of the election: Hispanics, suburban residents (tied), independents, those between 45 to 59 years of age, the highly-educated, those with high incomes, those whose financial situations had worsened since four years prior, and Parents. Notably, most of those blocs tended to favor Obama rather than McCain.

"Dem advantage to GOP in the year" refers to what extent Democratic presidential candidates won over their Republican opponents in each year. On the other hand, *"Dem gains from 4 years ago"* indicates how much better or worse Democratic presidential candidates performed than did the Democratic candidates in the last election cycle. Compared with McCain and the previous Democratic candidates, Obama gained substantially more support, particularly among women, minorities, moderates, the highly-educated, those with high incomes, those who enjoyed improved personal financial situations, those in cities and suburbs, and Catholics, as well as among all age groups except those over 60 years of age, and across all regions (the partisan gap diminished even in the South).

In sum, Obama was able to successfully mobilize: 1) Part of the Democratic voters who supported Hillary Clinton during the Democratic primaries, including for example women, Hispanic, Catholic, and the financially vulnerable; 2) The "Ascendant class," [4] which is expected to prosper in the near future in terms of population, political power, and/or socio-economic status, and which includes Hispanics and Asians, first-time voters, the New South and the West [5], and the

---

4 Ronald Brownstein, "Coalition of the Ascendant," *National Journal*, 11/08/2008 issue: 20-25.

5 "New South" means such states as Virginia and North Carolina, which find a huge influx of new voters, specifically the younger, highly educated, higher-income non-Southerners and the minorities. The similar trend is also found in such Western states as Colorado and Nevada.

TABLE 1: Gains and Losses in the Supports for Democratic Presidential Candidates, 1988-2008

Share of Electorate				Voting Block	Share of Votes				DEM Gains from 4 Years Ago					DEM Advantage to GOP in the Year				
					2008		2004		Obama 08 gains from Kerry 04	Kerry 04 gains from Gore 00	Gore 00 gains from Clinton 96	Clinton 96 gains from Clinton 92	Clinton 92 gains from Dukakis 88	Obama over McCain 08	Kerry over G.W. Bush 04	Gore over G.W. Bush 00	Clinton over Dole 96	Clinton over G.H. Bush 92
2008	2004	2000	1996		Obama (D)	McCain (R)	Kerry (D)	G.W. Bush (R)										
				Gender														
47	46	48	48	Men	49	48	44	55	5	2	-1	2	0	1	-11	-11	-1	3
53	54	52	52	Women	56	43	51	48	5	-3	0	9	-4	13	3	11	16	8
				Race														
74	79	82	83	White	43	55	41	58	2	-1	-1	4	-1	-12	-17	-12	-3	-1
13	12	10	10	Black	95	4	88	11	7	-2	6	1	-3	91	77	82	72	73
8	6	4	5	Hispanic	66	32	56	43	10	-11	-5	11	-8	34	13	36	51	36
2	2	2	1	Asian	61	35	58	41	3	4	11	12	XX	26	17	13	-5	-24
				Region														
22	22	23	23	East	59	40	56	43	3	0	1	8	-2	19	13	17	21	12
24	26	26	26	Midwest	54	44	48	51	6	0	0	6	-5	10	-3	-1	7	5
32	32	31	30	South	46	53	42	58	4	-1	-3	5	0	-7	-16	-12	0	-2
22	20	21	20	West	55	42	50	49	5	2	0	5	-3	13	1	2	8	9
				Population														
11	13	9	10	Over 500,000	70	28	60	39	10	-11	3	10	-4	42	21	45	43	30
19	19	20	21	50,000 to 500,000	59	39	49	49	10	-8	7	0	-2	20	0	17	11	17
50	45	43	39	Suburbs	50	48	47	52	3	0	0	6	-1	2	-5	-2	5	2
7	8	5	9	10,000 to 50,000	46	53	48	50	-2	10	-10	9	1	-7	-2	-21	7	-3
14	16	23	21	Rural areas	45	53	40	59	5	3	-7	5	-5	-8	-19	-22	-2	-1
				Party ID														
32	37	35	35	Republicans	9	89	6	93	3	-2	-5	3	2	-80	-87	-83	-67	-63
29	26	27	26	Independents	52	44	49	48	3	4	2	5	-5	8	1	-2	8	6
39	37	39	39	Democrats	89	10	89	11	0	3	2	7	-5	79	78	75	74	67
				Political Ideology														
22	21	20	20	Liberals	88	10	85	13	3	5	2	10	-13	78	72	67	67	54
44	45	50	47	Moderates	60	39	54	45	6	2	-5	10	-3	21	9	8	24	16
34	34	29	33	Conservatives	20	78	15	84	5	-2	-3	2	-1	-58	-69	-64	-51	-46
				Age														
18	17	17	17	18-29	68	30	54	45	14	6	-5	10	-4	38	9	2	19	9
29	29	33	33	30-44	54	45	46	53	8	-2	0	7	-4	9	-7	-1	7	3
37	30	28	26	45-59*	51	48	48	51	3	0	0	7	-1	3	-3	-1	7	1
16	24	22	24	60 and Older*	44	54	46	54	-2	-5	3	-2	1	-10	-8	4	4	12
11	11	9	9	First-time Voters	71	29	53	46	18	1	-2	8	-1	42	7	9	20	14
				Education														
4	4	5	6	Not H.S. grad	63	35	50	49	13	-9	0	5	-2	28	1	20	31	26
20	22	21	24	H.S. graduate	52	46	47	52	5	-1	-3	8	-6	6	-5	-1	16	7
31	32	32	27	Some college	51	47	46	54	5	1	-3	7	-1	4	-8	-6	8	4
45	42	42	43	College grad+	49	48	46	52	3	1	1	5	2	1	-6	-6	-2	-2
17	16	18	17	Post-graduate	58	40	55	44	3	3	0	2	2	18	11	8	12	14
				Family Income:														
6	8	7	11	Under $15,000	73	25	63	36	10	6	-2	1	-4	48	27	20	31	35
12	15	16	23	$15,000 to $30,000	60	37	57	42	3	3	1	8	-5	23	15	13	17	10
19	22	24	27	$30,000 to $50,000	55	43	50	49	5	1	1	7	-2	12	1	1	8	3
62	55	53	39	Over $50,000	49	49	43	56	6	-2	1	5	2	0	-13	-7	-4	-5
26	18	15	9	Over $100,000	49	50	41	58	8	-2	5	XX	XX	-1	-17	-11	-16	XX
				Family Financial Situation from 4 years ago:														
23	32	50	33	Better today	38	59	19	80	19	-42	-5	42	XX	-21	-61	25	40	-37
34	39	38	45	Same today	45	53	50	49	-5	15	-11	5	XX	-8	1	-25	1	-1
42	28	11	20	Worse today	72	27	79	20	-7	46	6	-33	XX	45	59	-30	-30	46
				Union														
21	24	26	23	Union Household	59	39	59	40	0	0	0	4	-2	20	19	22	29	31
				Religion														
54	54	XX	XX	Protestant	45	54	40	59	5	0	-1	5	-2	-9	-19	-18	-9	-9
42	41	47	46	White Protestant	34	65	32	67	2	-2	-2	3	0	-31	-35	-29	-17	-14
27	27	26	29	Catholic	54	45	47	52	7	-2	-4	9	-3	9	-5	2	16	9
2	3	4	3	Jewish	78	21	74	25	4	-5	1	-2	16	57	49	60	62	69
40	41	XX	XX	Attend worship at least once weekly	43	55	39	61	4	0	XX	XX	XX	-12	-22	-20	XX	-12
				Marital Status														
66	63	65	66	Married	47	51	42	57	5	-2	0	4	-2	-4	-15	-9	-2	-1
34	37	35	34	Not Married	65	33	58	39	7	1	0	6	-2	32	18	19	26	21
XX	30	32	33	Married Men	XX	XX	39	60	XX	1	-2	2	-1	XX	-21	-20	-8	-4
XX	32	33	33	Married Women	XX	XX	44	55	XX	-4	0	7	-5	XX	-11	-1	5	1
40	37	XX	XX	Parents of kids 18 and under	53	45	45	53	8	0	-3	8	-4	8	-8	-7	7	2
4	4	XX	XX	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	70	27	77	23	-7	6	5	-6	XX	43	54	46	44	58

young and highly-educated, high-income people, otherwise known as the Millennium generation; and finally, 3) Traditional "swing" blocs or leaning Republicans, such as moderates, independents, Midwesterners, suburban residents, and those in the middle-to-high income groups. They favored Obama or were at the least evenly divided, making them a significant factor in Obama's landslide, across-the-board victory. On the other hand, exceptions to this trend included the white working class, particularly older, less-educated and lower-income workers, who leaned more towards the Republicans.

Changing the Electoral Map

In the final outcome, Obama won 53 percent of the total popular vote (PV), over the 46% received by McCain.

This offers Obama a clear mandate, a situation which has only rarely occurred among first-term presidents-elect over the past half-century. Since the 1960s, those who received such a mandate were Lyndon Johnson in 1964 (PV 61%), Jimmy Carter in 1976 (50%) and Obama in 2008 among the Democrats, as well as Richard Nixon in 1972 (61%), Ronald Reagan in 1980 (51%) and again in 1984 (59%), George H. Bush in 1988 (53%) and George W. Bush in 2004 (51%) among the Republicans. Among those, the purely fresh faces (that is, those who were not sitting president or vice president) consist of only Carter, Reagan and Obama, and among these three Obama's 53% represents the largest share.

In terms of the electoral vote (EV), Obama picked up as many as 365 votes from 28 states and Washington, DC, which accounted for 68% of the total 538 EVs. A visual overview of changes in presidential electoral maps from 1996 through 2008 is illustrated in **FIGURE 1**.
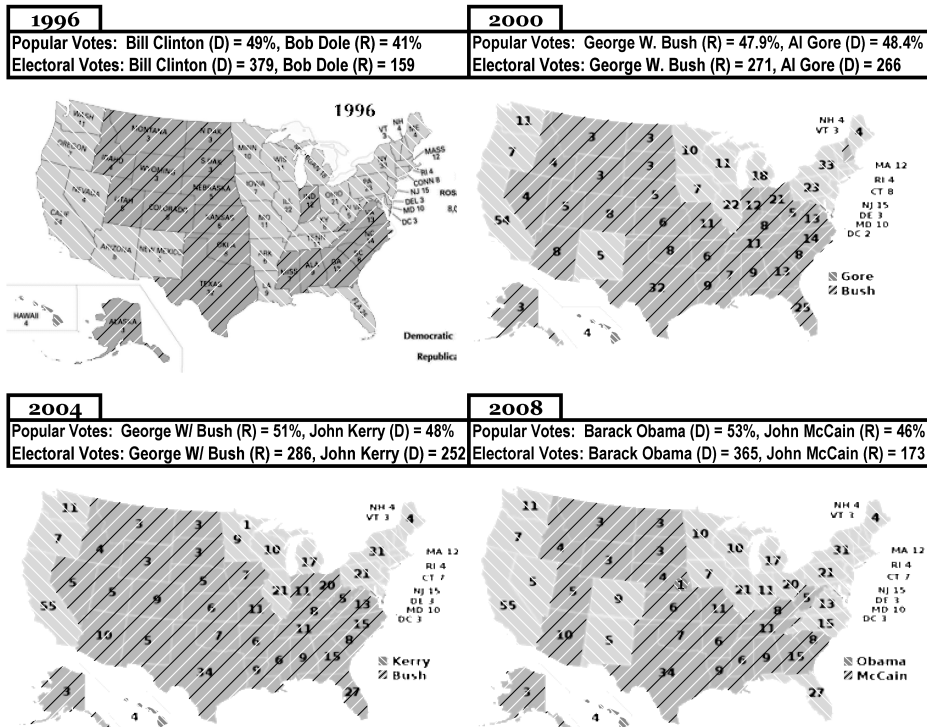
Among the 28 States that Obama won, nine states shifted from the Republican camp in 2004 to the Democratic one in 2008. These converted states were spread out across the nation, and contained Western states (Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico), Southern states (North Carolina, Florida and Virginia), and Midwestern states (Indiana, Iowa and Ohio). Given that the Eastern region is largely Democratic, this shift has served to change the entire layout of the presidential electoral map, changing a considerable number of formerly red states or swing states into blue or 'purple' states (states where the Democrats were chosen with as slim a margin as less than 5 percentage points over the Republicans, such as North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Indiana and Ohio) [6].

The new electoral map may also indicate the end of the Bush era and that president's Sunbelt politics, a form of southern politics centered on rigid ideology and faith as well as

---

6 For Obama's state-by-state strategies, see Chuck Todd and Sheldon Gawiser, *How Barack Won* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

anti-intellectualism [7]. Moreover, the new map also indicates that this transition may be described as a sweeping victory.

FIGURE 1:   Changing Presidential Electoral Map, 1996-2008

1996	2000
Popular Votes: Bill Clinton (D) = 49%, Bob Dole (R) = 41%	Popular Votes: George W. Bush (R) = 47.9%, Al Gore (D) = 48.4%
Electoral Votes: Bill Clinton (D) = 379, Bob Dole (R) = 159	Electoral Votes: George W. Bush (R) = 271, Al Gore (D) = 266

2004	2008
Popular Votes: George W/ Bush (R) = 51%, John Kerry (D) = 48%	Popular Votes: Barack Obama (D) = 53%, John McCain (R) = 46%
Electoral Votes: George W/ Bush (R) = 286, John Kerry (D) = 252	Electoral Votes: Barack Obama (D) = 365, John McCain (R) = 173

Source: Wikipedia Commons, World Atlas
Note: In Figure1, the "light gray" part nepnesents the states which were won by the Democrat, while the "thick gray" part represents those won by the Republiean.

Obama 'Stealth' Targeting Strategies

There were two strategic advantages to the targeting of the Obama campaign. Both advantages came from his invisible—*stealth*—targeting, which underwent 'off the radar' of the opposition parties as well as of the press.

One stealth technique was sophisticated microtargeting, with the help of the expanded voter file as well as an innovative online tool which enabled effective processing of incoming voter information for the purposes of targeting, organizing, fund-raising, and mobilizing.

---

7 Comment by Historian Robert Dallek, cited from Michael Harsh, "Election 2008: Brains are back," *Newsweek Japan Edition*, 19 November 2009 issue: 24.

Microtargeting provides campaigns, whether commercial or political, with useful information on customers/voters, who are sorted and segmented by their lifestyles and cultural values, and also by the relevance of these to their choices. The data from commercial databases and voter files is combined and then refined with contact information. This enables the campaign to seek out and locate possible supporters from small segments of like-minded people, and calculate what message may appeal to each. It also facilitates the picking up of supporters across conventional demographic divides or the "Red/Blue" regional maps.

George. W. Bush and his senior advisor Karl Rove first developed this innovative approach after the 2000 election, creating a huge database named *Voter Vault*. They located pools of possible supporters and "influencers" in existing networks, such as churches, and created multi-layered networks based on a business model of a company group with numerous affiliations. These strategies helped them win major victories in 2002 and 2004 [8].

Clearly, Obama learned from the Bush playbook how to utilize information on segmented voters and organize them effectively before one's opponent can sense the move and respond – in short, stealth tactics [9]. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) was catching up with the Republicans as late as 2006, building an updated database, *Vote Builder*, which contained the detailed information for roughly all registered voters, each allocated scores from 0 to 100 on as many as 800 scales. The Obama campaign also aimed to expand this file and organize promising voter segments through the use of innovative online software, *BSD Online Tools Suite*. This software facilitated the processing of incoming multi-faceted ID information on the electorate, and the organization of possible supporters into groups by like-mindedness or by level of commitment [10]. Through picking up and aligning hidden Democrats and anti-Bush Republicans, this targeting strategy helped Obama turn numerous red states into purple ones.

Second, Obama's stealth targeting also operated at the state level. During the primaries, his chief strategist David Axelrod is reported to have drawn on the state strategy by employing three foci [11]: 1) Targeting minor states which Hillary Clinton would dismiss, such as states which held caucuses instead of primaries, smaller states where fewer delegates were allocated, and red states where the Republican opponent was expected to win in the general election; 2) Preparing multiple and precise models for winning a majority of delegates, flexible and adjustable depending on any environmental changes; and 3) Setting up grassroots-level voluntary organizations and offices earlier than the rivals in every state, a tactic originating in "the 50-state strategy" that then-DNC

---

8 See Matt Bai, "The multilevel marketing of the president," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 April 2004. See also Thomas B. Edsall and James V. Grimaldi, "On Nov. 2, GOP got more bang for its billion, analysis shows," *Washington Post,* 30 December 2004.

9 See Leslie Wayne, "Democrats take page from their rival's playbook," *New York Times*, 1 November 2008.

10 Interview with Ben Self, the DNC e-campaign director and associate of *BlueStateDigital*, on 12 November 2008, Washington, DC.

11 See Jonathan Weisman, Shailagh Murray and Peter Stevin, "Strategy was based on winning delegates, not battlegrounds," *Washington Post,* 4 June 2008.

chair Howard Dean advocated and put into practice in 2006 and beyond [12].

In fact, during the primaries, Obama met no rival in the "Arctic Circle" such as Kansas, Idaho, Utah, and Alaska. Such was also the case in the Potomac area, including DC, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina, where Clinton invested little resources. In battleground states such as Colorado, the Obama camp was in full operation a whole year in advance of Clinton's.

During the general election, the local offices of the Obama campaign outnumbered McCain's by 3 to 1. The gap was even remarkable in those Republican-leaning states which were ultimately converted in 2008 as described above. These included Colorado (Obama's office outnumbered McCain's by 10 to 1), Indiana (14 to 0), Nevada (6 to 0), New Mexico (18 to 1), North Carolina (11 to 0), Ohio (33 to 9), and Virginia (28 to 6) [13]. Obama clearly exceeded McCain not only in scope of field operations, but also in crafting well-targeted, state-by-state messages, and conveying them effectively via online social networks and TV advertising as well [14].

Implications for the Obama Coalition—Government of the People, by the People

The across-the-board and nationwide support for Obama, aided by his well-crafted targeting strategies partly based on the Bush-Rove playbook, provided him with a clear mandate and allowed him to commence governing with his "audacity of hope" [15]: the notion of an America working together across the party lines or red/blue divisions and beyond racial or cultural barriers, so that all are free to enjoy the human rights and economic/social/cultural benefits that the nation promises.

Bipartisanship, or the building of a broad and inclusive electoral coalition which bridges over previous divisions among the electorate, is one of the distinctive features that Obama differentiated himself from Bush.

They had both employed similar microtargeting strategies, but for different purposes. On the one hand, Bush and Rove employed such strategies in order to identify who was or was not on their side, and then accentuated these divisions to solidify their Republican base. It was part of their post-9/11 strategy to turn away from a bipartisan tone, towards the sharper partisanship of "the 50%-50% nation." In fact, political scientist Bill Bishop indicates that partisan divides in American politics have been deepening since the 1990's at all levels of elections, contemporaneous with the diffusion of microtargeting in politics [16].

On the other hand, Obama has generally relied on microtargeting and the 50-state strategies

---

12 The Democratic National Committee, "The 50-state strategy, 2006." Draft available at *http://www.democrats.org*.

13 See *FiveThirtyEight.com*, "Obama leads better than 3:1 in field offices," 9 August 2008.

14 See for example, Wisconsin Advertising Project, "Obama outstanding McCain 3 to 1 on TV: Nearly 75% of presidential ad spending in red states," 31 October 2008. Report available at *http://wiscadproject.wise.edu.*

15 Barack Obama, "Audacity of hope,"which is the key-note address in the Democratic National Convention in Boston, 27 July 2004.

16 Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the clustering of like-minded America is tearing us apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

not only for solidifying the Democratic base, but also for a realignment of the electorate which may include, for example, the *Obamacans,* who are dissatisfied with current GOP partisan politics. The coalition also includes a wide range of like-minded people who may be ideologically moderate but share progressive values and hope for substantial change in Washington. These people are often hard to discern with conventional marketing operated exclusively based on demographic or regional factors [17].

Will he succeed? As of 100 days after his inauguration, a poll reveals that he enjoys overall approval ratings as high as 69%, and moreover that he is particularly solid among Democrats (93%) and Independents (67%), although Republicans (36%) and conservatives (46%) appear to have started turning away. While the degree of approval differs by gender, race, household income, and religion, with the exception of white evangelicals all groups maintain at least a 60% approval rating [18]. With this across-the-board support remaining stable during his first 100 days, President Obama has so far managed to keep the moral basis of his governance of the people and by the people.

THE BRANDING OF OBAMA THE PRODUCT AS THE CHANGE AGENT

The second question this paper considers is how Obama's messages, or his personalities, policy ideas and style, were packaged into a branded product of change.

The 2008 election was certainly occurring at a time suited to change: along with a historically low approval of President Bush, there was deepening economic anxiety and discontent with the country's direction, followed by the mid-September financial crisis and turbulences in the stock market which threatened people's jobs and investment savings. Consequently, all of the major candidates attempted to define themselves as bearing the banner of change. How did Obama come to prevail among them, and why?

Early Decision on the Concept of Change—The Iowa Caucus as a Defining Moment

The first key appears to be the early decision on the Obama campaign side to center around the concept of change.

Obama formally mentioned "change" on February 16, 2007, when he declared his candidacy for president in Springfield, Illinois. Before the launch of the primary season, Hillary Clinton aimed to frame the 2008 race as a referendum to President Bush, and focused on her records and experience to give her the appearance of excelling over her Democratic rivals. Obama and another Democratic rival, John Edwards, continued to emphasize the need for change: Edwards spoke of *one America*,

---

17 Refer to the discussion on "Demographic, cultural dividing lines complicate '08 race," the PBS *NewsHour*, aired on 19 May 2008. Transcript available at *http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june08/ demographic_05-19.html*
18 Poll was conducted by Washington Post/ABC during April 21-24, 2009. See Jon Cohen, "Behind the numbers: Obama @100: the crosstabs," 29 April 2009, *http:/voices.washingtonpost.com/behind-the-numbers.*

and claimed to want to level the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Nevertheless, these messages of change did not appear to be getting across at first. Obama and Edwards both trailed Clinton in the national polls by 20 to 30 percentage points in September and October of 2007. Obama chief strategist Axelrod, however, had "a clear sense of what to do: make the campaign about change, and make Clinton out to be more of the same." As early as the day after the 2006 midterm elections, Obama himself had laid out his vision for the campaign: the moment had arrived for an unconventional campaign that would take advantage of voter disenchantment—not just with the Republicans but with politics as usual [19]. Thus Obama aimed to target not Clinton alone, but also more broadly how Washington had worked through the Clinton and Bush eras.

Clinton's message appeared to remain persuasive through late 2007: according to a poll conducted in early December, most people disagreed with President Bush's handling of such issues as the Iraq war and the economy, and were moreover discontent with the country's direction, but only 38% of the respondents held that "new directions and ideas" were more important in their choice of president than were "strength and records," which were favored by 54% among them. In the same poll, the respondents were asked to offer one word in association with each candidate, and few of them associated "change" with any of the candidates, including Obama [20].

Things changed around the Iowa Caucus of January 3rd, 2008: the word "change" came to be prevalent. In the pre-Iowa debates of mid-December, Democratic competitors referred to "change" as many as 23 times, and Republicans 15 times. In remarks after the Iowa caucus, Clinton mentioned change 4 times, Obama 6 times, Edwards 9 times, and the Republican Huckabee 9 times. Likewise, in the final debates before the New Hampshire primaries of January 8th, Democrats referred to change 56 times (foremost was Clinton with 23 mentions, while Obama came third, with 12 mentions). Clinton shifted her message from experience to "ready for change," a phrase suggesting that experience was necessary for making change happen, and that only she had such requisite experience.

According to a Pew poll conducted in February and April, people had begun to associate Obama with the word "change," although "inexperience" continued to be the top association [21]. Once change came to the fore in the campaign discourse, Obama branding efforts kicked into full swing, against a backdrop of unprecedentedly high turnout and passion, particularly among Democratic voters.

---

19 See Evan Thomas et. al. "The inside story of campaign 2008: How he did it,"*Newsweek*, 17 November 2008 issue: 44.

20 Poll was conducted by Washington Post/ABC during November 28-December 2, 2007. See Jennifer Agiesta and Jon Cohen, "Poll shows more optimism on war," *Washington Post,* 14 December 2007. For free association for candidates, see the series of features on presidential candidates, "The frontrunners," published on irregular dates during November to December, 2007.

21 See Pew Research Center, "Poll report: Public support for free trade declines," 1 May 2008.

In fact, the net result of state exit polls for the Democratic primaries [22] show that "the most important attribute" desired of candidates was "bring change" (50%), followed by "right experience" (23%), "cares about people like me" (14%) and "has best chance to win" (9%), respectively. Among those who chose "bring change," Obama was supported predominantly over Clinton, by a rate of 7 to 3. On the other hand, Clinton tended to be overwhelmingly supported by those who chose "experience," by 9 to 1 compared with Obama.

The branding of Obama as the agent of change appeared to remain consistent and effective until the Election Day: the net result of all state exit polls on November 7th [23] indicated that "the candidate qualities which mattered most in deciding vote for president" were "can bring about needed change" (36%), followed by "share my values" (29%), "has the right experience" (20%) and "cares about people like me" (12%), respectively. Among those who chose "change," as many as 91% voted for Obama, while McCain was more preferred by those who chose "experience," of which 93% voted for him.

Packaging Obama the Product as the Agent of Change

The second key in Obama branding of change appears to be his messages, particularly in (1) the dominant tone of positivism, (2) clear distinctions from his rivals as well as from politics as usual in Washington, accompanied with well-performed brand management, and finally, (3) the contextualization or packaging of each of the messages in an appealing American story.

FIGURE 2 and **FIGURE 3** illustrate a list of major messages in the positive as well as negative branding of Obama and his major opponents: Figure 2 contrasts Obama with Hillary Clinton during the Democratic primaries, and Figure 3 contrasts him with John McCain under the clout of George W. Bush during the general election period [24] respectively.

Message strategy is broken down into four types of messages, given in a box: the candidate's messages on the candidate, the opponent's messages on the opponent, the candidate's messages on the opponent, and the opponent's messages on the candidate. The first two types of messages, consisting of self-definitions of his or her personal qualities, policy concepts, and style, are understood to comprise the key components of positive branding. These positive messages may be more effective when they are paired with the counter (negative) branding messages of the third and forth types, which define his or her rival negatively and thus, make clear the distinctions between the two competitors [25].

The first major finding here was the dominant tone of *positivism*.

---

22 Based on the exit poll result provided by ABC News.
23 Based on the exit poll result provided by MSNBC.
24 Campaign strategies are supposed to be different for the primaries and for the general election because candidates challenge different competitor, target different groups of voters and use different amounts of available resources.
25 For reference to a message box and message strategies, see Ronald Faucheux, *Running For Office* (New York: Evans, 2002), p80.

FIGURE 2:   Branding Message Boxes: Obama VS. Clinton

	Positive Branding	Counter (Negative) Branding
	Obama on Obama	**Obama on Clinton**
Personal Qualities	First as Multi-Racial Empathy Inspiring (*Yes, we can*) Millenium Grassroots	Substantial Experience? Detached Paternal Babyboomers Party Establishment
Style & Policies	Hope (*Change we can believe in*) Change Culture in Washington Uniter/Bipartisan Progressive Voluntarism Anti-Iraq War	More of the Same The Clinton/Bush Era Divider/Partisan Compromising Flip-flopping in Iraq War
	Clinton on Clinton	**Clinton on Obama**
Personal Qualities	First as Woman Experience (*Ready for change*) Global Career	Race Factor as Tactics Not Ready/Tested Community Organizer
Style & Policies	Solution (*Yes, we will*) Leadership Realism	Eloquence Only Risky Fantasy

FIGURE 3:   Branding Message Boxes: Obama VS. McCain/Bush

	Positive Branding	Counter (Negative) Branding
	Obama on Obama	**Obama on McCain/Bush**
Personal Qualities	First as Multi-Racial Empathy/Dialogue Cool Judgement Millenium Generation	Culturally Intolerant Out of Sync/Dogmatic Hot Temper Vietnam Hero
Style & Policies	*Change we need* Uniter/Bipartisan Responsible Government Open/Transparent Common Interests Grassroots/Bottom-up Pragmatic Restore Confidence in USA Smart Diplomacy/Dialogue Globalist	More of the Same Divider/Partisan Irresponible Government Secretive/Unaccountable Special Interests Party Machine/Top-down Ideological Disgraced USA Hardliner Unilateralism
	McCain on McCain	**McCain/Bush on Obama**
Personal Qualities	*Country First* Honor/Patriot Experience Man of Faith	Not Born in USA No Patriot Not Ready/Tested Empty Celebrity
Style & Policies	Strong America Leadership Maverick Moderate	Risky Party-Aligned (voting records) Socialism

The positive branding of Obama defines him the product by what he is or does, rather than by what he is not or does not. Obama message strategies were mostly positive rather than negative, and helped him frame this election as a choice between "hope" (*change we can believe in*) and "more of the same." This in turn helped him energize his passionate supporters, encouraging their increased commitment to the campaign. He was also an outstanding deliverer of a coherent brand package comprising his personal qualities, policy concepts, and campaign style, along with a symbol of hope for change.

The second finding was his *clear distinctions* from his rivals as well as from politics as usual in Washington, accompanied with well-performed *brand management*.

On the one hand, his positive brand was more carefully managed in contrast to those of his rivals, with well-targeted counter branding, such as "Change we need" versus "More of the same."

On the other hand, his counter branding was also carefully managed so as to not be too personal, and not stray too far from widely-shared perceptions among the public concerning the personalities of his opponents. For example, Obama instead liked to center the discussion around how the government should work, such as "Responsible" versus "Irresponsible," or "Transparent" versus "Secretive."

In this way, Obama messages emphasized the need for substantial change not only in terms of political players, but also in the rules of the game in Washington, thereby nullifying the experience that his opponents had claimed as their brand. He avoided personal attacks while carefully praising his rivals for their long-term service for the nation, either as a Senator, a war hero, or as the President of the United States.

Another example occurred in the primaries when he contrasted himself with Clinton in the style of "Bottom-up" versus "Top-down," instead of resorting to a character attack. Top-down, associated with paternalism and obtrusiveness, was assumed to be Clinton's style, while he presented his own style as bottom-up, associated with grassroots voluntarism and openness. The contrast was typically presented in such details as the designs of their campaign websites: Clinton's appeared to be fit more for conventional and square Windows PCs, while Obama's suited the freer, creative and user-friendly Macintosh [26].

The public seem to have shared these contrasts and thus perceived the distinctive bland power of the Obama campaign in some way or other. **<u>FIGURE 4</u>** illustrates how the public perceived the distinctions among the presidential and vice presidential candidates for both parties and how they described those candidates as different brands of coffee, cars, computers and so on. This figure was based on a large 1,000-sample survey that a well-known PR company conducts to figure out the branding power of presidential candidates for every election year. The figure indicates that Obama was perceived distinctive as BMW, keeping a high-brow image. He may have also seen freer and

---

26 See Norm Cohen, "Is Obama a Mac and Clinton a PC?" *New York Times*, Business section, 4 February 2008.

more creative, innovative, interactive and grassroots-minded than others, as he was associated with such brands as Macintosh computer or iPhone.

FIGURE 4: 2008 Presidential ImagePower Brand List

	Obama	**Biden**	**McCain**	**Palin**
Coffee	Starbucks	Starbucks	Starbucks	Starbucks
Car	BMW	Ford	Ford	Ford
Computer	Mac/PC	PC	PC	PC
Fast Food	McDonalds	McDonalds	McDonalds	Wendy's
Magazine	People	BusinessWeek	BusinessWeek	People
Beer	Samuel Adams	Samuel Adams	Budweiser	Budweiser
Smartphone	iPhone	Blackberry	Blackberry	Blackberry

Source: Landor Associates and Penn, Shoen & Berland, October 2008, online survey on 1,002 samples.

In sum, Obama took a high road in branding by keeping a positive tone and also by evading character assassination and mudslinging. It should be noted here that this approach was made possible only through his well-performed brand management. For example, the brand Obama was carefully managed in terms of quick response and swift crisis control, exemplified through his website such as *fightsthesmears.com*. Another website of his crisis control, *rader.barackobama. com*, was built for the purpose of immediate fact-checking against smears from every direction while providing full and correct information so that the campaign and supporters could use to refute. These sites, which were built immediately after the end of primaries, helped Obama, on the one hand, neutralize the impact of hostile counter branding from his opponent, and on the other hand, allowed him to maintain his principles: be open and responsive.

The final and most important point to consider was *the story* associated with his brand. In other words, his messages, being contextualized or packaged in an appealing American story, delivered as a whole a strong appeal of his brand as a change agent with a clear direction, and thus helped him energize and organize a various kind of supporters into a coalition.

A product can be evolved into the only-one brand, not only by its superb qualities but also by an impressive storyline or historic scene that the product is associated with. Obama's uniqueness as a Washington outsider or as a would-be first African-American president, along with his distinct policy messages and style, integrated him as the product within the historical context of an opening of new era in American politics with a revived American government which should be active, populist and responsible. Consequently, his change did not lose direction, but instead was able to *evolve* in sync with a familiar and hopeful story of what America should be like.

For example, his government was understood as seeking to change Washington by working not for certain groups of people nor for special interests, but rather *for the people* who would stand united and work together as citizens to reestablish common values in their communities. His

consistent belief in government that works, as well as his reformist values on open government and transparency, were clearly presented in his agenda and style, which altogether delivered a powerful and distinctive image of his brand.

A positive and committed government in pursuit of the common interest represents the key element of change from the Bush era: it was this role that the Bush administration had dismissed, leaving as it did most of the responsibilities to the private sector [27]. In fact, as Republican pollster Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute indicates, more people preferred an active role for government in 2008 compared to previous election years since 1994, which likely made a difference [28].

As **TABLE 4** illustrates, "smaller government/more private discretion" has been a long trend among Americans since at least 1994, though "pro-active government" has gradually increased in the same time frame. The 2008 exit poll result indicates a dramatic shift in favor of active government, which a majority (53%) supported, among whom the predominant preference was for Obama over McCain by 8 to 2.

TABLE 4: The Public Wants Active Government in 2008: Views on the Role of Government in Exit Poll Results 1994-2008

	2008 Total	2008 Obama	2008 McCain	2004	2002	2000	1996	1994
	vertical 100%	horizontal 100%	horizontal 100%	vertical 100%	vertical 100%	vertical 100%	vertical 100%	vertical 100%
(a) ACTIVE GOVERNMENT - Government should do more to solve the problems	54	77	21	46	47	43	44	42
(b) PRIVATE DISCRETION - Government is doing too many things better left to individuals and business	43	27	71	49	53	52	56	59
(a) — (b)	11			-3	-6	-9	-12	-17

Source：2008 Exit Poll provided by MSNBC and Handout at the American Enterprise Institute＇s Election Watch 2008, Session 10, November 6, 2008, Washington, DC.

This shift was most likely accelerated by the mid-September financial crisis, as well as by the lack of governmental control and intervention in the market. It may reasonably be expected to provide the Obama administration with a moral basis for responsible government and for investing in social infrastructure, such as public education, health care, global warming strategies and energy sustainability, and greater governmental intervention in corporate responsibility.

How has Obama done so far? *Washington Post* columnist Dan Froomkin provides an evaluation of President Obama as an agent of change in his first 100 days:

"[We are] awed by the tectonic shifts he has set in motion...it's pretty much exactly what he said he would do, it's just the scale is bigger than anyone anticipated... we are reminded of how

---

27 See for example David Brooks, "A date with scarcity," *New York Times*, 4 November 2008.
28 Comment on a handout of exit poll results provided at *AEI's Election Watch 2008, Session 10*, 6 November 2008, Washington, DC.

profoundly different Obama is from Bush not just in his policies but in his background, his character, his vision...and in terms of his thought processes, his cadences, his gut."

Froomkin takes examples ranging from Obama's ambitious budget proposals in defiance of the Washington establishment and his re-engagement with the international community, to his devotion to bailing out banks and his responses to torture and state secrets privilege, and then closes with a citation from Michael Tomasky of *The Guardian*:

"George Bush and Dick Cheney wanted an infantile citizenry...They wanted Americans to be fearful and to need daddy's protection...Obama wants people to be citizens. He wants them to play a role in shaping their own destiny...He wants people to think. [In the mid-April Georgetown speech on the economy, for example] he tries to clarify, but he does not try to simplify. He trusts that citizens can hold two concepts, even competing and contradictory ones, in their heads at one time...The [poll] numbers don't lie. The people, committed conservatives excepted, like being treated as adults for a change" [29].

PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER-IN-CHIEF AND "OBAMA 2.0"

The final question this paper will consider is Obama's promotion and public relations strategies. Those strategies not only represented the features of Obama campaign (ala McLuhan's "the media is the message") but also may well have predicted the bottom-up, interactive and transparent style of his governance, *Obama 2.0* [30]. This is the exact point where Obama's branding of change appeared to come to full fruition, with the concept of *government by the people*, marking clear distinctions from the Bush era.

Obama Marketing Communications by the Numbers

It is well-known that the Obama campaign waged an extraordinarily skillful communications strategy online and offline—or even integrating both seamlessly (*inline*)—to connect with supporters, to organize and mobilize them, and to raise enormous amounts of fund from more than 3.1 million small donations.

It is helpful to start with an overview of his campaign communications by the numbers as described below. The snapshot of comparison with McCain is shown in **FIGURE5**.

---

29 Dan Froomkin, "White House Watch: Obama the change agent," *Washingtonpost.com*, 29 April 2009.
30 "2.0" refers to an evolution of online communications and marketing where micro-targeting, consumer voluntarism, and civic influencers matter in people's choices.

FIGURE 5: Obama 2008 PR by the Numbers

Media/Social Media	Obama	vs. McCain
Video on YouTube	1,792 uploaded (since 11/'06	5.4 to 1 (since 02/'07)
	Subscribers: 115 thousand	4 to 1
	Channel Views: 18 million	9 to 1
Facebook	Supporters: 2.4 million	3.8 to 1
MySpace	Friends: 830 thousand	3.8 to 1
Twitter	@barackobama Followers: 112 thousand	@JohnMccain: 240 to 1 *unverified
TV ads (1/1-11/4, '08)	Spending: $310 million 571 thousand ads	2.3 to 1 2 to 1
Obama infomercial	Estimated cost: $3 million Audience: 33.6 million	

Source: CMAG data released on CNN.com; and Web Strategy by Jeremiah, "Snapshot of presidential candidate social networking stats," 3 November 2008, at *http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/ 2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats.*

1) Obama Fundraising in total

   = $750 million (a record in presidential campaigns).

2) Estimated TV ad spending and the number of ads (January 1 – November 4, 2008) [31]

   = Obama: $310 million, 571 thousand ads; McCain: $135 million, 275 thousand ads.

3) Obama's 30-minute infomercial "American Stories, American Solutions" which was aired on October 29, 2008 on three major networks and 4 cable stations

   = Estimated cost: $3 million, Audience size: 33.6 million.

4) Videos on YouTube for the Obama and McCain campaigns [32]

   =Obama: 1,792 videos uploaded since November 2006, Subscribers: 115 thousand (about 4 uploads a day), Channel views: 18 million.

   =McCain: 329 videos uploaded since February 2007, Subscribers: 28 thousand

   (about 2 uploads a day), Channel views: 2 million.

5) Facebook =Obama supporters: 2.4 million, McCain supporters: 620 thousand.

6) MySpace =Obama friends: 830 thousand, McCain friends: 220 thousand.

7) Twitter =Obama @barackobama: 112 thousand followers, McCain @JohnMcCain: 5 thousand followers (unverified).

8) Obama Inauguration Ceremony on January 20, 2009

---

31 Based on the CMAG data accumulated by CNN, which is available at *http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/map/ad.spending/index.htm*l.

32 Data for (4) (5) (6) and (7) is based on Web Strategy by Jeremiah, "Snapshot of presidential candidate social networking stats," 3 November 2008," at *http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2008/11/03/snapshot-of-presidential-candidate-social-networking-stats.*

= Onsite participants: 1.8 million, TV rating= 29.2% (the 4th highest in history).

= Predicted nationwide exchanges of online short messages= 1.4 billion.

Notably such wide gaps existed between Obama and McCain not only in the uses of innovative communication technologies and tools, but also in the spending of traditional TV advertising. While McCain had a cap on spending because he received federal fund, Obama, who was much better funded, was allowed to spend money more freely and flexibly on a blend of old and new media venues for campaign promotion.

The State-of-Art PR Strategies of the Obama Campaign — Five Features

Obviously the Obama campaign was familiar with new trends in the marketing world, along with innovative media uses and state-of-the-art public relations, and did not hesitate to apply them to the campaign whenever they appeared to be beneficial. It may be helpful to give an overview of the notable features in the Obama PR and marketing efforts which not only made difference in 2008 but also may affect the ways and modes of presidential campaigns in the future.

First of all, the key strategy here is *building communities*, in other words, establishing networks online or offline or both, in which the members would share some degree of passion and motivation in support of the campaign.

For example, the Obama campaign utilized the *BSD Online Tools Suite* for his primary campaign, "Obama for America 2008." Already touched on above, this was an integral online campaign software application which enabled campaigners to manage sophisticated online fundraising, constituency-building, issue advocacy, and peer-to-peer online networking. For example, supporters who joined the Obama campaign website, *barackobama.com*, were immediately categorized by districts, demographics and action history, etc., into 25 distinct groups. Then, like-minded people or those with a similar level of commitment were encouraged to form a community online (e.g., by building an in-house SNS, *mybarackobama.com*) or offline (e.g., by organizing a volunteer group or local community event). The members may have been further motivated to compete with each other for higher involvement and a greater number of "action points" earned [33].

Second, Obama knew that *consumer voluntarism and civic influencers* play a significant role in people's choices. In other words, he recognized the need to be marketed as a consumer-generated brand. Supporters were encouraged to become community leaders and act as personal influencers who could reach out to other outbound networks, such as through social media: notably *YouTube* and the SNS sites including *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Linkedin*. Through such strategies, campaigns can

---

33 Interview on Interview with Ben Self, the DNC e-campaign director and associate of *BlueStateDigital*, on 12 November 2008. The case study for *Obama for America '08* is available at the website of Blue State Digital, LLC. See *http://www.bluestatedigital.com*.

enhance their reach to countless people who are loosely tied but could be organized into an army of passionate volunteers. In short, generic dynamism among people is harnessed, but rather than being counterproductively forced, it is allowed to develop by itself.

The PR expert Hisami Oshiba indicates that Obama could energize the grassroots through social media because he understood that sharing information and transparency mattered to them [34]. His career as a community organizer may have had much to do with his openness and unobtrusiveness in networking the grassroots: he knew how effective bottom-up organizations functioned.

Third, the Obama campaign was also innovative in its large-scale use of *instant and personalized messaging via cellphones,* for example through *Twitter.*

The cellphone can be an efficient campaign tool, particularly for reaching out to the younger generation and minorities who may not have home phones, and for swift and timely dissemination of personalized messages as well as the sharing of interactive audio-visual messages among them. The Obama campaign also provided iPhone users with free campaign software, *Obama '08*, which enabled the volunteers to call for support, fundraising or mobilization through *BYOP* (Bring your own phone) as well as to manage the calling list, receive campaign updates, or contact the local HQ if necessary.

Oshiba isolates four points that characterize the successful cellphone strategies of the Obama campaign [35]: 1) Timely messages with appropriate frequency; 2) Personalized and authentic appeals; 3) High Return on Investment (ROI) and a large scale of "Word of Mouth" marketing (WOM) [36], such as buzz marketing, viral marketing, grassroots marketing, and influencer marketing; and 4) A long-term strategy of cellphone use in coordination with other channels of messages.

Forth, in all likelihood the most significant effect that innovative high-technology may have on the electoral process will be its fundraising capabilities, as was proven in the Obama 2008 campaign. *High-tech fundraising* may dramatically change entire promotion and communications strategies or tactics, such as expensive TV ad purchases.

Obama did not accept federal fund because he knew that he could raise significant funds which would enable him to spend flexibly on a daily basis without a cap on spending. McCain, on the other hand, was miserably under-funded, receiving public finances and consequently having his spending limited. Obama's decision made a notable difference, particularly in the last-minute TV ad spending

34 Hisami Oshiba, "Analyzing the Obama campaign from a marketing perspective (2)," in Japanese, *Nikkei Business Online*, 5 January 2009. See *http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/nmg/20081225/181349/*.

35 Hisami Oshiba, "Analyzing the Obama campaign from a marketing perspective (3)," in Japanese, *Nikkei Business Online*, 2 February 2009. See *http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/nmg/20090129/184297/*.

36 Word-of-Mouth marketing includes, for example, buzz marketing, viral marketing, community marketing, grassroots marketing, evangelical marketing, seed marketing, influencer marketing, social movement marketing, brand blog marketing, and so on. See "Feature: Development of Word-of-Mouth Marketing," *Dentsu Ad Studies*, Vol.20, 2007, p4.

not only in the battleground states but also in the red states, including Indiana. Obama poured more than 16 million dollars (four times as much as McCain did) into ad buys in Indiana from January 1 until Election Day [37]. Eventually the state, one of the reddest states 4 years ago, surprisingly fell into the blue column, revealing the soundness of Obama's strategy.

Finally, massive advantage in fundraising also enabled the Obama campaign to exploit *a blend of old and new media* flexibly depending on its targets, which is the fifth feature of Obama public relations. As for ad spending on digital media, Obama, again, outspent McCain by a ratio of 10 to 1. Steve McClellan of *ADWEEk* predicts that this "blend of digital and old media will likely be a blueprint of political advertising," and that in this sense "Obama creates new campaign template" [38].

Obama as Strategic Communicator-in-Chief

The promotion skills described above clearly resonated with today's marketing trends, such as direct marketing, word-to-mouth marketing, and peer-to-peer empathy marketing where "customer relations management (CRM)" and personalized public relations, as well as consumer voluntarism and civic influencers, are key.

President Obama and his White House communication team clearly understand this, and have tried to evolve the brand assets he accumulated during the campaign so that he can establish an interactive, bottom-up style of governance. This represents not only a radical shift from the Bush presidency, but moreover can be seen as a distinction from the Clinton presidency, which has often been characterized as applying marketing skills for "manipulation" rather than increasing "responsiveness" [39].

While it is premature to evaluate Obama's efforts from this perspective, we may reasonably assume that he needs to "sell" his difficult or complex agenda to both the public and Congress in a "permanent campaign" mode.

Reportedly, Obama, whose top agenda item is the recovery of the U.S. economy, has learned from history, particularly from Franklin D. Roosevelt. This is evident, for example, in his strategies of governance and public relations, where the following points are emphasized: 1) Conversation with the American public; 2) Use of all available media, including the most up-to-date techniques, to communicate with the public and rally support; 3) Striking a balance, that is, emphasizing the depth of the problem, but not being so pessimistic in perspective; 4) Putting pressure on Congress while controlling expectations from the public; and 5) No *War Room*-like campaigns, such as the

---

37 Based on the CMAG data provided by CNN, which is available at *http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/map/ ad.spending/index.htm*l.
38 Steve McClellan, "Obama creates new campaign template," *ADWEEK*, 10 November 2008.
39 See Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President*, 1994. See also Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

ones under the Bush administration which represented a closed, centralized and top-down style of governance [40].

Obama started working on his innovative public relations immediately after the election:

1) As soon as the campaign was over, president-elect Obama decided that his campaign communication team should continue their duties in the White House; they include Robert Gibbs (spokesman), Daniel Pfeiffer (communications director) and John Favreau (speech writer).

2) In early November, he launched his transition website, *Change.gov*, for the purpose of getting his messages across and encouraging interactive/transparent customer relations as well. His official campaign site was renamed *Organizing for America* for the purpose of promoting his agenda through the grassroots activities.

3) He started weekly presidential YouTube addressees instead of conventional Saturday radio addresses.

4) His inauguration was conducted on January 20th.

5) He issued on January 21st a Presidential memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies on *Transparency and Open Government*, in which he gave orders for full information disclosure online, for an increase in opportunities for dialogue with the public online, for example through using blogs, and for establishing tougher limitations on the power of lobbyists to influence government from within [41].

6) He began an internal discussion on how he could retool online grassroots groups organized for his campaign on YouTube, Twitter and through social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn [42]. "Obama 2.0" was referred to by ex-campaign manager David Plouffe.

7) He made an appeal for the Muslim world to begin conversation, via Al Arabia on January 27th.

8) The first town hall meeting was held, in Elkhart, Indiana on February 9th where the jobless rate was as bad as 15%.

9) The first prime-time press conference was held on February 9th.

10) State Secretary Clinton launched a "listening tour" and held town hall meetings in East Asia in late February.

11) The Presidential address was given before Congress on February 24th.

12) He tried to shift the public focus from the AIG bonus to his budget proposal by appearing on TV shows, including Jay Leno's "The Tonight Show" and CBS' "60 Minutes" in mid-March.

---

40 Adam Nagourney, "Obama looks to history for economic message," *New York Times*, 11 January 2009.
41 Memorandum available at *http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Transparency_and_OpenGovernment*.
42 See Jim Rutenberg and Adam Nagourney, "Melding Obama's Web to a YouTube Presidency," *New York Times*, 25 January 2009.

13) The second press conference was held on March 24th.

14) The first electronic town hall meeting, "Open for Questions," was held in the White House on March 26th.

15) Town hall meetings were conducted during the European tour in early April.

16) He launched from the end of April, commemorating his first 100 days, a swing-state town hall meeting tour, "Listening to America," across Missouri, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Virginia.

17) He marked his first 100 days with a speech in a town hall meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 29th.

Obama 2.0. — Will an Innovative Brand of Presidency Work?

Peter Wallsten of the *Los Angeles Times* [43] reports that Obama plans to set up an internal organization, or a political machine, *Barack Obama 2.0.*

It is assumed to be "designed to sustain a grassroots network of millions that was mobilized last year to elect Obama and now is widely considered the country's most potent political machine." Wallsten also notes that "the scope of this permanent campaign structure is unprecedented for a president," and that the Obama team "would use the network in part to pressure lawmakers to help him pass complex legislation on the economy, healthcare and energy." The organization could have "an annual budget of $75 million in privately raised funds," and deploy hundreds of paid staff members "one for every congressional district in certain politically important states and even more in larger battlegrounds such as Florida, Ohio, Colorado, Virginia and North Carolina."

Chris Cillizza of *The Washington Post* [44] adds that Obama plans to "keep control of his massive grassroots army in the hands of a small number of loyalists" and also that, according to Obama's ex-campaign manager David Plouffe, the goal of the new grassroots operation is to secure buy-in from the millions of people who donated or volunteered during the campaign. At the same time, Plouffe had to admit that it would take much longer to figure out what supporters wanted to undertake for the next operation, as well as how he could turn campaign supporters into a grassroots group organized now around legislation or their own community issues.

However, things do not appear to be working as conveniently as Obama aides may want them to. It was not so long ago that an activist group strongly disagreed with then-Senator Obama on his own campaign website, *My.BarackObama.com*, when Obama voted for Telecom immunity as a compromise bill for the extension of the *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act* (FISA) which had been pushed forward by President Bush [45]. The grassroots supporters could potentially say no to the

---

43 Peter Wallsten, "Retooling Obama's campaign machine for the long haul," *Los Angels Times*, 14 January 2009.

44 Chris Cillizza, "Plouffe on 'Obama 2.0'", *Washington Post the Fix Blog*, 13 January 2009.

45 See Sarah Wheaton, "Obama responds to FISA on his web site," *New York Times the Caucus Blog*, 3 Jury 2008. See also "President Obama, please get FISA right," *http://my.barackobama.com/page/group/SenatorObama-PleaseVoteAgainstFISA*.

Obama agenda, in part or in whole, to say nothing of a specific bill.

The same holds true this time around. Some journalists are opposed to the idea that Obama can "marshal his online forces and engage them against his targets." It is possible that, now effectively organized, they may decide to move against him, according to Eric Etheridge of *The New York Times* [46].

Etheridge explains that this had begun to happen as early as January. He cites Ari Melber of *Nation* to the effect that Obama's spokesman tried to dodge the question of whether Obama would appoint a special prosecutor to investigate possible war crimes during the Bush administration. The question had been voted to the top of a list of citizens' questions submitted to the new administration via *Change.gov*. The activist who submitted the question campaigned for an appointment, while progressive websites criticized the dodging. As the national media began to pay attention, Obama was compelled to answer in an ABC interview with George Stephanopoulos; he indicated that he wanted to prioritize moving forward but did not rule out a special prosecutor. It made the front page of *The New York Times.*

Henry Farrell writes at the website *Crooked Timber*,

"This goes to the heart of the contradictions that the Obama people successfully managed to straddle during the campaign, but are going to have increasing difficulty in dealing with going forward. The Obama people combined very tight top-down message control and campaign coordination with a fair degree of openness at the bottom to independent initiatives by volunteers. A long as everyone agreed on the underlying goal (beating the Republicans), this worked. But as that overwhelming imperative recedes, people are going to start pursuing their own objectives... and the 'open' architecture that the Obama people have constructed provides them with plenty of opportunities to do this."

Of course, it may be assumed that it will take considerable time and opportunities for trial and error before the Obama administration can take full advantage of their skills, techniques and brand assets for a new presidency. Dialogue, transparency and responsiveness cannot easily be attained in a modern democracy where competing or conflicting interests need to be aligned or compromised, where clusters of complicated issues are too difficult for non-experts to deal with, and where the market of the electorate itself is too elusive for any skilled practitioner of marketing to catch up with.

Perhaps, all we can do is to hope for change, as Obama spoke during the campaign: "what we know—what we have seen—is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope—the audacity to hope—for what we can and must achieve tomorrow" [47].

---

46 Eric Etheridge, "Obama 2.0: Who's leading who?" *New York Times Opinionator Blog*, 16 January 2009.
47 A citation from the "Perfect Union" speech by Obama on March 18, 2008.

ENDNOTE — DISCUSSION

It is never a new idea that marketing concepts and its tools can effectively be applied not only for business/commercial campaigns but also for pro-social campaigns, such as those conducted by the WHO, the UNICEF, or numerous other NPO groups, as well as for large or small political campaigns, ranging from civic single-issue advocacies to the promotion of the presidential agenda [48]. Marketing can be an effective tool for increasing the purchase of products, for earning the fund for activities, or for gaining the approval or votes of the electorate in a competitive setting. Campaigners, who want to stay competitive and survive, need to learn about the market and thus make their product and service more receptive to the customers or the public.

However, we often find people reluctant to accept those realities that marketing can break into the public sphere, such as electoral processes and political governance. For those people, their political hero, such as Obama, should not count on such a vulgar approach to ascend to the power. He could not have been selling him the product as if he were soap or a car. Some critiques may even argue that applying business/commercial model in the public sphere would ruin our democratic processes, for example by transforming independent citizens into a horde of customers who are to be propagated, courted and pampered [49]. These fears may sound reasonable in a mass democracy.

Nonetheless it may be worth noting that, with the aid of political marketing, the Obama campaign successfully inspired politically alienated people, getting them reconnected with the process and organizing the grassroots into a powerful political voice. Obama reached 'nitch' markets of the electorate nationwide which could never have been identified without microtargeting tools. He also closed the gap between politics and people by peer marketing and community building with high-tech marketing tools. Nowadays policy discussions become so complicated and detailed that even an informed citizen may find it difficult to understand every issue or its relevance to his/her own life. Under these circumstances, packaging into a brand may provide people with a clear image of the product, in other words, a broad context where every single issue lies. Branding technique allowed Obama to build an unique and distinctive hopeful brand of change, raising as much of small donations as over 750 million dollars alone, as well as securing the mandate to push forward his agenda and making his American dream happen.

No doubt Obama and his way to the White House was a great successful American story that the American people have anxiously waited for during the last 50 years since Martin Luther King gave speech in Washington. An important reality here was that not only the African Americans but

---

48 For reference to pro-social campaigns, see for example Philip Kotler and Edward L. Roberto, *Social Marketing* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1989). For political campaigns, see Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President* (Thousand Oaks, CA: sage, 1994).
49 See for example Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

also the people nationwide—across-the-board—shared the perception of Obama as a change agent who was ready to make this national dream really happen. His story was a great successful American branding story for change, which has just begun.