

**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**Cyber-Campaign 2000:**

**The Function of the Internet in Canadian Electoral Politics**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

History has shown that innovation in communication technology translate into innovations in politics and political communication. This notion has lead many to consider the potentiality of the Internet as a political tool. The Internet began playing a role in election campaigns around 1994. However, much of the literature on the Internet in the political arena is largely anecdotal. Using the 2000 Canadian General Election as a case study, this thesis examines function of the Internet in Canadian electoral politics. After an in-depth examination of four Canadian political partie Web sites, this thesis outlines the many ways in which the Internet functioned in this election. This thesis suggests that campaign 2000 will be remembered as the election when political campaigning went online becoming *cyber-campaigning*, as the Internet clearly played a role for political parties. Moreover, it concludes that the Internet has created a new venue for politics in Canada.

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**To my parents, Margaret & Wesley.**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **The Tripartite System**

Politics and communication are inextricably linked. Regardless of the mode, whether it was the spoken word that dominated the public houses or the visual images of television in the modern era, communication is a necessary link between the governors and the governed. The centrality of the media to the political process has led scholars to regard it as the fourth branch of government or the fourth estate signalling its role as an “essential pillar of democracy” (Siegal, 1993, p.18). The importance of media is also constitutionally entrenched in many western democratic nations. Part I, Section 2 of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* states that every Canadian has the fundamental “freedom of thought, belief, opinions and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication” (Charter). This freedom allows for the unfettered exchange of ideas and views on any topic, including the government, politicians and policy matters by an individual or media organizations. Moreover, as media scholar Frederick Fletcher (1981) noted in his submission to the *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, when Canadians accept and acknowledge the notion of freedom of the press, we also accept a “press which performs a public service through social criticism and education” (6). Here, Fletcher identified two essential features of the media in politics. First, the media is the watchdog of the political system, ensuring the legitimacy of our governments. Second, the media performs an educative role, as much of the information about the political process that is available to citizens comes through the media (Wallace & Fletcher, 1984). Essentially in politics, the media, the government and the public form a ‘tripartite system’ (Tumber & Bromley 1998).

However in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this tripartite system faces a challenge from a newly emerging communications technology, the Internet.

### **Enter the Internet**

Since the early 1990s, the Internet, “the global network of networks” (Rash, 1997, ix), has gone from being the playground of academics and computer geeks to a public space inhabited by more than four hundred million regular users worldwide (November 2000). The Net has taken the world by storm; the number of users of this still young medium has increased by three hundreds times since 1993 (International Technology and Trade Associates & the United States Internet Council, 2000). Moreover current predictions indicate that by 2005, worldwide users of the Internet could exceed one billion (International Technology and Trade Associates & the United States Internet Council, 2000).

While only in its adolescence, the Internet has invaded the daily lives of individuals, businesses and even politics in Canada and across the globe. Statistics Canada recently reported that 13 million Canadians, that is 53%, used the Internet from home, at work or from some other location in 2000 (Dryburgh, 2001). Since 1994 the number of Canadians using the Internet has increased by 35%. Despite the large scale population difference, Canada is on par with the United States in terms of Net penetration and use (International Technology and Trade Associates & the United States Internet Council, 2000). Not only are Canadians becoming rapidly connected to the Internet, “more households indicate that computer communications have become a part of their daily lives” (Dickinson & Ellison, 1999a, p. 33). Communications via e-mail, general browsing and searching for specific information on the World Wide Web (WWW) are among the top activities that Canadians participated in when

using the Internet.

While extremely popular, personal and home use of the Internet is not the only way people are utilizing this new medium. The Internet is also reshaping the corporate workplace, by spawning a growing list of exclusively online businesses and is becoming a tool for traditional businesses to meet with millions of potential customers (Davis, 2000). There is also a growing interest in the Net by educational institutions. With schools all over North America becoming wired and the Web as a new venue for distance education. According to some the Net is becoming the virtual classroom of the future. The music industry, the stock market and journalism have also been dramatically altered by invasive nature of the Net.

Another indication of the Internet's rapid growth can be witnessed by examining the explosion of online material. Recent studies reported that in January 2000 there were one billion unique and indexable Web pages, 6.4 million servers and 4.5 million web sites appearing on the World Wide Web. Six months later, by June 2000, the number of web pages had doubled to two billion unique and indexable web pages (ITTA & USIC, 2000). The social significance of the Web lies in its ability to provide millions of people regardless of location with an enormous amount of information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

While the basic conceptual structure of the Internet was created by the American military in 1967, the Internet as it looks and feels today is only a decade old. Due to the sweeping effects the Internet has had on society in the areas of personal communication, information retrieval, corporate affairs and education, many observers have compared the development of Internet technology to the advent of the printing press, ordaining the Internet as the most 'revolutionary' communication technology since Gutenberg. *The State of the*

*Internet* (2000), a study conducted by the International Technology and Trade Associates (ITTA) & the United States Internet Council (USIC), claims that the “Internet is changing lives. The Internet has made more information accessible to more people. It is fundamentally changing the way we communicate and live” (p.19). Davis sees the Internet as “the instigator of social revolution” (9). These two views are echoed by a respected science and technology writer, Wade Rowland (1999) who predicts that the “Internet is destined to become the world’s most important medium” (p.322).

### **The Internet, Politics and Democracy**

Political commentators have also made similar claims about the role of this new technology in the political arena. For instance, former President Clinton aide, Dick Morris (1999) writes of the Internet, that “there is a quiet but radical revolution shaking the very foundation of our politics” (p. xxii). Not all pundits and scholars, however, are as confident as Morris about the changes that the Net might bring to politics and democracy. Rather, there is an extensive and heated debate about the possible benefits and drawbacks of the Internet in relation to political communication. Despite disagreements among scholars on the nature of the change, none of them can dispute that the Internet *is* changing politics and political communications as we know it. In 1992, when there were less than 100,000 regular Internet users worldwide, presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Ross Perot made references to the ‘information superhighway’ in the campaign. The 1996 presidential campaign is considered a “landmark” for computer mediated political communication, as it “marks the year that political candidates began rushing to establish a presence ‘on the net’” (Whillock, 1997, p. 1209). The 1996 United States election campaign indicated to all that Internet technology

was expanding into political territory. However the use of this technology in 1996 can be compared to the use of television by Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, as something quite experimental. Two years later, during the 1998 US midterm elections, 95% of governorship candidates and 72% of state candidates had home pages on the World Wide Web (Cuilla Kamarck, 1999). By September 2000, the US presidential race had inspired more than 6,700 campaign related sites on the Net (USIC, 2000), including campaign sites for all major presidential contenders.

The Internet's explosion into politics has not been limited to the United States or to election campaigns. In Canada, all the provincial and territorial governments, the Government of Canada and many municipalities have their own web sites. The Canadian parliamentary Web site has email links to all Members of Parliament and many of them have their own homepages. National and international interest groups, such as Council for Canadian Unity and Greenpeace, have sites on the Web. Most critically for this study, political parties at the federal and provincial levels can be found in cyberspace, and these Web sites have been used as a political tools, albeit a limited one, in Canadian elections since 1997.

There are even claims that the Internet has won an election. According to journalist Diane Francis, former pro wrestler Jesse Ventura, "will go down in history as the world's first 'virtual candidate' who won despite a 'virtual campaign'" (2000, February 14, p. A13). Ventura faced an uphill battle for the governorship of Minnesota. First, he was a third party candidate in an traditionally two-party system. Ventura also lacked the necessary funds and field organization to mount a typical ground and television campaign. However, by using the Internet, he was able to gain much needed exposure, communicate with supporters and raise

campaign funds. The Ventura organization even used the Internet to solicit bank loans to the campaign (Cuilla Kamarck, 1999). Ventura's upset victory was a shot heard around the world of political campaigning. It demonstrated that the Internet "could be a fast, cheap and effective campaigning tool for a candidate short on funds and infrastructure" (Fromm, 2000, May 15, p. 19).

As Browning has observed, the "Internet has figured into every conceivable combination and permeation of the . . . political dialogue" (Browning, 1996, p. 4), just like the dramatic effects it has had on personal communication, business and education. This realization has lead Hill & Hughes (1998) to make the following observation:

In 1994, if a political party or interest group had even a rudimentary Web site, it was a pioneer in the Information Age. In 1995, if a party or organization had a flashy series of Web pages that included graphics, audio, video, and text, it was hip. In 1996, if a candidate for president has a Web site, he would likely give out the address for it during televised appearances, as Bob Dole did in the second presidential debate against Bill Clinton. By 1997, if a party or interest group *still* did not have a Web site, it was run by a bunch of idiots (p.133).

The tripartite system of government, the traditional media and the public can no longer be considered dominant. As we have seen the Internet has invaded the political arena and is providing a new avenue for dialogue and information exchange among citizens, politicians and government.

### **Medium Theory, Communications Technology and Politics**

Will the Internet revolutionize politics and democracy? With the World Wide Web only a decade old, and with user penetration rates far from universal, at this point it is difficult to tell. Looking back to television, we can only now see the extent to which TV altered the

nature of politics and society in general. Nevertheless our experience with television and other mass mediums, teaches us a valuable lesson: modern communication technology has an enormous influence on the nature and character of our political system (Grossman, 1996).

The notion that communication technology influences society stems from a theoretical tradition established by two Canadian scholars, Harold Adams Innis and Herbert Marshall McLuhan. Innis was concerned with the control potentiality of different mediums of communication. Mediums that are in short supply or require special skill will allow for a centralization of power by elites. Despite the introduction of the printing press by Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, lack of literacy among the general populace and limited printed materials, allowed the clergy and aristocracy to maintain control over the masses. Mediums that are accessible to people allow for the decentralization of power and serve to “democratize a culture” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 16). McLuhan, a self-proclaimed student of Innis, saw communications technology as ‘extensions of man,’ in that these technologies extended our human senses and influenced the structure of society. McLuhan divides history into three distinct periods, oral, writing/printing and electronic, whereby each period is characterized by its own interplay of the senses, forms of thinking and communicating (Meyrowitz, 1985).

The ideas and writings of Innis and McLuhan have influenced an entire scholarly tradition, called medium theory. Joshua Meyrowitz (1994) argued that medium theorists such as himself “have tried to call attention to the potential influences of communication technologies in addition to and apart from the content they convey” (p. 50). He goes on to add that they “focus on the particular characteristics of each individual medium or each

particular type of media” (p. 50). Medium theory differs from traditional media theories, such as Gerbner’s cultivation theory or agenda setting, in that it does not focus on the content of the message. Rather, as the name suggests, this theory focuses on the nature of the medium itself and its effects on societal organization. This theory is not so much concerned with what’s on TV, as it is with TV itself. As McLuhan’s famous saying goes “the medium is the message.” According to McLuhan (1995) this means

that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – results from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves or by any new technology (p. 7).

There are two levels of analysis for medium theorists. At the micro or individual level, scholars are concerned with how the choice of one medium over another affects a particular interaction or situation (Meyrowitz, 1994). At the macro or cultural level, theorists address how the introduction of a new medium alters social structures and interactions. It is at the macro level that questions about the Internet and politics should be considered.

The Internet is the latest in a long line of communication mediums that have transformed and altered society and politics. The introduction of print journalism, radio and television have each changed political life in some way. To examine the effects of each of these mediums on politics is beyond the scope of this thesis; however it is necessary to provide a context for looking at the Internet as an agent for change in political communications. Therefore, television will be used to demonstrate how a medium can change the structures of political campaigning.

Between 1952 and 1960 newspapers and radio gave way to television as the predominant medium through which politicians communicated with citizens in Canada, the



United States and Great Britain (Spencer and Bolan, 1991). The defining moment for television in politicking came in 1960, with the televised presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. Those who listened to the debate on the radio thought that Nixon had clearly won this debate. However, those who watched the debate on television concluded that Kennedy had won. The clean cut and handsome J.F.K seemed much more comfortable on television than his rival. It became clear that the integration of visual images with audio in television had a different effect on the perceptions of viewers than did audio alone. Hearing the debate on radio was substantially different from seeing it on television. The lesson of the Nixon-Kennedy debate was that television had different imperatives than other mediums. In television, public affairs has merged with entertainment (Taras, 1990); therefore there is a predisposition toward the visually appealing, the dramatic, mass appeal and commercialism. The effects of television on politics were perhaps best articulated by Austin Ranney (1983) when he wrote that “the advent of television as the principal source of political reality for most Americans has altered the political game profoundly” (p. 89). These changes have not been lost on the candidates of today.

Today, television is the battleground on which modern election campaigns in industrial nations are fought. This centrality of television has made electoral contests essentially a contest of television performance (Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau, 2000). How well a candidate or political party can perform and manipulate television will have an influence on how well they will do at the polls. First, there are several traits that are valued in campaigning, such as “an attractive, youthful physical appearance and a mellifluous voice” (Davis, 1992). Media experts and consultants are hired by campaigners with the mandate to

create suitable and telegenic images of candidates. For instance David Taras (1999) notes that Reform Party leader Preston Manning went through a 'symbolic construction,' in the 1997 federal election,

Manning's personal appearance was highly choreographed; he had dispensed with his thick glasses and changed his hairstyle, a voice teacher had coached him so that his western twang would be less pronounced, and he would often appear in a blue denim shirt to emphasize his down-home populist politics (Taras, 1999, pp. 48-49).

By changing his image Manning was appealing to the audio-visual aspects of television. Today, candidates are fully aware that broadcasting has changed the process of image making, thus, a good portion of campaign resources are spent on campaign consultants and media experts.

Campaigns and candidates also change their activities to accommodate television coverage by arranging the campaign for the best media exposure possible (Graber, 1988). Candidates orchestrate pseudo-events in picturesque and symbolic locations to attract favourable television coverage. To borrow from political scientist Michael Robinson, these events are 'medialities,' that is, "they are events that take place mainly to be shown on television – events that, in the absence of television, would not take place at all or would take place in a different manner" (Ranney, 1983, p. 23). In Canada, the leader's tour and the televised leadership debates are important medialities. According to Taras (1990)

the arrival of television changed the nature of the leader's tour dramatically. By the late 1960s, the tour had become a television production with everything geared to reaching the audience at home with a potent visual message. The tour itself is a prop used by leaders to package themselves for television (p. 159).

The organizational details of the leadership debate when they will be held, their format, the

participants and how many will be held are decided through the cooperation of the major political parties and television networks. Since the first televised debate in 1968, there has been little consistency in how the debates are structured. A televised debate was not held during three elections. During some elections, debates were held in both official languages, while during the others they were only held in English. While both the leader's tour and the debate would likely occur without television, it has clearly dictated the look and feel of these two events in Canadian electoral politics.

In addition to helping candidates change their style features to get more attention, campaign consultants also help them make substantive changes. In 1962, the average television sound bite was 42 seconds, by the 1992 presidential election, the average length of a sound bite had been reduced to eight seconds (Patterson, 1993). The sound bite arose due to the commercial nature of broadcasting. In television, air time is a commodity, therefore, the sound bite becomes an economical way to fit political content into the news format. This substantial reduction has altered the content of messages that a candidate can express to the public through the television media. Political hopefuls quickly learned how to transform how they spoke to TV reporters. They learned how to fit "news values" and therefore communicate to voters (Davis, 1992). One such technique is the use of prepared slogans or one-liners. Candidates who cater to the press by speaking in sound bites, will likely get more news coverage. For instance, during the 1997 English leadership debate, Progressive Conservative leader Jean Charest received spontaneous applause from the audience when he vowed not to let separatists tear the country up. In their election study, Nevitte et al. (2000) determined that "Charest's performance became not only the lead campaign story but the lead

story in the news” (p. 36). Additionally their content analysis indicated that after Charest’s victory in both debates, he received more favourable coverage and increased visibility. Speaking in sound bites, like using image consultants, is an important technique used by candidates to make themselves more appealing for television.

Fletcher and Everett (1991) in their submission to the *Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing* and Taras (1990) charge television with the ‘presidentialization’ or ‘Americanization’ of Canadian politics. The terms presidentialization or Americanization refer to the nearly exclusive focus on party leaders within Canadian politics. Unlike the presidential system used by our southern neighbours, the highest office in Canada is not elected by the entire country. In a parliamentary system, the leader of a party is selected within his or her constituency, like any other Member of Parliament. However at election time, due to the focus on party leaders, it seems as if there is only one election occurring, instead of 301 local elections. A leader is not just the head of the party, they *are* the party. Consider Jean Chrétien, Stockwell Day or Ralph Klein; their names have more resonance with their constituents than the parties they represent. Political parties are personified through their leader, which many would suggest is a byproduct of television. Fletcher and Everett note that “whether or not leadership itself is an issue, the lead items on television newscasts and newspaper front pages generally derive from the leader’s tour” (p.99). According to scholars the presidentialization of the Canadian system has negative consequences. First, we lose the localness of constituency politics. Because television is a mass medium, that is, it must accumulate mass audiences to be successful, local candidates, cabinet ministers and interest group leaders have little place on the agenda. Also, substantive issue discussion is

overshadowed by the focus on a few oversimplified national issues. Despite our parliamentary system, television makes party leaders look like presidential contenders where all politics is national politics.

In sum, television has made ‘being good on TV’ a requirement of governing, especially for national leaders. This is unfortunate for politics and good government because “the qualities that make people good on television are only randomly related to the qualities that make people good at governing” (Ranney, 1993, p. 173). These examples of how television has altered politics are hardly exhaustive, but they do provide us with evidence of how communication mediums change societal institutions, as Innis, McLuhan and other medium theorists have suggested. Furthermore these examples provide us with a useful context for looking at any new medium, such as the Internet, in the political arena. Will the Internet revolutionize politics, as Morris (1999) and others (Browning, 1996, Grossman, 1995, Rash, 1997) have proposed? It is difficult to say, just as it is difficult to conclusively claim that television has revolutionized politics. However, if we take what we have learned about television in politics, the tenants of medium theory and the examples of the Internet’s influence to date, there should be little doubt that the Internet will have a future role in political communications. For better or for worse, the Internet *is* changing and *will* continue to change politics in some manner. Therefore, the question that political analysts should consider is not *if* the Internet will transform politics, but in *what ways*?

### **Computer Mediated Political Communications in Canada**

Questions about the impact of the Internet on politics are important ones for scholarship for several reasons. First, the remarkable growth of the Net in such a short period

of time is indicative of its potential to become a powerful medium for political communications. The vast impacts that Internet technology will have on society makes it an important research area for a variety of academic disciplines, including political communication. Second, the Internet, as a communication medium is unique compared to its predecessors. Among other things the Internet is interactive, unmediated and asynchronous. The second chapter will develop this theme in greater detail. Finally, much of the literature on the Internet in the political arena is largely anecdotal. The empirical evidence that does exist is almost exclusively American. To date there is not a single published study on Canadian politics and the Internet. There is a need to provide basic empirical data on the Internet's role in Canadian politics. This thesis maps the terrain of Internet politics in Canada for the first time.

To address how the Internet is transforming political communications is a challenging endeavour. Therefore this thesis attempts to examine this phenomenon through a more focussed lens by investigating the Internet in Canadian electoral politics. Specifically this exploratory and descriptive research will addresses the following question: *What function does the Internet as computer mediated political communication (CMPC) play in Canadian electoral politics?* This question attempts to describe the form and content of electoral Web sites in Canada. Also, it will assist in determining how Canadian political parties perceive computer-mediated technology, as a mode of political communication.

A case-study of the 2000 federal election, will be used to answer this question. Methodologically, this case study followed a two-step process. First, a standardized monitoring of major political party web sites was conducted for the duration of the election

campaign. This monitoring provided insight into how parties were using computer-mediated technology as a political and electioneering tool. Second, interviews were conducted with the members of campaign staffs responsible for fighting the cyber-campaign.

This thesis is organized as follows. First, a comprehensive examination of the literature will be conducted in Chapter 2. In this section, I will, first, identify the major characteristics of Internet technology that make it fertile ground for political communications. Second, the scholarly debate surrounding the prospects of a electronic democracy will be described. Last, the major research findings on the use of the Internet in electoral politics will be reviewed. This literature review will provide the academic foundation for the case study. In Chapter 3, I will provide an initial look at the Web sites examined, the purpose being to provide some background information on the Web campaigns that were launched by the four parties and to provide a context for the findings of the case study in the fourth chapter. Then, I will outline the methodology used in the case study to address the function of the Internet in Canadian electoral politics. In the fourth chapter, the data from the case study will be used to answer the research question and address the aims of this thesis. The final chapter will provide a summary of the major conclusions of this study. It will also discuss how these conclusions relate to and reflect the electronic democracy debate identified in the second chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Ten years ago most people did not know what the Internet was. Today, the Net and the World Wide Web have become a part of public lexicons (Davis, 1999). As discussed in Chapter One, Internet technology has found its way into the daily lives of people around the world. It has also become an extremely popular topic in popular and scholarly literature. This chapter intends to review the literature on the Internet as it relates to political communications. It will examine the electronic democracy debate and the major research findings on the use of the Internet as a tool of political campaigning. First, however, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of this new communications medium that make it different from other mediums.

### **Characteristics of the New Media**

As suggested earlier, the Internet is a medium unlike its predecessors. This section surveys Internet scholarship to present the seven characteristics that make this medium what it is. This list is not intended to be a ranking of the Internet's attributes. Nor are these characteristics mutually exclusive. Compiling and understanding these characteristics is a necessary step in using medium theory. Since this theory is concerned with the nature of a medium and its societal effects, this review provides a good starting point for understanding the role that the Internet can play in political communication. Moreover, these are some of the characteristics that will be considered in my examination of the party Web sites during Election 2000.



1. *Integration of Mediums*: The Internet is a multifaceted medium. Like television, the Internet combines both audio and visual components. However, the Internet moves beyond television by incorporating text features, from newspapers and books and it also acts like a telephone. The Net not only integrates the features of all the communications mediums that preceded it, but it can display them all at the same time. The Internet is an entirely new multimedia platform making it “qualitatively different from previous technologies” (Davis, 1999, p. 35).

The integration of communications mediums provides many new opportunities for communications never before experienced. In his book *Electronic Whistle-Stops*, Gary Selnow cites the work of Percy Tannenbaum. Tannenbaum is concerned with how the elements of communication, whether they are visual, sound or text contribute to the content of the information packed into a message (Selnow, 1999). According to Tannenbaum, the combination of communication elements affects ones’ perceptions of messages. The Kennedy-Nixon debate provides a good illustration of Tannenbaum’s argument. The reason that radio listeners differed from television viewers in their perception of who won the debate is derived from the differing combination of elements in radio (audio) as opposed to television (audio and video). The addition of visual elements altered the perception of the message for viewers of the debate. The multifaceted nature of the Internet transforms the ways in which messages can be received. The Internet’s integration of mediums presents political contenders and groups with new opportunities and possibilities in relation to how political messages are sent and received.

2. *Interactivity*: The interactive capabilities of the Internet are considered by many to be its greatest strength. (Browning, 1996, Morris, 1999). This is because no other mass medium, newspapers, radio or television has the capacity for direct, and instantaneous feedback between the transmitter and the receiver. According to Rowland (1999), traditional mediums are unilateral communications technologies, whereby information flows in one direction. However, the Internet like the telephone is a bilateral communications technology: information can move in both directions in equal volumes. Hence, to respond to a Web site all one has to do is click on a button and within seconds an email can be sent to the someone who may be a thousand miles away. The speed and ease of feedback is greatly enhanced on the Web. News groups and chat rooms are other features of the Net's interactivity unmatched in other mass mediums. On news groups and in chat rooms, users can post messages that other users can respond to in real time or at a later date, thus allowing for on-going discussions on various topics. There are several politically oriented discussion groups on the Web, such as the Canadian Political Forum on Canoe ([www.canoe.com](http://www.canoe.com)). It was this feature of the Internet that inspired 1992 presidential contender Ross Perot to promote his concept of the electronic town hall. Perot believed that the Internet would allow for all Americans to debate and discuss issues, just like they did in New England town hall meetings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, many political sites conduct on-line polls, to gauge the opinions of users on political and policy issues.

The interactive capabilities of the Internet are significant for two reasons. First, interactivity makes the Internet an interpersonal medium. On the Net, one-to-one relationships can be sustained despite the fact that millions of people are viewing a given Web

site. Second, Morris (1999) notes that political communication in other mediums is a one-way street in which the politicians and political contenders speak and citizens listen. However, because interactivity is the norm on the Net, political communication can “feature a lively give-and-take” (Morris, 1999, p. 104) between politicians and citizens. Give and take with political leaders has already become a feature of Canadian politics, Prime Minister Chrétien, former Reform Party leader Preston Manning and Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark have all participated in on-line chats with Canadians. The Internet’s interactivity provides politics with a new venue in which citizens can engage politicians in a ways that are not possible on other mediums.

*3. Pull Communication:* The World Wide Web is a storehouse for an enormous amounts of information. However, to gain access to any of it one must actively seek it out. McKeown and Plowman (1999) use the term ‘pull communication’ to describe the Web and the Internet. Unlike the passive nature of audiences listening to radio or watching TV, Internet use requires a considerable effort by users. Despite intending to simply watch one’s favourite show, TV audiences can inadvertently gain knowledge on topics they did not actively seek, such as sports scores, commercial products or local weather. However, if an Internet user wants to find out about the weather, he or she must log on and type in a specific URL<sup>1</sup> for a weather related page. On the Net, very little residual information is transmitted.

This particular characteristic of the Internet can be considered problematic for political communications. In the broadcast media, a lot of political information is transmitted passively. For example, when listening to music on the radio while driving, one is exposed to hourly news segments and advertisements. This can be considered beneficial, since politics

is far from being the most interesting and important topic in the lives of most Canadians.

Wayne Rash Jr (1997) described this problem when he wrote

For a political party or any other movement to be a success on line, there must also be people who visit the Web pages, participate in the forums, or download speeches and video material. Getting those people is harder than it is with traditional broadcast media, because the material has to be actively sought out. Television, radio, and print ads, by contrast, are delivered to the audiences, who passively receive them (p. 15).

Politicians and political parties on the Net must work hard to gain attention and to get users to click onto their sites. Political Web sites must be advertised in other venues such as on television, in newspapers or search engines in order to attract the public. However, for “political junkies” who will actively seek out Web sites, the World Wide Web provides a cornucopia of political information and provides the user with greater control over the information they receive (Gibson & Ward, 1998).

4. *Unmediated*: Hills and Hughes (1998) describe the Internet as a publication space. On the Net, anybody and everybody can create a Web site. This is demonstrated by the vast numbers of Web sites created by young people. To establish a Web site, all one needs is some basic knowledge of HTML. In the traditional mass media, publishers are large corporations such as Izzy Asper’s Global Inc, Ted Turner’s CNN, or Sun Media Corp. The distinctions between transmitter and receiver are increasingly being erased on the Internet (Davis, 1999), because the medium allows for a great deal of self broadcasting and publishing. What’s more, traditional media have to compete for attention in the same space as Web sites created by individuals and groups. Cyberspace is vastly different from broadcast space, and the key to understanding it is to grasp its unmediated nature (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 135).

According to Todd Gitlin (1980), political information from traditional mass media sources is structured to fit frames. “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). In Gitlin’s seminal work *The Whole World is Watching*, he demonstrated that the frames used by the news media in the coverage of the 1960s antiwar movement served to marginalize and disparage their message and activities. What frames indicate to us is that news organizations do not reflect reality, as much as they produce and mediate reality. By prioritizing and giving political importance to issues by emphasizing some issues and downplaying others, the news media are both gatekeepers and agenda setters. This process of mediation that exists in the traditional media does not occur on the Internet. Information on the Web comes directly from the horse’s mouth so to speak, whether it is an interest group, a political contender, or the government.

The unmediated quality of the Net can be considered advantageous to political communications. Political groups and candidates often allege that their particular issues and causes are not treated fairly or given sufficient depth by traditional news sources. The Internet allows these groups and individuals to take control of what is published and provide as much information as they feel is necessary to get their message to the public. The Internet essentially reduces the role played by journalists as intermediaries in political communications, and allows political messages to reach the public without the use of frames. However, there is a downside to the loss of our traditional media filters; the Net unfortunately contains a lot of misinformation. Net users must take extra caution in using the information they may find on the World Wide Web, because in many cases no one has reviewed this material to ensure

its correctness and credibility.

5. *Decentralized Medium*: In terms of power and ownership, the Web is decentralized, unlike the news media. In Canada, as around the world, the media is owned by a handful of media moguls and companies. While there is an overabundance of television channels, radio stations and newspapers for people to choose from, they are in fact owned by a small group of corporations such as AOL Time Warner. The concentration of media ownership around the world has lead scholars to write about the ownership model of news making. This theory suggests that news making is dictated by the imperatives of these large corporations. The ownership model cannot apply to the Internet, because no one owns or controls the Internet. As technorealist Andrew Shapiro (1999) notes the Internet “is not just a change in how we communicate . . . it is a potentially radical shift in who is in control – of information, experiences, and resources” (p. xiii).

One can argue that the traditional media are influential intermediaries, whose power is curtailed by the Internet. Another aspect of the decentralized character of the World Wide Web is its inclusiveness. Many scholars believe that the Internet can level the political playing field, such that it wipes out distinctions based on factors such as physical appearance, location and lifestyle. Browning (1996) notes the popular Web saying that ‘nobody knows you’re a dog on the Internet’ (p. 77). The Internet is a new vehicle for voices that are traditionally not heard in other venues. Groups outside of the political mainstream, on the left or the right, that normally are ignored by the traditional media can have their say in cyberspace. Because the Net is decentralized, every view, regardless of how extreme or novel, can be heard. For obvious reasons, this is extremely beneficial to these groups. However, on the other hand,

users are now being exposed to certain types of information that may be considered harmful or dangerous. While the centralized traditional media tends to filter out the opinions of extreme groups, such as White supremacists, the World Wide Web has become a haven for such views. Hate speech legislation cannot be easily applied to the Internet. Moreover, the Internet is over run by adult entertainment and pornography. The lack of centralized control of the Internet makes it possible for anyone, including children, to gain access to unsavoury information. It is important to note that decentralization may not always be a characteristic of the Internet. Regulation of the Internet, like other mediums of communication may be inevitable.

6. *Narrowcasting*: The Internet is a narrowcast medium, while television, radio and even print journalism are broadcast mediums. Broadcast mediums are commercial at their core, that is, their content is paid through advertisements. Because the goal of advertisers is to expose their products to as many people as possible, broadcast mediums must accumulate mass audiences to be successful. According to Rowland (1999), broadcast mediums cannot provide content to a specific niche in society, rather, it must appeal to everyone, creating lowest common denominator programming. Despite having hundreds of millions of users, Web sites are not focussed on mass audiences, but on particular individual users. The Internet is above all a narrowcast medium.

Narrowcasting refers to “targeting of a communications media to specific segments of the audience” (Dutton, 1999, p.348). Narrowcasting can occur in a number of fashions. First, the Internet is not anchored in linear time, that is, participation is not geared to a predetermined schedule or format (Rowland, 1999). Therefore, it allows the individual users

the utmost control in manoeuvring around the site. When watching TV, viewers must watch the programme from beginning to end at the time that the networks broadcast it. However, an Internet user can start with any hyperlink that he or she finds engaging and useful. Second, Web sites are offering users ways to make sites they visit their own, through *personalization*. The Microsoft Network at [www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com) is a useful illustration of personalization. On this site you can decide what types of information that you will need when you use the site, including headlines from your favourite newspapers, weather for the city you live in and you can even get your daily horoscope. Narrowcasting and personalization are empowering features of the Internet, as they allow individuals to “exercise more control over the flow of information” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 43).

*7. Cost, Time, & Distance:* The Internet is cheap, quick, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of where you are. Production costs on the World Wide Web are far cheaper than the production costs for a magazine or a television show. For instance, during the impeachment trial of former US President Clinton, [www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) created an online petition for censure signed by almost 500,000 Internet users. Additionally, this site also got 700,000 Americans to commit time and money towards defeating candidates who voted for Clinton’s impeachment. What is most impressive about [www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) is that both of these accomplishments reportedly cost the programmers \$89.95 (US). Politically, the Internet is a great opportunity for resource poor interest groups and candidates, because it is always possible for them to set up a bare bones site. The Internet is the only communications medium where you can potentially communicate with hundreds of millions of people for under \$100 (Tapscott, 1999, February 13). Granted, as Internet technology becomes more



advanced, and audiences more demanding, this price is likely to rise. However, in relation to the cost of producing a radio or television spot, the Internet will likely allow more political candidates and groups to make contact with their constituents.

Cyberspace is always open. Regardless of the time of the day, users can access the plethora of information that is available on the World Wide Web. The reason for this is that the Internet is asynchronous, that is, there is no timing requirement for the start of a transmission. The commencement and conclusion of a television or radio programme is always signalled by the broadcasters. Depending on peoples' schedules there is always a possibility that programmes of interest will be missed. On the Internet, this does not occur. Users of this medium can access a Web site any time of the day, and can return to it as many times as he or she chooses. There is no waiting for reruns on the Internet. The asynchronosity of the Internet makes the retrieval of information, including political information, very flexible and places the onus on the individual users. With the Internet, people no longer have to watch the nightly news to get their daily fill of politics. Internet users can click on to their favourite news site or political party Web sites and get the information when want it.

Another related time characteristic of the Internet is its ability to reduce the time it takes to transmit information. Many of the activities that other communication technologies can do, the Internet can do faster. The speed of the Internet make it a great tool for political organizing and mobilization. With the telephone, fax, television, radio, newspapers and the postal service, it can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days to get a message to supporters or the press, recruit volunteers or contact staff. With email, it can takes seconds.

E-mail mailing lists are important tools for political organizations. During an election, campaign headquarters can create a mailing list of journalists, and with the click of a mouse a press release with the message of the day can be delivered instantaneously to a journalist's inbox. Newsletters are an extremely popular vehicle used by political organizations to supply their supporters with information about their activities and issues of interest. The use of e-mail newsletters can cut down on postal costs and delivery time, and allow supporters the opportunity for instantaneous feedback. The speed of the Internet is a benefit to political organizations, because it provides a quick and controlled means of group communications (Rash, 1997).

The final characteristic related to cost and time is distance. The Internet transcends physical proximity (Bimber, 1999). At any given moment, a Web site can be viewed by an individual in Halifax, Calgary, or even Amsterdam. Moreover, all of these individuals can communicate with each other via a discussion group or by e-mail. Geographical location and distance means very little in cyberspace. The rise of 'virtual communities' are a good example of the Internet's ability to transcend physical distance. Virtual communities are collections of individuals tied together by interests, education, tastes, beliefs and skills (Doheny-Farina, 1996). *The State of the Internet 2000* report indicates that the Internet has become vital to grassroots organizations, because virtual communities have formed around their issues. Virtual communities are also served by the cost and time characteristics of the Internet as described above. The Internet has created an opportunity for individuals to communicate beyond their local communities (McKeown & Plowman, 1999), thus the Internet has realized McLuhan's notion of the 'global village'.

The seven characteristics just described demonstrate the essence of the Internet as a new mode of communication. Some of these characteristics can be found in other information technologies, such as the telephone which is interactive and instantaneous. However, these seven attributes together form a unique medium that is different from the other mediums of communication that have preceded it. Now that we have a more complete picture of the Internet, it is necessary to consider the implications of the new media for democratic practices and politics.

### **Implications of the New Media - The Debate**

At this point in the discussion, two things should be clear. First, innovations in the mode of communication translate into innovations in politics and political communication. Second, as just demonstrated, the Internet offers governments, political parties and movements, new and unique communications opportunities. This section will examine the literature on the potential impacts the Internet may have on democratic practices'. According to Bell and Dagger (1999) democracy is an 'essentially contested concept,' that is, it generates controversy because it lacks a complete set of standards for determining when something falls under the concept" (p.281). For instance, according to the liberal democratic definition, democracy focuses on civil rights and the liberties of individuals. On the other hand, social democrats believe that democracy stress equality between members of society. Electronic or digital democracy is the application of electronic networks, such as the Internet, to support democratic practices, including voting, polling and political discussions (Dutton, 1999). Like democracy, the concept of electronic democracy is a contested one among scholars. Within the literature, scholars, including Corrado (1996), Buchstein (1997), Street

(1997), Hills & Hughes (1998), have identified two opposing schools of thought. The first school are the utopians. They are the proponents of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and see computer networks like the Internet as “ushering in a new age of democratic politics” (Hills & Hughes, 1998, p. 2). The second school are the dystopians. According to this school, the Internet cannot and will not enhance democratic practices. In fact, this group believes that the introduction of ICTs will be a deterrent to the public sphere resulting in both conflict and misinformation. It is important to remember that many of the propositions of the utopian and dystopian schools are theoretical and anecdotal in their nature. Typically, the debate in the literature is two-sided, viewing the new technology as an ‘unalloyed blessing’ or an ‘unmitigated curse’ (Dutton, 1999). A third perspective is the normalization hypothesis which emerges in the work of Margolis, Resnick & Wolfe (1999). The normalization thesis asserts that life on the Internet reflects and reinforces the patterns that occur in the real world (Margolis & Resnick, 2000). Far from being revolutionary, political and social structures in cyberspace are starting to look like they reflect familiar social structures and patterns. This section will describe the major tenets of each of these three schools of thought.

### **Utopians - Political Faith in the New Technology**

As mentioned above, thinkers from the utopian school of thought have an inherent faith in the ability of the Internet to transform the public sphere in positive ways. Utopians identify four key political activities that will be enhanced by Internet use. The four areas are participation, citizen information, electronic delivery service, and disintermediation.

Participation or political mobilization is central to democratic politics. By definition,

without the participation of citizens, democratic politics cannot and will not exist. There are many ways in which citizens can participate in politics. Voting in a general election is arguably the most important and meaningful way in which people participate within the political system. However, attending an all-candidates meeting, joining an political party or interest group, writing a letter to a MP or to the bureaucracy, or contributing money or time to political causes are other ways in which Canadians can engage in the political process. Despite the existence of several different ways to participate, engagement in the political system is declining in Canada, as is the case in other post-industrial nations. Nevitte (1996) notes that there is a “progressive weakening of attachments to traditional political parties,[and] declining levels of confidence in both governmental and non-governmental institutions” (p. 67) in Canada. For utopians thinkers, Internet democracy can create new venues for political participation (Street, 1997), and thus reversing what some see as the destructive spiral of political malaise.

According to this line of thinking, participation can be achieved through the use of the Internet and other ICTs by increasing the opportunity and ease by which citizens can communicate with political and elected officials, and vice versa (Firestone & Schneider, 1996). Through the creation of political Web sites and e-mail addresses, citizens now have unprecedented access to government institutions, candidates and the political system. Moreover, the Internet reduces the space and time dimensions of participation. For instance, all-candidate meetings are an opportunity for citizens to ask questions or seek clarification on a particular issue with candidates in their constituency. However, attending an all-candidates meeting may prove difficult for those with small children or limited mobility. With

ICTs, citizens are no longer limited by time and space, because in cyberspace physical distance and time are irrelevant. Political engagement is also enhanced by the Internet through the creation of virtual communities. Hence, citizens “participate in community affairs asynchronously, at all hours of the day without having to leave their house” (Fisher, Margolis & Resnick, 1996, p.401).

Utopian theorist also believe that the Internet levels the playing field because all voices on the Web can be heard. Bimber (1998) claims that because the Internet is cheap, quick and effective, it “functions as a substitute for institutional resources and funding” ( p.392). In terms of participation, this literature contends that the relative political equality that exists in cyberspace, stimulates participation by those groups and individuals not normally acknowledged by the traditional media. Once again, computer networks aid in enhancing democratic practices by increasing the participation levels of all, regardless of their mainstream respectability, and promoting greater political choice for citizens.

Another way in which the new media can enhance participation in the public sphere is through plebiscitary democracy and ‘virtual elections’. Utopians argue that in time the Internet will replace the ballot box (Morris, 1999). By the use of national chat rooms and discussion boards, citizens or ‘netizens’ will be able to initiate and deliberate policy options. With the click of a mouse button, netizens would registrar their vote, and make decisions. Utopians believe that levels of participation would soar because citizens will take a “more active and substantive role in their own governance” (Corrado, 1996, p. 15). In a wired republic decisions would be more meaningful, because larger numbers of people could participate in the process. Moreover, elections and referenda conducted in cyberspace would

be vastly different from traditional ones, because they will be not only active, but interactive. The utopian ideal of increasing public participation via electronic democracy is bolstered by a recent poll conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* and NBC, which indicated that “6 of 10 Americans who are not registered to vote said they would prefer to cast their ballots online” (USIC, 1999). From this statistic it follows that the Internet would increase voting participation by those currently disengaged from the political and electoral system. In the Utopian view, the Internet will return politics to the days of Athens. Buchstein (1997) believes that the electronic democracy will “replace the old institutions of representative of democracy” ( pp. 248-49). Digital democracy opens up many opportunities for the rejuvenation of politics by stimulating a public participation that is currently lacking in post-industrial nations, such as Canada.

A second area where the Internet will play a role in enhancing democratic practices is in the area of information. For utopians

the most common promise of an Internet revolution is twofold: an increase in information readily available to the average citizen, and more individual control over what information is received. Combined these two promise true citizen awareness (Davis, 1999 p. 21).

On the World Wide Web, there is an endless amount of political information to be found. In terms of the information available, the Net is essentially a ‘marketplace of ideas’ (Browning, 1996). Since access to information is central to the functioning of a democracy, utopians believe that the unlimited amount of information on the Web will ensure more educated citizens. Armed with this new source citizen will be much more knowledgeable and enlightened about public affairs. Consequently netizens will be more active. The negativity

of television advertisements and thirty-second sound-bites will be replaced by detailed policy information, press releases and full text speeches. Internet information will also be more comprehensive and varied, because it will not be filtered by journalists and news organizations.

Another factor in citizen information is the previously discussed concept of personalization. Web users now have the ability to “decide what information they receive and how they receive it” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 46). Personalization affords Net users a sense of empowerment that does not exist while reading or watching traditional news sources. Individuals who are keen on a particular political issue can surf as many related Web sites as they wish. They are not confined to the information given in a newspaper article or a TV news segment. Last, one final way that proponents suggest that digital democracy will enhance citizen information is that “the Internet will destroy the monology of knowledge that the government too often holds” (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p. 1). China provides a good case for this utopian argument. The mass media has always been an arm of the communist regime in China. However, the Communist regime’s attempts to control and temper the Internet have all but failed. Thus, for the first time, the estimated 16.3 million Chinese citizens with Internet access now have access to information that the government has traditionally censored (NUA, 2000). To reiterate, in the Utopian view, democracy is enhanced since the Internet provides citizens with an unlimited source of information.

Electronic Delivery Service (EDS) is another key benefit of the electronic democracy identified by utopians. In Canada and around the world, government agencies are using Internet technology to assist in the provision and delivery of public services. For instance,



the Government of Canada Web site ([www.gov.pc.ca](http://www.gov.pc.ca)) offers a link from its homepage for electronic services. One such service is T.I.P.S. Online, which allows Canadians to get automated personalized tax information at their convenience. Utopians claim that the use of ICTs in government can change the way in which services are delivered and the way citizens interact with their governments (Dutton, 1999). The benefits of EDS include

faster response, lower cost, access to government from any location, prevention of fraud or misuse of benefits, increase in public confidence in welfare and taxation services, improved services to rural areas, enhance emergency support services and help to local and national economies (Tumber & Bromley, 1998, p.160).

By improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government services through computer networks, direct communication between citizens and governments will flourish. Proponents believe that the stronger ties created by EDS will benefit democracy.

The final focus of utopian thought is disintermediation. Utopians argue that the Internet and related technology will stimulate the reduction of middlemen in the political process. Pollsters, journalists, spin doctors, media consultants and the like will be unnecessary in the electronic democracy. There would exist a direct link between citizens and officials. During the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election, candidates bypassed the mainstream press, by relying on non-traditional media such as radio and television talk shows. The purpose of the 'traditional media sidestep' was to get their message directly to the American people without the filter of traditional news organizations (Johnston, Braima & Sothirajah, 1999). In electronic democracy, the Internet will play a similar function allowing candidates and government to bypass media filters and speak directly to their constituents. The power the mass media has in political affairs would be tempered because people can get information

straight from the source.

Public opinion polls play an extremely important role in our political system because it is one of the only ways to gauge how a cross-section of Canadians feel about a particular issue or policy area. Thus, pollsters wield a lot of power in society. For proponents of ICTs, the interactive nature of the new technology has the potential to usurp the power of pollsters (Morris, 1999). If governments or political candidates want to gauge public opinion on a particular issues, they will be able to set up a survey on their Web site or ask for feedback via e-mail. Moreover, electronic referendums allow citizen to participate directly in the policy making process. Democracy in cyberspace is different and superior to democracy in the real world because only in cyberspace can governments and citizens speak to each other directly without the spin of other actors.

### **Dystopians - Political Fear of the New Technology**

Dystopian thinkers, on the other hand, do not believe that the Internet and other ICTs will bring about a new electronic democracy. For dystopians, the notion that democratic practices can be supported or enhanced through the application of computer networks is fallacious. They contends that ICTs will have negative repercussions in the political sphere. Furthermore dystopians have serious concerns about the feasibility of an electronic democracy. The concerns can be grouped into three areas: the digital divide, the possibility of mob rule and the quality of information.

In their seminal article, Margolis et al. (1997) refer to users of the Internet as an “odd bunch of inhabitants” (p. 60). Rather than being a representative microcosm of society, cyberspace is disproportionately inhabited by certain types of people. While it is true that the

Internet is becoming more international everyday, currently there are grave disparities in the dissemination of the new technology worldwide (ITTA & USIC, 2000). There is a digital divide between with access to this technology and those without. According to NUA Ltd, only 6.71% of the world's population has access to the Internet, 38% of which reside in the United States. The divide exists in several capacities: the Internet is both US-centric and English-centric. Developing nations are under represented in their use of the new technology. Moreover, within developed countries, there is an income, education and age divide. For instance, Statistics Canada discovered that

members of the top income and education households were more likely to use the Internet at work, school, public libraries and other places (as well as at home) than persons living in households with lower income or less education (Dickinson & Ellison, 1999b, p.8).

This finding is also echoed by the ITTA and the USIC in the United States. The 'odd bunch' of inhabitants surfing in cyberspace are disproportionately white, young, educated, English-speaking, have higher incomes and are more technologically sophisticated than the average citizen.

The digital divide creates a 'cruel paradox' (Coleman, 1999) in the functioning of democratic politics as it establishes a system of techno- haves and have nots. Utopians claim that the Internet's role in enhancing participation and informing the citizenry will aid democratic practices. Dystopians are unable to see how these benefits can materialize when they are limited to such a small percentage of the population. In terms of the informed citizenry, for example, it may be true that the information found on the Web will make people more knowledgeable and assist in political decision-making. However, opponents of

electronic democracy are concerned with the fact that only a limited number of people will profit. The less educated and the poor do not have access to the expensive new technology. Dystopian literature suggests that the digital divide created by ICTs exacerbates the political divide. Until Internet technology reaches a critical mass, civic life in cyberspace will not be one of fairness and equality, but one of 'technological elitism' (Fisher et al., 1997). In such a civic space, the economic resources and the technical skill that are the requisites for effective participation in political life will belong disproportionately to a small elite.

Liberal thinkers, such as John Stuart Mill and the authors of the *Federalist Papers* have long been concerned about the tyranny of the majority. To Liberals, representative government is the most appropriate form of government, because it protects the minority from being victimized by the majority. Dystopians have a similar perspective when thinking about plebiscitary democracy. They argue that push-button democracy is merely head counting (Hill & Hughes, 1998) and will lead to mob rule. Liberals and dystopians alike contend that just because a position has the support of the majority of a population does not mean that it is the most accurate or appropriate one. Such decisions can work to the detriment of a minority. Dystopians, like opponents of direct democracy are also concerned about public ignorance. The ease and expedience associated with online referenda would present opportunities for rash decision-making based on only a limited understanding of the issues at hand. According to Jean Elshtain, electronic participation is

equivalent to making consumer choices on the shopping channel. The key to democracy – deliberative, public policy choices – are replaced by privatized, instrumental decisions: 'advocates . . . display a misapprehension of the nature of real democracy, which they confuse with the plebiscite system (In Street, 1997, pp. 32-33).

The final criticism waged by dystopians is related to the nature of the information found on the World Wide Web and its quality. According to utopians, the Internet will be an unlimited source of political information, making citizens more efficacious. Critics of electronic democracy also see the Internet as an unlimited source of information. However, they question the quality of the information available and the ability of people to use this information effectively. Anybody with a few resources and a little technical know-how can build a Web site. While people may not always agree with the traditional media, the norms and standards of objectivity normally employed by professional journalists instill confidence in most members of the audience. CNN senior political analyst, Bill Schneider said in an interview that

the Internet, the 'democratization of information', seems to carry a very real danger with it. That is, everybody can spread whatever information they want, and no professional is going to verify anything. Rumours are spread, misinformation unreliable so-called 'facts.' That is all over the Internet (Glass, 1996, p. 144).

Information errors on the Net can be the product of a simple mistake on the part of the Webmaster. But they can also be the result of an intent to confuse and deceive others. Dystopians often cite the 1996 U.S. Presidential election as an example of misinformation on the World Wide Web. [www.dole96.org](http://www.dole96.org) appeared to be an authentic Bob Dole site: however, the site was a copycat of the Dole's real Web site ([www.dole96.com](http://www.dole96.com)) designed to parody and criticize the presidential candidate.

A second problem for dystopians is information overload. Access to information is a necessary component in making educated decisions at election time, but what happens to people when they are faced with too much information, some of which may not come from

legitimate sources. Corrado (1996) argues that “voters may be more confused than enlightened by all the competing claims and data that will be available” (p. 21). Moreover, according to this line of reasoning personalization can lead to fragmentation, whereby the population is united around narrow special interests at the expense of the greater public will. Such fragmentation is considered dangerous for consensus-based polities, such as Canada, because residing solely within one’s virtual communities leads to constant reinforcement of one’s particular viewpoint to the exclusion of opposing or alternate perspectives. It is believed that the Internet would lead to the atomization of society. According to Shapiro (1998), the danger is that the Internet “might leave us uninformed and unprepared to deal with the world” (p. 104).

### **The Normalization Hypothesis - Political Status Quo**

Most of the literature on electronic democracy presents the utopian-dystopian dichotomy. Recently a third perspective has emerged constituting a middle ground. The normalization hypothesis contends that the Internet and other ICTs will not dramatically alter democratic practice to the benefit or detriment of citizens, rather they will reflect and support status quo political behaviour. Unlike the preceding two sections, this standpoint is derived from empirical research and is not anecdotal.

Thinkers such as Davis and Hill and Hughes and Margolis and Resnick<sup>3</sup> (2000) do not disagree with utopians and dystopians that the Internet will have an effect on politics, but they do disagree about the scope and nature of that change. The change to politics will not be radical or dramatic, rather the change will be subtle. Moreover, this perspective claims to believe that it is unrealistic to assume that the Internet will solve all of the problems of

democracy. Austin Ranney (1983) believes that “politics is far from being the most interesting and important thing in life” (p. 11). This being true, Davis (1999) wonders how the additional cost, involvement and time commitment incurred by Internet democracy will make people more politically efficacious. It is simply incomprehensible to think that this technology will force those who are not interested in political affairs to change their attitudes. The Internet, hence, serves to reinforce pre-existing levels of interest and thinking, not change them (Hill & Hughes, 1998). The normalization hypothesis states

that as the Internet develops, patterns of socioeconomic and political relationships on-line come to resemble those of the real world. Applied to political parties, this hypothesis implies that just as the major parties dominate the sphere of everyday domestic politics, so they come to dominate cyberspace (Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999, p. 26).

Davis’s work demonstrates that traditional institutions, such as news organizations, lobby groups, governments and major political candidates will be the main beneficiaries of the new technology. This is because they have the resources and motivation to get online. Also citizens will need to look towards traditional institutions to make sense of the new types of information that the Net will bring. As Glass (1996) notes, “as long as there exists a public-interest need to corroborate information, journalists, academics and other bona fide neutral actors will have an ongoing role to play on-line” (p. 144). Davis reminds us that the Internet is not the first or only technology to be heralded as a major political breakthrough. Similar claims have been made about radio, television, cable TV and non-traditional media. This school of thought warns us to be cautious in our thinking about the future. In sum, this perspective holds that

The Net is not going to radically change us; we are molding it to our own way of thinking and action. It is neither a monstrosity nor a saviour: it is a new venue for the same old human compunction: politics (Hill & Hughes, 1998, p.186).

### **Political Campaigning & the Internet - The Research Context**

In the previous section, we considered the potential implications of the Internet in politics. We have seen that the concept of electronic democracy is a contested one, and that three differing schools of thought have surfaced to address this issue. It would be fair to suggest that it is probably too early in the history of the Internet to know if it will change politics and democracy. However, the examining of Internet use during the 2000 General Election will give us some indication about the future direction of the Internet. Before we can move on to the case study, it is necessary to review one final aspect on the Internet literature: the major research findings about political campaigning.

After the 1996 U.S. presidential election, many experts predicted that the year 2000 would be the year that the Internet would become a significant aspect of the electoral process (Corrado, 1996). The Internet has played a limited role in campaigns since 1994. The landmark year for the Internet in electoral politics came in 1996, when both major and minor contenders for the US presidency and congress established sites on the Net. The 1996 General Election in the United Kingdom was the first British experience with the Internet as a campaign tool. The following year, cyberpolitics came to Canada. University of British Columbia professor Bill Cross (1998) notes that in Canada the 1997 federal campaign brought a significant increase in the parties' use of new communications technologies, including the Web. During that election, all five major parties and one minor one had campaign Web sites.



Since then politics and political campaigning has found a niche in cyberspace all over the globe, and at all levels of government. Despite pronouncements by Weise (2000) and Schneider (2000) that the cyber-revolution did not arrive in 2000, it is fair to say that the jury is still out on this election. What is evident is that role of the Internet in earlier campaigns was 'embryonic' (Delli Carpini, 1996), and has now it reached adolescence in both US and Canadian political communications. In this section, we will examine the role that the Internet has played in previous elections by examining the empirical literature. It is important to note that most of the scholarship is American.

### **Levelling the Playing Field**

When trying to draw a road map of the cyber-campaign literature, the first stop must be the seminal work of Michael Margolis, David Resnick, and Chin-chang Tu (1997). This research project was one of the first to investigate the role played by the Internet in political campaigning. The Margolis et al. project asked "will the Internet provide the means for electoral politics to assume a more democratic character as CMC<sup>4</sup> reduces the organizational cost of political participation" (p. 64)? This question relates to the notion that the Internet has the potential to provide a level playing field for political actors that does not exist in the real world. After examining political party and candidate Web sites of both major and minor parties during the 1996 campaign, Margolis et al. concluded that politics on the Net was "politics as usual" (p. 74). This conclusion was supported by the fact that major party and candidate sites were of a much higher caliber and quality than that of minor parties and candidates. Access to financial resources and professional staff for site maintenance was cited as reasons for the higher quality Web sites created by the Democrats and the Republicans.

For the Margolis group, the 1996 election indicated a failure of the promise that the Internet will provide more equitable conditions for groups outside of the political mainstream. They concluded that “[w]hen all is said and done, commercial interests and mainstream political interests will control the WWW or its successor in a manner similar to the control they presently exert over other mass media” (p.75).

Margolis et al.’s conclusion that in cyberspace minor candidates and political parties are just as marginal as they are in real life is supported by the works of Dave D’Alessio (1997) and Richard Davis (1999). D’Alessio’s study attempted to understand the role of the Internet in campaigns in terms of Harold Lasswell’s famous aphorism: ‘who says what to whom with what effect.’ In examining the ‘who’ element, D’Alessio determined that during the 1996 election only 36% of minor party candidates, and 14.5% of independent candidates had Web sites compared to 66.6% of major candidates in senatorial races. In congressional races, 22.2% of major party candidates had sites, while only 7.2% minor party candidates, and 4.1% of independent candidates had campaign Web sites. These figures led D’Alessio to infer that economic factors play a role in the inequality between major and minor actors in cyberspace. He concluded that “large campaigns and major party candidates can afford Web sites, and small, minor party or independent campaigns cannot, or feel they cannot” (p. 492). Using a sample of 100 candidate Web sites during the 1996 election, Davis determined that despite the Internet giving minor and non-traditional sites access that they do not normally have, resource rich candidates do have a major advantage on the Web. The differences between the Web site of rich and poor candidates were ‘stark.’ Davis noted that incumbents could rely on their own official government sites for campaigning, while challengers had to

pay to establish their own sites. Davis also agreed with Margolis et al. that minor or non-traditional candidates sites were below the quality of their competitors.

The D'Alessio and Davis' studies support the conclusions of Margolis et al., but a study on the 1997 British general election by Gibson and Ward (1998) came to the opposite conclusion. Gibson and Ward sought to test Margolis et al's 'politics as usual' hypothesis in the British context. Their first research question was "to what extent does the new medium equalize the parties' ability to get their messages across to voters" (p. 17)? After a comprehensive study of Britain's twenty-eight political party Web sites, Gibson and Ward concluded that "when comparing the quality of sites, it was clear that minor parties are able to compete with the Conservatives and Labour Parties in terms of visual appeal" (p. 21). This study takes issue with the gloomy conclusions of Margolis et al., D'Alessio, and Davis. According to the British study, the Internet was levelling the playing field for minor political actors compared to the traditional mass media and "at least within the confines of this new medium, the minor parties are intensifying their challenge to their major counterparts" (Gibson & Ward, 1998, p. 22). For Gibson and Ward, politics on the Net was not politics as usual. However, the study did not address whether the differences were due to the different political contexts of the US and the UK. Stimulated by the finding of Gibson and Ward, Margolis and Resnick along with colleague Joel Wolfe (1999) attempted to update and extend their previous study in order to make some relevant comparisons with parties in the United Kingdom. This study compared electoral Web sites in the two countries on several variables including Web presences and design features. Unlike Gibson and Ward, they concluded that the American and British data generally supported the normalization

hypothesis.

### **Information Dissemination**

Information provision, unlike levelling the political playing field, is a theme that is not disputed by the literature. Campaign web sites served Internet users by conveying much more political information than they might otherwise have access to. According to Whillock (1997) “the seminal feature of cyber-politics in the 1996 US election was voter access to information from a wide variety of candidates. Simply stated, there was more information available to Internet users” (p. 1216). Several other research studies conducted on the 1996 US presidential election and on the 1998 gubernatorial and midterm elections came to similar conclusions. Most election Web sites were structured in a similar fashion, providing personal information about candidates, press releases, speeches, news stories, and contact information, and it allowed candidates to make lengthy campaign statements. Some sites even provided calendars, quizzes, and on-line polls. One study which examined the Clinton/Gore Web site even suggested that there was too much information provided (McKeown & Plowman, 1999). The literature argued that the Internet gives campaigns a new tool for control over the dissemination of information, thus avoiding the filters of the conventional press.

Due to the unfiltered nature of information found on the Net, scholars also noted that the content was one-sided, positive and propagandistic (Tedesco et al., 1998; Coleman 1998). This was of interest to some scholars, because it was “widely anticipated that negative campaigning would quickly become a fixture of the Internet” (Klotz, 1998, p. 352). Unlike television advertisements, most Web sites in 1996 did not refer to their opponents in a negative manner (Klotz, 1997; Tedesco et al., 1998). Klotz (1998) found the frequency of

negative advertising on the Internet to be very low. Only 34% of Senate candidates used negative advertising online in 1996. But those candidates that did use their sites for negative advertising used it a lot. Davis' data shows a gloomier picture; his sample showed that 53% of candidate Web sites in 1996 put their opponents in a negative light. All in all, electoral Web sites have had a positive, self-promotion quality about them. This may not always be the case. Klotz (1998) warns us

The use of negative advertising on the Internet affords advantages to candidates that should secure a role for negative advertising on the Internet well into the future. Candidates can do things that are nearly impossible and prohibitively expensive in other media. (362).

Another important aspect of information provision on candidate/political party Web sites identified by scholars was its archival nature. Unlike other mediums, Internet users can visit and revisit information found on a political Website. Moreover, it allows for side by side comparisons of information. On the whole, the literature suggests that there is

evidence that this new medium has the capacity to alter the flow of political information. It will provide voters infusions of raw, uninterpreted information, allowing them to uncover their own agendas and to provide their own insights into the meaning of surveys and other data that is customarily filtered first through the analysts and reporters (Selnow, 1999, pp.140-41).

These findings regarding information provision support the utopian claim that the Internet and ICTs will enhance democratic practices by providing citizens with greater access to political information.

### **Interactivity**

As described in the first section of this chapter, interactivity is one of the Internet's most unique and central features. The bilateral flow of communication on the Web allows

for a dialogue to occur between citizens and politicians through computer networks that rarely exists in other mediums. Interactivity was thus a key variable for scholars when conducting their research projects. Overall, scholars were disappointed by what they found. Researchers have concluded that the use of the interactive capabilities of the Internet by campaigns was a failure. However, there was one exception. Selnow (1999) observed that “from the outset, the major campaigns saw the value of interactivity, and integrated it aggressively into their campaigns” (p. 131). Selnow provides ample evidence from the 1996 election to support this claim. For instance, Bob Dole’s page allowed users to sign his Guest Book, volunteer, or send a contribution. Sites also offered games, quizzes, polls, and other novelty activities, such as sending an electronic Bob Dole postcard. According to Selnow, these types of interactive activities were used to attract visitors, and “while they’re playing with the interactive features, they may read the other items” (p. 99). Selnow’s findings can be explained by McKeown and Plowman’s (1998) conclusion that there are different definitions of interactivity operating within campaigns and scholars. For many, for interactivity to occur there must be a two-way flow of communication. While the activities Selnow speaks of may be fun, entertaining and even benefit the campaign by raising funds and attracting volunteers, one can argue that they fall short of being a two-way flow of information (McKeown and Plowman, 1998). Consider Davis’s findings. He (1999) notes that if interactivity is measured by e-mails alone, 75% of candidate Web sites in his sample could be considered interactive. If interactivity is measured by the use of bulletin boards, then interactivity rarely occurred. Only 3% of candidate Web sites posted user e-mails on a bulletin board. More importantly, if interactivity is measured by real-time, live on-line chats

or electronic town hall meetings between candidates and users, then such interactivity never took place in 1996. McKeown & Plowman's results, Gibson & Ward 's examination of the British election and Dulio, Goff, & Thurber's (1999) examination of the US 1998 midterm election corroborated Davis' finding. It is clear that when scholars use the two-way communication definition, campaign and election Web sites fail the interactivity test.

Dulio et al. (1999) suggest that the lack of interactivity on election Web sites up until this point has to do with campaigns having little experience with this new technology, and not understanding the characteristics that make the Internet different from television or radio. Coleman (1998) contends that political party campaign Web sites lack interactivity because they attempted to broadcast on the Web. Critics of election Webs sites have described them using terms such as 'shovelware' and 'brochureware,' indicating that "candidate Web sites are almost uniformly dull, seldom more than static versions of the brochures that fill the mailbox" (Weise, 2000, p. 38). Critics argue that campaigns have difficulty breaking out of the broadcast model when using the Internet for political campaigns. They need to recognize the exceptional features of the Internet, and take full advantage of them when creating political and election Web sites.

#### **Voter Involvement:**

Voter involvement, through volunteering and campaign contributions, has been identified as an important part of campaign Web sites by researchers. One reason this may be the case is because Internet users are more likely to vote and participate in a campaign than are non Internet users (recall the digital divide) (Whillock, 1997). During the 1996 US presidential election invitations on the Web to participate in the election campaign by

volunteering attracted few responses (Davis, 1999). However, according to McKeown and Plowman (1998) Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole was the most successful in using his homepage to initiate voter involvement. Their study maintains that 1/3 of all Bob Dole volunteers signed up using their computers. Moreover, donations received from online contributions were enough to cover the total cost of Dole's Web site. Davis's study found that less than 50% of candidates had fundraising solicitation links on their homepages. The methods by which candidates solicited funds from supporters varied. Some sites provided a mailing address or phone numbers that prospective donors could contact. Other methods included encouraging prospective donors to print off a contribution form from the site and mail or fax it to the campaign. Sometimes the campaign would contact a prospective donor after an initial e-mail was sent to the Web site. Noticeably lacking in 1996 was the use of secure online credit card transfers utilized by many e-businesses. Davis concluded that:

1996 was not a successful year for Internet contributions, the future for donor solicitation for candidates may be different. The costs for solicitation are minimal – space on a Web site – and, more important, candidates will still need the money. Since Internet donating is in its infancy, it should not be surprising that few Americans took advantage of it (p. 109).

Two years later, by the US midterm elections of 1998, Davis' predication was realized, and online contributions played a more significant role in Internet campaigning. Dulio et al.'s (1999) study focussed on the use of Web sites by congressional hopefuls (both the House of Representatives and Senate) to solicit campaign funds. They found that 2/3 of the candidates participated in cyberpolitics by establishing election homepages on the World Wide Web. More significantly, this study determined that 73% of candidate Web sites



solicited campaign contributions from visitors by at least some method. This represented an increase of 27% in only two years. Despite this substantial increase in the number of candidates using the new technology to solicit needed campaign dollars, Dulio et al. came to similar conclusions as Davis did about the methods of solicitation and the success rate. In 1998, candidates were no more technologically savvy than in 1996, as secured transaction technology (SSL) was still underused by campaigns. Instead of using the Internet technology to its fullest advantages by allowing prospective donors to donate online from the comfort of their home in 1998 as in 1996 campaigns employed the less technically sophisticated methods, like the mail-in. Dulio et al. also noticed that in 1998 Americans were no more comfortable with online donating as few funds were raised via the Web. Irrespective of candidates not increasing their campaign coffers or making better use of Internet technology in 1998, Dulio et al. still concluded their study by suggesting that the increase in the number of candidates using their homepage to raise money is an extremely significant finding. They wrote that in “the past, candidate web sites were little more than digital yard signs. In 1998, candidates made use of their sites to solicit small-dollar contributions” (p.53).

The resonance of this finding can be witnessed in the success of John McCain, who ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. A recent PoliticsOnline survey reported that US presidential contenders for the 2000 election raised nearly \$7.5 million via the Internet, led by Senator McCain who raised more than \$5 million online (Doyle, 2000). After the New Hampshire primary, contributions through his Web sites gave McCain the funds he needed to continue his run for the presidency. McCain’s web site has become the standard against which others are compared. On entering John McCain’s site, a tiny pop-up

box would appear which greeted visitors and invited them to contribute. This technique has been emulated by several other campaigns since. McCain's success hints at the future potentiality of the Internet in campaigning, especially in the area of fundraising.

In this section, the major themes and findings of research projects conducted on the Internet and political communication have been identified. The 1996 election cycle in the United States was the first real test of cyberpolitics and Internet campaigning, since it was the first time the Internet became a part of the campaign war room. Research suggests that the employment of Internet technology in political campaigning has not reached its potential. While there is still no evidence that the Internet can alter the outcome of an election, campaign Web sites do affect other campaign activities, such as fundraising, campaign management, and organizational communication (Dulio et al., 1999). Political parties, candidates, and campaigns are still trying to comprehend the nature of this new technology and ascertain how best to use it as a tool for political communication. The 2000 federal election, therefore, provided researchers with an opportunity to witness the progress, if any, that campaigns had made in using the Internet to reach voters.

This review of the scholarly literature has highlighted the unique characteristics of the Internet, identified the nature of the debate occurring among scholars on the implications of the new technology on democratic politics and reviewed the major research finding on the use of the Internet in political campaigns. Indeed, this review has demonstrated that the Internet has and will have an important role future election campaigns. It is now time to test the academic literature by examining the ways in which the Internet was used as a tool for computer mediated political communication during the 2000 federal election. First, however,

it is necessary to outline the methodology used and provide an initial review of the Webs site analyzed in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY**

### **Canadian Political Parties on the Web - The Web Sites**

This chapter provides an initial look at the Web sites of the four political parties examined in this thesis. The purpose is to provide some background information on the Web campaigns that were launched by the four parties. Then the methodology used to examine these four Web sites will be outlined.

#### **Canadian Conservative Reform Alliance - [www.canadianalliance.ca](http://www.canadianalliance.ca)**

The Reform Party of Canada, the predecessor of the Canadian Alliance, established its Web site on October 17, 1996. The Canadian Alliance Web site is a reflection of the two arms of the party, the parliamentary caucus in Ottawa and the party headquarters in Calgary (T. Gronow, Personal Communication, 2001). Each arm employed its own independent Webmaster. For the election, the Canadian Alliance set up a strategy group to organize and run the campaign. Decisions on what should be posted that related to the leader or other political aspects of the campaign were dealt with by the Webmaster in Ottawa under the direction of the War Room. Information relating to the party, constituencies and members, such as requests for information, were dealt with by the Communication department in Calgary in consultation with the Executive Director of the Canadian Alliance. Media Metrix reported that the Canadian Alliance site received 231,000 unique hits during November 2000. Approximately four times as many people visited the Web sites during the election than is normally the case (T. Gronow, Personal Communication, 2001). The average length of a visit to the Canadian Alliance Web site during the campaign was 9.48 minutes. The Party received approximately 600 e-mails per day during the election. Seventy-five percent of the e-mails

sent to the Alliance were handled by the Communications department in Calgary. For the duration of the campaign, five part-time staff were responsible for responding to e-mail. The other 25% of the e-mail messages were referred to the research department or to specific individuals, such as cabinet critics. The Canadian Alliance Web site was advertised on all campaign materials.

**Liberal Party of Canada - <http://web1.liberal.ca> or [www.liberal.ca](http://www.liberal.ca)**

The Liberal Party of Canada has the longest running Web site, originally established through the National Capital Freenet in 1993. The National Capital Freenet set up forums where any political party could post information and receive feedback from voters (Kippen, 2000). During the 1993 election the Liberal Party was the only party to take advantage of the National Capital Freenet. Despite this, campaign 2000 represents the first time the Liberal Party made a concerted effort on the Internet (D. Hayward, Personal Communication, March 14, 2000). The current Liberal Web site was designed in 2000 by Vickers and Benson Design & Interactive, Toronto, and was still in development when the election campaign began. Prior to the election, three individuals were hired and assigned to the Web site. Within the Liberal Party National Office, two areas had responsibility for the Web site. First, the Manager Technical Services, Dan Hayward, maintained the Web server, software, hardware, and site security. Second, the Web site contents and updating were the responsibility of the Director of New Media, Rob Steiner, and a Webmaster in Ottawa. Both the Director of New Media and Webmaster were located within the 'War Room' with the media monitoring and writing staff. In the first week of the campaign (October 22 to 26) the Liberal site received 17,500 visitors who viewed 195,700 pages. During that period 2,870 users visited the site

more than once, or 16% of the unique visitors. Over the entire campaign, [www.liberal.ca](http://www.liberal.ca) had 1,660,178<sup>5</sup> total page hits or 195,306 total sessions. A campaign volunteer was assigned to English and French-language responses during the election campaign. The URL was included in television and print ads and on campaign literature.

**New Democratic Party - [www.ndp.ca](http://www.ndp.ca)**

The NDP established a party Web site in 1996. This site, offered in both French and English, was designed by Thindata Communications of Toronto. Thindata has developed several other political homepages, including those of Toronto City Councillor Jack Layton and the Ontario Challenge Fund for the Ministry of Energy Science and Technology. Thindata charged the NDP \$50,000 for the Web site including salaries. During the campaign the NDP's media relations group, a unit in the Communications section, maintained the Web site and dealt with e-mail all under the supervision of Communication Coordinator Wayne Harding. The members of the media relations group were responsible for the day to day decisions regarding what types of information would be posted on the site. However, more contentious issues were referred to the NDP's Campaign Manager. The Web site was staffed by one full-time person during the campaign, and three-part time individuals from the host firm. The part-time individuals from Thindata worked at the direction of the NDP staff member. According to Harding, there were about 60,000 visits to this Web site during the election campaign. Even though the number of e-mails received was not counted, the Party had two individuals assigned full time to responding to e-mail. During the campaign, the Web site address was advertised in the NDP television commercials and was printed on all election documents.

## **Progressive Conservative Party of Canada - [www.pcparty.ca](http://www.pcparty.ca)**

The Progressive Conservative Party has been online since 1996. This web site was redesigned a few months prior to the election in September 2000. The structure and design of this bilingual Web site was developed by Michael F. Vasseur. Vasseur is a full-time employee, and is also responsible for the design of the current PC Party Parliamentary Caucus site. For the Tories, the Internet was one of the important ways in which they communicated with the general public and their party members (Personal Communication, 2001). During the election, the Web site was an integral part of the PC campaign, and was staffed by two full-time Webmasters who worked out of the 'War Room'. The Webmasters were both fluent in a variety of computer operations, including JavaScript, Microsoft Access, and Internet security. Developing the Web site to ensure ease of navigation for visitors and posting information on the site were the main tasks of the PC Webmasters. A representative of the Party estimates that the Web site received about 25,000 initial hits over the campaign. The only costs related to this Web site during the election were associated with the Webmasters, as the PC site was already fully functional prior to the election (Personal Communication, 2001). The Progressive Conservatives received more than 10,000 e-mails during campaign 2000. Responding to the e-mails was the task of the Correspondence Department. The Web site and the Correspondence Department are both units within the Department of Research and Communications. The Conservative Web site was advertised on Joe Clark's tour bus, on press releases and media advisories, and in all other forms of campaign materials.

### **Methodology:**

Academic research into the impacts and effects of the Internet on society is in its

infancy in all disciplines, including political communication. The research covered in the literature review constitutes groundbreaking scholarship in this area. Due to the newness of the Internet and Internet research studies such as this are inherently exploratory and descriptive. While exploratory and descriptive studies often have different objectives, they have many similarities and often blur together in practice (Neuman, 1997). The decision to conduct a case study on the cyberpolitics of the 2000 Canadian election, in part, reflects the exploratory nature of this thesis. According to Yin (1994)

case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. ( p. 1)

While the research question guiding this study is not a “how” or “why” question but a ‘what’ question, Yin goes on to note that for exploratory purposes ‘what’ questions, including case studies can be an appropriate methodology. However, the latter aspects of Yin’s definition make this particular case a perfect fit with this methodology. First, without a doubt, the cyber-campaign of 2000 is a contemporary event with a real life context. Second, decisions about the form and content of the web sites of the four political parties took place within the war rooms of each campaign. There was a complete separation between the phenomena being investigated and the researcher. Therefore, no manipulation or control could be imposed on the cyber-campaign by the intervention of the researcher. All in all, a case study is a fitting methodology for collecting data on the use of the Internet by Canadian political parties, as the particulars of the research question and case stand up to the criteria set forth by Yin’s definition. Now that a justification has been provided for the choice of methodology, the design of this study can be looked at in greater detail.



Sunday, October 22, 2000 marked the beginning of a thirty-six-day campaign culminating in Canadians going to the polls on Monday, November 27, 2000. During these thirty-six days, a battle was waged among eleven political parties on the ground, in the media and in cyberspace. During the 2000 election all of the parties fielding candidates had a site on the World Wide Web. This fact demonstrates a widespread acceptance by political parties of the importance of the Internet as a political tool especially for electoral purposes. Due to time constraints this study did not investigate the use of the Internet by all eleven registered parties. Though an analysis of third-party web sites could prove interesting, it was necessary to limit the scope of this project. Instead, the four major political parties, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Canadian Conservative Reform Alliance (Canadian Alliance or CA), the Progressive Conservatives (PC), and the New Democratic Party (NDP), were the focus of this study. These four parties were chosen for several reasons. First, these parties are considered major parties in the Canadian political system. They have all contested several elections and had seats in the House of Commons at the dissolution of Parliament. All of these parties have similar organizational structures. Second, all of these parties have been through at least one election cycle using the Internet. Therefore, all of these parties went into the 2000 election with some experience campaigning on the Net. An important question to be asked here is why has this study excluded the Bloc Québécois? Unlike the Liberal, CA, PC and NDP, the Bloc cannot be said to have a national presence. The Bloc only fields candidates within the Province of Québec. The other parties fielded candidates in all ten provinces and the three territories. While the content and form of the Bloc Québécois web site may be similar to those of the other parties, the national focus of the other parties makes

them much more similar and better units for comparison.

Two different instruments were utilized to discover the function that the Internet played in the campaign. For the duration of the election campaign, a standardized monitoring of the Liberals, CA, PC, and NDP Web sites was conducted on a daily basis. An Evaluation Criteria (Appendix A) was used at each to determine the form and content of each of the party sites. The terms form and content come directly from Tedesco et al.'s (1999) study on the use of the Internet by Dole-Kemp and Clinton-Gore during the 1996 US election campaign. According to Tedesco et al. form and content refers to a "thorough review of what visitors found during the 1996 election campaign" (p. 55). This work operationalizes form and content in the same fashion, and will provide a review of what Internet users found when visiting the Web sites of the four parties during campaign 2000. The Evaluation Criteria is a culmination of the variables investigated in previous research studies. Several items, such as negative campaigning, issue substance, reference points, voter involvement, and updating were influenced by Klotz's (1997) study of Web use by US senate candidates. Items related to the fundraising capacity of the Internet are influenced by Goff et al.'s (1999) research project. Other variables reflected the interest of the researcher. This study benefited enormously from the use of previous research findings. Because this instrument was steeped in the previous literature it allowed for the findings to be considered in a comparative context

On the first day of the campaign, October 26, 2000, each of the party Web sites were printed out in their entirety. Each of these initial documents were analyzed according to the Evaluation Criteria. For the duration of the campaign each homepage was re-analyzed according to the Evaluation Criteria. Any major change to the form or content of any of the

party Web sites were also observed and recorded. At the end of the campaign, each of the homepages was analyzed for a final time according to the variables of the Evaluation Criteria.

Interviews were, then, conducted with members of the campaign staff responsible for election communication and the Web sites for each of the four major political parties. Although the analysis of the web sites during the campaign were the focal point of this study, this second step added depth and perspective to this research. The purpose and benefit of speaking directly to campaign staff members of the parties were twofold. First, as Neuman (1997) suggests “measurement improves when diverse indicators are used” (p. 151). In this instance, the responses to the questionnaire helped to corroborate and/or justify the findings observed in my analysis. Second, the responses provide a greater understanding of the attitudes that political strategists had about the Web as a campaign tool and computer mediated political communication. As was the case with the criteria used to evaluate the Web sites, the questionnaire (Appendix B) was based on previous research. Ward and Gibson’s (1998) UK study was used heavily in creating this instrument. Again other questions reflected the interests of the researcher. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents in January 2001 via e-mail. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted in March and April 2001.

One final aspect utilized in the analysis was the growing literature on campaign Web design. As the Internet becomes an important medium for political campaign communications (Benoit & Benoit, 2000), campaign web design has become a profitable business for some individuals and consultants. Thus, there is an emerging professional literature developing on the how to’s of creating effective Web sites for the purpose of political and campaign

communication. Since the 1996 US presidential election, the periodical, *Campaigns & Elections*, has published several useful articles on this topic. Also, George Washington University's Democracy Online Project at [www.democracyonline.org](http://www.democracyonline.org), created and distributed a primer on campaigning online that was available by via e-mail to anyone during the 2000 US campaign. This literature was extremely useful in helping to evaluate the sites during the federal election campaign.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide background information on the Web sites of the four political parties to be examined in the next chapter. Additionally the methodology used in the case study was outlined. This chapter and the literature review covered in Chapter Two provide the foundation for understanding the functions of the Internet has played in the Canadian electoral process which follows in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS**

### **The 2000 General Election - The Cyber-Campaign**

The 2000 General Election call was one of the worst kept political secrets (Kapica, 2000 ). For weeks prior to the election, pundits, journalists, candidates, even political party Web sites were speculating about the dissolution of Parliament. The day before the election was called the Web site for the Liberal Party of Canada hit the cybertrail, telling Canadians that they “will be asked to choose between two very different visions of Canada’s future.” On October 21, 2000, the Canadian Alliance’s election platform was ready to be downloaded, in several Web formats. In fact, since none of the four parties developed a new site specifically for the election campaign (a popular technique in the United States), opting instead to adapt their political party sites for the election campaign, the technical infrastructure was in place long before the campaign.

The cyber-campaign, the battle waged by the four political parties on the World Wide Web, will be examined in this section. The purpose is to address my research question of *‘what function does the Internet, as computer mediated political communication (CMPC), play in Canadian electoral politics?’* This chapter will describe the form and content of election Web sites and attempt to understand the purposes and intentions of the parties that created them. This work opts not to present each of the four sites descriptively one by one. Instead, the form and content of these sites will be presented in terms of observed patterns and core Internet concepts. This will allow for each of the election sites to be delineated, but also permit a comparative aspect to this work. Seven core categories of findings emerged from my study of the thirty-six-day campaign. The purpose of the section is to highlight each

of these core categories, thereby determining the functions that the party Internet sites played during the 2000 federal election.

### **The Function of the Internet in Canadian Electoral Politics -Findings**

#### **Similar Format**

One of the first things Internet users would notice if they visited all four party sites during the campaign was how similar these sites were. As Selnow (1998) observed during the 1996 US presidential election:

sites were formulaic, dispensing predictable content. Sites posted biographical sketches and obligatory photos, sometimes with family and flag, always with the candidate grinning or staring longingly off into the future. They carried quotable quotes and provided links to speeches, policy positions, and flattering news stories. At the end it was their custom to offer E-mail links to the candidates and the Web design company or to the 18 year old volunteer who assembled the site. Such cookie cutter content dominated the political pages. (p. 81-2)

Selnow's critical observation about the 1996 cyber-campaign accurately describes the Canadian campaign Web sites during this election. Biographical sketches, photos, links to policy positions, e-mail links were all evident on the four sites.

Table 1. demonstrates how similar the four sites were. Table 1. presents a comparison of campaign/political Web site functions. Generally, there were thirteen different functions that the campaign Web sites performed, including providing candidate, leader and party information, information about how to get involved with the campaign, and campaign news. This table shows that while the names may differ from site to site, the function and purpose of the links were the same. As was the case with Selnow's description, each site provided a biographical sketch of party leaders, and a way to contact the party. With the exception of

the Progressive Conservative site, all of these functions were presented as links on the homepage or first page of each of the sites. As noted, none of the political parties established a site for the sole purpose of campaigning. Instead, the parties opted to modify their previous political party sites to reflect the campaign. Therefore, there were two main types of information on the sites; party/organization related information and campaign-related information. Uniquely, the Tories opted to create an entirely new link called 'Election 2000' on their main navigation bar. 'Election 2000' served as the portal to the party's campaign information. The other parties merely put new links and icons on their homepages. As this table indicates, there were very few functions that were not employed by all of the four parties.

Not only were the sites extremely similar in function, but they also looked a lot alike. Each of the sites used frames, photos and graphics to present their campaign message. Except for audio and video elements (to be discussed in detail later) all of the sites were of comparable quality visually. The sites even placed their content on their homepages in a similar way. The Liberals, Canadian Alliance and NDP all had a smiling picture of their leader, and links to the latest news which they updated almost daily. All in all, with the exception of each party's unique colour schema and particular messages, all four sites were extremely similar in terms of design features and site function in campaign 2000. One important thing to keep in mind when reading the following findings is that all of the parties operated using similar formats and content. Notwithstanding the categories that I explore in my study, it can be said that the sites were extremely similar in how they approached each of these functions during the election.

<b>Table 1. Similar Web site Functions</b>				
	<b>CA</b>	<b>Liberals</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>PC</b>
<b>Candidate Information</b>	Your Candidates In Your Neck of the Woods	Your Candidates	Your Candidates	PC Candidates Near You
<b>Campaign Solicitations</b>	Donations	Join our Fight	Make a Donation	Donate Do Something
<b>Contact Information</b>	Contact Us	Join our Flight feedback@liberal.ca	Contact Us	Contact Us
<b>Get Out The Vote</b>	N/A	Advance Polls Information from Elections Canada	N/A	Find your riding Don't live in Canada. You can still vote
<b>Leader Information</b>	Stockwell's Biography	Your Prime Minister	Meet Alexa	Meet Joe Clark
<b>Leader Itinerary</b>	Leaders's Itinerary	Follow the Leader	The Campaign Trail	Tour Schedule
<b>Media Information</b>	What's Hot Reality Check The Hot Issue	What's New	Latest News Surreality Check Media Centre	Media Information Bulletin Board
<b>Membership Information</b>	Membership	Join our Fight	Join the NDP	Be A Member Do Something
<b>Navigation</b>	Site Map	Site Search	Search	N/A
<b>Party Issues</b>	The Hot Issue	Your Issues	The Issues	Policy
<b>Party Platform</b>	A Time For Change	Our Platform	Our Commitment	Election Platform
<b>Party Structures</b>	Who We Are It's Your Alliance Your Principles	The Liberal Party	N/A	PC Caucus Party at Work Member Services Youth Web Site
<b>Volunteer Recruitment</b>	Volunteers	Join our Fight	Volunteer!	Volunteer Do Something
<b>Other</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Why Care? Other Links

### **Integration of Mediums**

Multimedia is often a term used to describe the Internet. The Net has the ability to integrate many different communications elements and display them all at the same time. As the integration of audio and video in television changed the face of politics, it is believed that



the multifaceted nature of the Internet can do the same. Furthermore, using a variety of communication elements can make a campaign site more engaging for users. The notion is that good use of the technology will get visitors to stop and investigate the site (Rash, 1997). Users will not remain at or return to sites that are not interesting. Along with frequent updating, it is thought that integrating mediums is one method of capturing and maintaining the interest of visitors. Each of the political parties took a different approach to integrating mediums during this election; the Progressive Conservative Party made the most impressive and intensive use of this opportunity, while the other three parties made little or no attempt to integrate mediums on their sites.

Text and visuals (graphics and pictures) were the typical ways of presenting information on Web sites in this election. This essentially makes them no different from a newspaper or campaign brochure in terms of integration of mediums. Normally, pictures were found the first page of the site and on the page with the leader's biography. Beyond those pages the Web sites were merely text. The Liberal Party did not make any use of mediums beyond text and visuals. On the main page, there would be a photograph of Jean Chrétien taken while appearing at a variety of campaign events. These photos were professionally taken and updated at least. These photographs were taken with a digital camera by a photographer working on the Leader's tour and were transmitted to the Webmaster in Ottawa. These pictures could be found no where else but on the Web site, since they were taken with this new digital camera technology. Once a user surfed beyond the homepage, the site was merely a white screen with black text, with the exception of the red navigation bar laced with maple leafs and adjacent black menu bar. Overall, the Liberal

Web site remained very static and text-oriented throughout the entire campaign.

For most of the campaign the NDP site was as static as that of the Liberals. The NDP had a single picture of leader Alexa Donough on the main page that changed only once during the campaign. At two points during the campaign the New Democrats were quite inventive in the way they integrated different mediums. The first occurred on Day 21 of the campaign. Health care was a key issue during the election, especially for the NDP. To highlight to visitors their health care policy, a text-based slide show was developed on the main page of the Web site. The slide show was entitled '*here's how to fix health care.*' The slides described the five steps that the NDP would take to fix the problems in Canada's health care system. The slide show was brief, but it allowed the NDP to highlight its health care policy in a more dynamic fashion. The second inventive use of the Internet came on Day 26 when a link to a bit of animation called '*What did Stockwell mean to say?*' materialized in the NDP's 'Surreality Check' section. This animation mocked the sign that Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day held up during the English Leaders Debate which said 'No Two-Tier Health Care.'<sup>6</sup> The link opened up a new window with a photograph of Day with the sign from the debate. Instead of the words 'No Two-Tier Health Care,' a variety of different statements flashed across the sign. Statements included 'For My next trick, I'll reverse the Niagara river,' 'Won't you feed a starving oil company' and 'Now where did I put the hidden agenda.'<sup>7</sup> Obviously, the purpose of these statements was to ridicule Day. Visitors to the site were even invited to send in their own suggestions for what to put on Day's sign, although none were ever added. Except for these instances, however, the NDP campaign site was rather static and text-based.

The Canadian Alliance's site falls into the same category as that of the NDP. For the most part, the Party did not combine communication elements beyond text and visuals on their Web site. There were, nonetheless, a few elements worth noting. Visitors to the Canadian Alliance site could access the party's election platform, *A Time for Change*, in three different formats; text, Acrobat and Flash. The Macromedia Flash is a software package that allows individuals to "build scalable, animated Web sites and high-quality, low bandwidth graphics" ([www.macromedia.com](http://www.macromedia.com)). Visitors to the Web site who possessed a Flash Player were able to watch and read the election platform with extremely professional and impressive graphics, photographs, and animation. However, if a user did not have a Flash Player or their connection was too slow, they probably did not get to view this powerful display. This would likely explain the offering of the two other formats. In addition to an archive of photographs from the campaign trail, on Day 13 of the campaign the Canadian Alliance also uploaded three of their campaign television commercials to be viewed online. As was the case with the NDP site, the Alliance site did not make effective use of the opportunities present by being able to integrate different communication elements on the Internet.

The Progressive Conservative Web site was leaps and bounds ahead of the others in terms of this characteristic. From Day 1 of the campaign, visitors to this site were not only exposed to the typical text and visual elements, but to audio, slide shows, flashing graphics, and video. This site was truly multimedia. Throughout the campaign, users had the opportunity to watch ten different video clips. Several were of PC leader Joe Clark. Others included a clip of former PC leader and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney speaking at a fundraiser, Clark's daughter Catherine, Tory candidates, and several television campaign ads. There were also several audio clips of Clark throughout the site, including media interviews.

A slide show and the full text of a presentation called 'How to win an election' given by the PC National Director was also put on the Web in the 'Election 2000' section. As was the case with the Canadian Alliance, the site also had a photo gallery of pictures from the campaign trail. A second slide show was added to the site at the end of the campaign showing highlights from the campaign. Without a doubt, the Progressive Conservative Web site was the most dynamic during campaign 2000, moving beyond text and visually based pages. It provided the most engaging experience for Internet users, allowing them to listen, read and view the campaign from their computers.

<b>Table 2. Importance of Internet Characteristics to Campaign</b>				
	<b>CA</b>	<b>Liberals</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>PC</b>
Integration of Mediums	3	2	1	4
Unmediated	4	4	?	4
Interactivity	3	3	3	3

When asked how important integration of medium was to the campaign, 5 being 'very important' and 1 being 'not important'? (Table 2.) The respondents' replies corresponded with how much integration actually occurred on their Web sites during the election. The representatives of the NDP and the Liberal Party did not rank integration of mediums highly as important characteristics of the Internet. This definitely reflected the minimal use of elements beyond text and visuals on the NDP and Liberal sites. Tony Gronow, the Canadian Alliance's Manager of Communications, choose the neutral category with good reason. He pointed out that initially, their election platform was only in the Flash format. After e-mails from supporters who complained they were unable to open the document, the party added the other two options. Moreover, a good portion of the Canadian Alliance members and

supporters were not online, so it was felt that an extensive commitment of time and money in this area was not the best use of the organization's resources. Not surprisingly, the Tory spokesperson considered this characteristic 'important'. From the form and content of their Web site, it should be evident that integration of mediums was considered an important priority. When asked about this the Party spokesperson said that they wanted their site to be as 'cutting edge' as possible. He said that by adding audio and video elements, their Web site provided a more informative, interesting, and memorable experience for visitors, because it was felt that the user would be watching the site as opposed to just reading it (Personal Communication, March 16, 2001). With the exception of the efforts made by the Tories, Web sites were static and were characterized by text and visuals.

### **Information Dissemination**

Gronbeck (1997) suggests that information dissemination is one of three prime ways the World Wide Web functions politically. According to utopian thought, the World Wide Web will produce a more informed and active citizenry because of the unlimited amount of information found there. As described in Chapter Two, research studies on earlier cyber-campaigns support Gronbeck's claim, indicating that voters do have access to a wide variety of information from Web sites during a campaign. In terms of information provision, the Internet gives campaigns unprecedented control over dissemination, and allows them a means to avoid the mediation of the press. Sites commonly offered personal information about the candidate, press releases, speeches, news files, and lengthy campaign statements. Also, the archival nature of Web sites, allows Internet users to visit and revisit information.

The Canadian experience with the Internet as a campaign tool revealed similar results

with regard to information dissemination. Visitors to the four political party Web sites were exposed to a plethora of information during campaign 2000. Party policies, the election platform and press releases were available on all four sites. In most cases, party policy was not uniquely campaign-related information. The parties' overall policy agenda on issues was typically on the Web sites before and after the election. The Canadian Alliance, the Liberals, the NDP and the PC Party all had a versions of their party policies on their sites, but there were differences in how they were presented.

The Canadian Alliance had a link on the side navigation bar called 'The Hot Issues.' 'The Hot Issues' was a portal which always started with the 'Top Story' of the day. For the first ten days of the campaign, the 'Top Story' was called the *Canadian Alliance Agriculture Team*, a story that according to the date was uploaded several weeks before the campaign. Its removal during the election was an obvious oversight on the Webmaster's part. Visitors could view party issues by content type or department. Content type refers to the format of the document, a top story, press release, a speech, or a position paper. Topics were also divided into eighteen federal departments, for instance Finance or Intergovernmental Affairs. There was also a link for Election 2000. Once a Net user clicked on one of these issue areas, the site would compile all of the information, including the archives, relating to that issue. The site could also compile all of the stories, speeches and press releases that related to the election on one screen for a user to review.

The Liberal Party site featured a link called 'Your Issues' which provided 'The Liberal Story' on each issue area. Users had the opportunity to choose from eighteen different issue areas, including families and children, rural Canada, or transportation. Once the issue had

been selected, the page was divided into three sections, 'The Challenge,' 'Our Actions,' and 'Our Direction.' Discussion of these issues on this site was quite extensive. 'Your Issues' not only discussed what the Liberals would like to do if elected, but what actions they had taken while in office. A menu box at the top allowed visitors to scroll quickly to choose the next issue they were interested in.

The Progressive Conservative's policy positions were found in the 'Policy' link on the main navigation bar of the site. During the election, the Tories presented their policy positions to Net users in several different ways. First, there was a policy document adopted by the party at its last policy conference in May 2000. Attached to this document there was an audio clip of leader Joe Clark's closing remarks to delegates attending the PC Party conference (another example of the Conservative's integrating mediums on their Web site). There were three position papers under the heading "Joe Clark on the issues." Here, the issues of tax cuts, capital gains taxes and justice reform were addressed. Finally, there were several PC Party Task Force Reports from 1999. The issues addressed in these reports were seasonal workers, taxes and poverty. As was the case with the Liberals, the treatment of issues here was quite extensive. While important in documenting the Tories' agenda, none of these Web documents were purely campaign-related.

Unlike the other parties, the NDP's issue section contained only election and campaign related materials. Party issues were in the form of position papers written by the party, such as 'The Liberal record: What they don't want you to know.' The contents of 'The Issues' and 'NDP on the Issues' changed periodically. Several different position papers were put online throughout the campaign. Papers specifically addressed the Liberal's record, health

care and the Liberal mini budget among other issues. An archive of previous NDP position papers was maintained on the site, allowing visitors to reread a document if they so desired.

The platforms of each party were put on the Web at various points during the campaign corresponding to its date of release. As mentioned earlier, the Canadian Alliance platform was put on its Web site on October 21, 2000, the day before the election was called. *A Time for Change* remained as a link on the main page of the CA site for the entire election. As indicated previously, users of the site could view the document in three different formats. The Progressive Conservative Party released its platform, *A Change You Can Trust!* on its Web site on Day 5 of the campaign. Initially, the platform was located on the main page in the 'Bulletin Board' section. It was moved to 'Election 2000' the following day where it remained for the duration of the campaign. Like the CA platform, the PC platform was provided to users in three forms, HTML, Adobe Acrobat and as a text file. The NDP's platform, *Think How Much Better Canada Could Be* was released on Day 10. A new link was added to the party's main navigation bar called 'Our Commitments,' which offered a synopsis of the party's six core principles and a link to the entire platform. The NDP platform was available as Adobe Acrobat and HTML file. The Liberals were the last party (in this case study) to launched their platform, *Opportunity For All* which was released on Day 11. The day before visitors were forewarned of the launching with the announcement "Prime Minister Chrétien will launch Liberal Party of Canada's election platform 11:00 a.m. November 1" (<http://web1.liberal.ca>) in the 'What's New' section. The Liberal platform was also available in two formats, Adobe Acrobat and text.

It is clear that all the parties recognized that not all Internet users had computers or



connections that could download these documents in a realistic time, and therefore offered users at least two different ways to read the documents. Campaigns understood that they would alienate a part of their constituency if they carried only technically sophisticated versions of documents on their sites. It must be remembered that the party platforms for all the parties did exist in a hard copy. Parties conducted a bulk mailing of their platforms to ensure that all Canadian households received copies.

The final category of information found on the parties campaign Web sites were press releases. This was the main vehicle used by the parties to deliver campaign-related information on their Web sites. Almost daily, all four of the parties would upload at least one new press release documenting their stance on a particular issue or their reaction to an election event. Overall, during campaign 2000 the four parties released a total of about 280 press releases on their Web sites. The Canadian Alliance uploaded the greatest number, releasing fifty-seven press releases under the 'What's Hot' link and sixty-one 'Reality Check' press releases over the duration of the campaign. The Liberals released 67 press releases under the 'What's New - The Latest from the Liberal Campaign' link. The NDP released 51 press releases. Nineteen of these were 'Surreality Checks,' and the others being under 'Latest News.' Visitors to the Progressive Conservative's site could access 45 press releases online, under the categories of 'Message of the Day <sup>8</sup>' and 'Press Releases.' Over the five-week campaign, a variety of topics and issues were covered by the press releases. It is important to remember that news releases serve an important function for political parties. According to Roper (1998):

**They are usually written by a public relations practitioner trained in the art of “spin doctoring.” That is, the writers know how to write a “news” story from the perspective which best serves their organization’s or clients need (p.79).**

**Hence, the posting of so many new releases on the four political party Web sites demonstrated a recognition of their benefits.**

**Other types of information provided on the Web site were the television commercials on the CA and the PC sites that were mentioned previously. The Tories also put a few of Joe Clark’s speeches up during the campaign. Several observations can be made about information dissemination by the four political parties in Campaign 2000. First, as Whilock (1997), Klotz (1997) and Davis (1998) had observed one the most critical benefits of online campaigning is the area of information dissemination. All of the parties provided different types of information for users of their sites. The World Wide Web has allowed Canadian parties to post various kinds of party and campaign literature, in large volumes, all in a venue convenient for voters to access. As the Tories spokesperson put it, the Internet acts as a “communication tool to get our platform and messages across to Canadians” (Personal Communication, 2001). Moreover, the treatment of issues was more substantive on the Web sites than it could possibly be in the traditional television clip or newspaper article, due to the unmediated nature of this medium. This was one of the benefits that campaigning on the Net garnered for candidates and political parties. Since there was no outside source filtering the information, Canadian political parties were able to get their message directly to voters without worrying about the frames used by the mass media. The unmediated quality of the Internet was considered important to the parties in this study (Table 2..). According to the**

## **Canadian Alliance, the Internet**

**gives you an opportunity for an unfiltered message. If it goes through other hands, like media and so on, and there is always a chance that what goes in one end is not necessarily what think you put in the other end. (Personal Communication, 2001).**

**On the Web, all of the press releases, party policies, and the platforms were presented to Internet users as the parties intended it, thereby bypassing the mass media.**

**Electronic democracy proponent Dick Morris (1999) suggests the “basic premise of today’s political communication are brevity, focus, repetition, and condensation. In the Internet era, elaboration, explanation, extrapolation will be the primary virtues” (p. 93). Unlike a party pamphlet or TV commercial, the Web site has no space limitations. Therefore, in theory, campaigns are able to offer to voters a more extensive and lengthy issue discussion of issues on the Web site than in other mediums. Despite this opportunity, elaboration, explanation and extrapolation have not generally been a characteristics of cyber-campaigns. In fact, candidates and political parties have been accused of using their sites to produce brochureware or shovelware. That is, information and the discussion on the Web are little more than an extended campaign pamphlet (Kahler, 1997). Additionally, these terms refer to the fact that campaign Web sites didn’t “necessarily contain information that wasn’t readily available elsewhere” (McMahon, 2000, p. 10). Using these definitions, the Canadian party Web sites in the 2000 election definitely fit into the category of shovelware and brochureware. The party platforms, policy documents and speeches found on the four party sites could have been accessed by voters in print formats. Nor was any of this information uniquely created to be posted on the Web site.**

In addition to brochureware, the sites contained what one might also call *mediaware*. In the interviews the party spokespeople indicated that they used their Web sites to reach a wide variety of audiences, including the press. Wayne Harding, the NDP's Communication Coordinator, indicated that one of the intentions of their site was to provide news reporters with daily information; news releases and the leader's campaign itinerary (Personal Communication, 2001). Even though the PC Party employed a company to fax their press releases to journalists, they were fully aware that journalists were using their Web site to get information for stories. The Tory spokespersons noted that whenever they were slow in posting new media advisories or press releases on the Web site, they would receive inquiry by phone and e-mail from reporters. While sites did provide unfiltered, useful information to voters about campaign events and issues, reaching journalists with the hit of the day was a central purpose for at least some of the parties. Roper (1998) concluded that the use of news releases on campaign Web sites "is essentially a public relations function" (p. 80) for campaigns, because they are aware that journalists need to be able to access information for stories quickly.

It can be argued that the Canadian Alliance, Liberals, NDP and PC parties had failed to use the Internet in a way that would engage citizens more fully. However, according to campaign professionals the Utopian model of citizen engagement is an unfruitful way to think about how Web sites should be used. According to the Democracy Online Project there is "abundant evidence that voters want documentation from political candidates" and that the online public wants the Internet to help "answer the questions on their minds" (p. 10). This being true, any type of information that addresses the issues of the campaign will be beneficial

to voters and therefore, the campaign. Mike Connell (1998), president of New Media Communications, a Web development and Internet consulting firm in Ohio, contends that campaign Web sites need to be a repository for position papers, news releases and other issue oriented communications. Moreover, the contents of a Web site should “mirror what is distributed to the press and public through all other channels” (p. 28). By this standard U.S. campaign professionals would praise what the four Canadian parties have done in terms of information dissemination in this campaign. Through their Web sites, the four parties have all attempted to answer the questions that Canadians may have had by offering several different types of information. Second, the information on the Web sites did in fact, mirror what was going on elsewhere in the campaign.

Updating is key to any Website, political or otherwise. If candidates or political parties want voters to come back to their Web sites, they must always offer the voter something new to engage in. Campaign Web sites need to be conceptualized as newspapers, not brochures (Davis, 1999), in that they are ultimately evanescent. In addition to campaign photographs (CA and Liberals) and the leader’s itinerary (all parties), the main source of updating on the Web sites came through the posting of press releases. An average of two press releases were posted by the four political parties daily. The New Democrats and the Canadian Alliance were the only parties that clearly identified the last times that their sites had been updated. The Alliance notified users when the site had been updated by indicating the date it had last been modified, at the bottom left side corner of the screen. The New Democrats attached the date and time of an update to each and every press release on their homepage. Klotz(1998) noted that during the Senate elections in the US in 1996 that home

pages were altered infrequently. He observed that “alterations to candidate home pages almost always involved adding material, with little material removed” (p 355). Klotz’s first statement appears not to have been the case in campaign 2000. As mentioned previously the parties used sites to post press releases very frequently. However, the second claim appears to be correct in this election. While parties may have cleared old press releases off the first page of the site, a large repository of campaign press releases developed for all the parties. In sum, while not necessarily the case in previous cyber-campaigns, in this campaign information dissemination and Web site dynamism were closely linked.

### **Negative Campaigning**

During Jean Chrétien’s victory speech, he said “We are at the end of a campaign that was frankly too negative and far too personal” (McCarthy, 2000, May 29, p. 1). The campaign of the 37<sup>th</sup> General Election has been described as one of the most negative and nasty in Canadian history. Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day and PC leader Joe Clark both called Chrétien a ‘crook.’ Clark also suggested that the Chrétien was too dumb to be Prime Minister. NDP leader Alexa Donough referred to Day as a cockroach. To the distress of many, negativism has become a part of modern day campaigns, especially through television advertising. According to Taras (1993) negative or black television ads

attempt to tarnish an opponent through ridicule or by a straightforward savaging of their character or record in office. The competence, motives, intelligence, and integrity of opponents is brought into question. The object is to draw blood, to inflict irreparable damage (at least for the duration of the campaign). (p. 219).

Scholars were surprised to find minimal use of negative campaigning on Web sites during previous cyber-campaigns. Nonetheless, we cannot forget Robert Klotz’s (1998) prediction

that “the positive characteristic of Internet campaigning is not necessarily a permanent characteristic” (p. 362). While the first few experiences with electioneering online in the United States were not characterized by negative campaigning, in Canada, the negativism that plagued the campaign on the ground was also evident in cyberspace. The four political parties showed no mercy in using their Web sites to criticize and ridicule their opponents throughout the duration of campaign 2000.

The vehicle for this negativity were the press releases. As discussed earlier, new releases were uploaded daily by all of the parties. While, it would be impossible to go extensively into each negative new release, the titles of a sample should help provide an understanding of the nature of these negative news releases. On Day 23 of the campaign, the press releases uploaded on the party Web sites included; Canadian Alliance - ‘*The Liberal’s Hidden Agenda*’; Liberal Party - “*The Bloc is Punishing Québec Workers*”; NDP - ‘*Joe Clark discovers health care . . . Unfortunately, he wrote his platform first*’; Progressive Conservative - ‘*Canadian Alliance Hidden Agenda on Immigration.*’ The parties, their leaders and prominent candidates, such as cabinet ministers were all targets of negative campaigning. Fifty-six percent of all of the press releases posted on the Liberal Web site over the thirty-six-day campaign could be considered negative. None of the major parties or their leaders (including the Bloc Québécois) were safe from Liberal attack. Fifty-three percent of ‘Press Releases’ on the Progressive Conservative Web site could be considered negative. The Canadian Alliance served as the Conservative’s biggest target, with the Liberal Party coming in a close second. Both the New Democrats and the Canadian Alliance organized their negative news in a separate category from the rest of their releases. The tone of the press

releases that appeared under the NDP's 'Surreality Check' and the Alliance's 'Reality Check' were different from what appeared in their 'Latest News' and 'What's New' sections. The governing Liberals were the favourite targets of both parties' negative news attacks. Almost half (48%) of the press releases on the Alliance site appeared in its 'Reality Check' section. The NDP had the least negative news releases on their Web site, with only 37% of all press releases having a negative tone.

In general, negative campaigning occurred in the form of press releases for all four parties. It should be noted that the NDP's 'What did Stockwell mean?' animation and the television commercials found on the Canadian Alliance and Conservative Web sites (identified earlier) could also be included under the category of negative campaigning. While it is believed that Canadians unlike Americans will not accept political advertising that 'hits below the belt' (Taras, 1993), election Web sites were inundated with attempts by the parties to do just that. The use of the Web sites for 'black' campaigning may be a reflection of the bitter and divisive campaign that occurred on the ground and in the mass media. Or perhaps the Canadian cyber-campaign indicates that Klotz was correct: that it was only a matter of time before candidates and political parties recognized the advantages afforded to them by the Internet in terms of negative campaigning. Whatever the reason, it must be concluded that one central feature of this cyber-campaign was the use of the Internet by all four parties for negative campaigning practices.

### **Intra-party Communication**

All of the parties used their Web sites to reflect and communicate with local campaigns. Each site provided a list of their candidates on their pages. The list of candidates



was organized by province and constituency and provided contact information. This list developed over the duration of the campaign; information about candidates was added as they were nominated at the riding level. Both the Liberals and the NDP also provided biographical information on their candidates. As well, the Liberal, Canadian Alliance, and PC sites offered a link to the Elections Canada Web sites, the purpose being to assist voters in being able to correctly identify the constituency in which they resided. All the parties provided candidates' e-mail addresses, if available. Links to candidate or constituency Web sites were also provided. Overall, the number of candidates with Web sites during campaign 2000 was substantially less than the number of candidates for each party. For instance, only 1/3 of Canadian Alliance candidates had their own personal campaign Web site. Obviously, the focus on political parties as opposed to candidates in Canadian politics was being reflected in the relatively small number of individual candidates campaigning on the Net.

There was another aspect of the relationship between the national and local levels that deserves mentioning in terms of how the medium functioned in this election. In Gibson and Ward's (1998) study, they examined how the Internet would affect intra-party communications. They concluded that British political parties recognized the importance of and utilized the Internet for the downward dissemination of information. The British national parties used the Internet as a tool to distribute campaign information to the local ridings.

When asked in interviews how advantageous the Internet was for intra-party communication, all of the parties' representatives described the Net as being extremely useful. The New Democrats used the Internet to provide local candidates and constituencies with "backgrounders on issues, fact sheets, news releases, organizational information, the platform,

leaflets, and sign designs” (Personal Communication, 2001). This was sent electronically through their ‘Campaign Bulletin’ or it was uploaded in a special secured area of their Web site that only individuals with special access could view. Several times a day the NDP would issue different talking points for local campaigns to access on this secured site. These two methods were also used by the Canadian Alliance and the Liberal Party. Information regarding Stockwell Day’s itinerary, campaign events, issues of the day, and party responses to statement from the other parties were delivered from the War Room in Ottawa by e-mail. Logos and design materials were delivered from the national organization electronically. The Alliance also established a hidden Web site that required an access code. This site was essentially a research archive. It allowed local candidates to access information that would help them in preparing campaign documentation and speeches. The Liberals set up an Intranet<sup>9</sup> set for party personnel, campaign staff and provincial and territorial associations that provided templates for consistent publishing and ‘talking points.’ For instance, when Alliance strategist Jason Kenney made a comment about two-tier health care during the campaign, the Liberals used their Intranet site to provide the Liberal response to Kenney’s comments to candidates in the field. The Progressive Conservatives sent their ‘Message of the Day,’ which included press and special event information to candidates and constituencies. The Tories employed a database containing research materials for campaign and party personnel. Their spokesperson indicated their desire to set up an interactive Intranet site for future political and campaign use. The hidden and Intranet sites demonstrate that in this election the Internet had not only an external face, for the public, but an internal face that served an organizational purpose for the parties.

The benefit to the parties was that the Internet, through e-mail and Web sites, allowed the national party organization to communicate easily and quickly with the local ridings whenever necessary. Gronow from the Canadian Alliance pointed out that without the Internet, providing this type of information would have been a 'headache' for the party both logistically and in terms of cost (Personal Communication, January 2001). The NDP's Harding compares the secured site to a store for local campaigns, where they could access all sorts of campaign information quickly (Personal Communication, April 5, 2001). The Liberal Party plans to use the internal face of the Internet more in the future. The Party hopes to begin disseminating their party publications, such as the Liberal Times, to their online members in a PDF file via email. As discussed in the second chapter the Internet's characteristics of time, cost and distance changed the nature of intra-party relations. As was the case during the 1997 election in the United Kingdom, Canadian political parties increased their communication with their local constituencies by effectively using the Internet. It is important to point out that this intra-party communication was entirely top-down or one-way. All of the national organizations used the Internet to provide the local campaigns access campaign documentation and information. None of the respondents indicated that the Internet was used to enhance bottom-up or discursive democracy.

### **Interactivity**

The interactive capability of the Internet is one of the reasons that the Internet is championed by utopian thinkers. It is believed that political participation can be rejuvenated. This is because the Internet has the capacity to allow individuals to talk freely to candidates, elected officials, public institutions, and other citizens about public policy issues. Moreover,

with the Internet, a potential exists for citizens all over the country to initiate, deliberate and vote on public issues from the comfort of their computer desks. Because of the centrality of this characteristic to this technology and to utopian thought, it is a popular issue for researchers. Depending on how it is measured, interactivity is either pervasive on election Web sites or nonexistent. The research has shown that if interactivity is measured by allowing voters the opportunity to send direct e-mail to candidates or political parties, then most campaign Web sites are highly interactive. However, if the bi-lateral definition of interactivity is used, most campaign Web sites have failed so far in using the Internet to anything close to its full capacity.

During campaign 2000, a voter was able to reach any of the political parties directly through their election Web sites via e-mail. Both the NDP and the Canadian Alliance parties made it relatively simple for users to contact their parties through their Web sites. Initially, the contact information for the NDP was located in a 'Contact Information' box on the main page. This included the party's mailing address, phone and fax numbers and its e-mail address (ndp2000@alexa.ca). However, on Day 5 of the campaign, the contact information was linked to the main navigation bar entitled 'Contact Us'. The homepage of the Canadian Alliance site provided three different ways that users could contact the party through e-mail links. Citizens could reach the party by clicking on the 'Contact Us' link on the top navigation bar or they could e-mail the party's leader directly through an 'E-mail Stockwell Here' link found below his picture. Also, users of the CA page could contact the site's Webmaster via a direct link found at the very bottom of the homepage and all subsequent pages. The 'Contact Us' model was also used by the Progressive Conservatives. As was the

case with the other two parties, a link to the party's contact information was found on the left navigation bar. As was the case with the the Canadian Alliance site, the e-mail link to the PC's Webmaster was provided on pages throughout the site. The Liberals seem to have forgotten to provide a convenient method to e-mail or contact the party for the first twenty-four days of the campaign. If a voter wanted to reach the party by e-mail they had to do some surfing. Contact information, e-mail or otherwise, for the Liberals was buried in the site. There was no direct e-mail link at all for several weeks of the campaign. However, an online feedback form could be found, curiously, under the 'Join our Fight' link on the navigation bar. "Join our Fight" served three different purposes for the Liberal Party. It was an online form for party membership, financial contributions, and user feedback. While not clear in the link name, this online form actually allowed users to send a message to the Liberal Party or the Webmaster, as "the Liberal Party is interested in your views"(<http://web.1.liberals.ca>). With twelve campaign days remaining, the Liberals finally put a direct e-mail contact link on the main page of their site. The link [feedback@liberals.ca](mailto:feedback@liberals.ca) finally allowed users of the site to contact the Party with relative ease.

The depth of interactivity, defined by e-mail correspondence differed from site to site. There was only one way to e-mail the NDP on their Web site. However, because clicking on [ndp2000@alexa.ca](mailto:ndp2000@alexa.ca) opened up the user's own e-mail program, users could write for as long as they wished. The [feedback@liberals.ca](mailto:feedback@liberals.ca) link worked in the same manner. But due to the late arrival of this link, for most of the campaign, voters on the Liberal site were limited to 'fewer than 150 words' if and when they located the online form. The Canadian Alliance also provided an online form for users to interact with the party. This form was extremely

comprehensive. Unlike the Liberal's form, this one provided an unlimited amount of space for users. More interestingly, however, users of the CA page could select a particular individual or department they wished the message to be forwarded to. E-mail could be sent to the Public Information office in Calgary, or to Question Period in Ottawa, or to any of the sitting MPS in the House of Commons (despite being redundant during an election campaign). The PC Party site provided the most opportunity for interaction with the public. If an individual worked for the Party and their name was on the site in an official capacity, then they could be contacted by a direct email link. Users of this site could e-mail leader Joe Clark, campaign manager John Lachinger, or any member of the PC party executive and staff.

The Democracy Online Project suggests that we should not underestimate the importance of e-mail-based interactivity. Their *Online Campaigning Primer* contends that "Web site visitors do not expect prompt, unique, and sustained dialogue with the site providers" but, users "should be afforded the opportunity to send online messages to the campaign" (DOP, 2000, p. 6). According to the Primer, e-mail and contact information should be on every page of the site, for this will indicate how accessible and responsive a political party and candidate are to citizens surfing the Net. *Campaigns and Elections'* contributor Michael Cornfield (2000) has identified another benefit for campaigns. The more communication a campaign can create between visitors and people within the campaign, the more visitors will get involved on behalf of the organization. Hence, according to election professionals interactivity in any capacity is beneficial to a campaign.

The opportunity to interact with the political parties through their Web sites was well-taken advantage during campaign 2000 by citizens. The Canadian Alliance received between

500 and 800 e-mails per day. The PC Party estimates that it received about 10,000 e-mails during the campaign. The Liberals received approximately 6500 e-mail messages through their feedback e-mail box on the Web site. A representative from the NDP indicated that this information was not counted. The parties indicated that the e-mail they received represented a variety of opinions from supporters and opponents alike. According to the NDP, "we received all sorts of e-mail - comments on the campaign, the platform, the candidates, advice to the Leader, request for help, offers of assistance, hate mail" (W. Harding, Personal Communication, January 2001). According to Dan Hayward, Manager of Technical Services, the e-mail sent to the Liberals was typically congratulatory or critical feedback in response to campaign events and news and some individuals would even suggest policy ideas (Personal Communication, January 2001). Similar responses were given by spokespeople for the Tories and the Canadian Alliance. It is clear that both supporters and opponents of the parties were surfing these Web sites, indicating their approval or animosity toward the parties and their election promises. As mentioned earlier, several individuals were employed by the parties to read and respond to the vast amounts of e-mail received during the campaign. Typically the e-mail was generic in nature, including requests for information or general comments about the campaign. The parties' spokespeople who were interviewed noted that the number of e-mail they received corresponded to important campaign events. For instance, before the English-speaking debate, the PC Party received an average of 250 e-mail per day. On the day after the debate, the Party had received 250 e-mails by mid-day. The Tory spokesperson called the debate the 'turning point' in their campaign, which was reflected in an increased number of e-mail contacts.

In theory, leaders of the political parties, candidates, and members of campaign staff could chat with voters regarding campaign and policy issues, in real-time or using a bulletin board<sup>10</sup> format. According to utopian thinkers, it is this type of interactivity that will help foster a new political ethos. Despite the claims of electronic democracy supporters, the Liberals, Canadian Alliance, NDP and PC Party did not provide this type of interactive experience for users of their sites. However, two qualifiers need to be made regarding this statement. First, CA leader Stockwell Day and NDP leader Alexa McDonough both participated in on-line chats sponsored by CANOE ([www.canoe.ca](http://www.canoe.ca)), the Web portal operated by Sun Media Corp. Additionally, a Liberal cabinet minister, the National Campaign Director of the PC party, plus other candidates and political activists <sup>11</sup> participated in these online chats during the campaign. Users e-mailed their questions to CANOE in advance of the half-hour bilingual chats. The number of question answered by the participants varied. For instance, McDonough answered eight questions during the chat, while Tory strategist Susan Elliot answered eighteen questions. A variety of election issues were addressed during these chats, including health care, the brain drain, the death penalty, and negative campaign commercials. The nature of the questions also crossed a wide range of topics. For example, one user asked Stockwell Day who his favourite Canadian historical figure was. Day selected Sir Isaac Brock, citing Brock's courageousness during the War of 1812. During Liberal cabinet minister John Manley's chat, a user asked how the Liberal government would address the problem Western alienation.'

A second qualifier concerns the NDP. The Party did in fact operate a discussion group on their site called Mouseland. This was unique amongst the federal parties in this



study. However, visitors had to meet strict admission requirements in order to participate in Mouseland. An individual had to become a member in 'good standing' of the NDP and apply for admission using an online application form on the site. Although the forum has been associated with the NDP site for some time, it was not advertised on the Web site during the election campaign.<sup>12</sup> It would be unfair to suggest that bi-lateral interactivity did not exist in cyberspace in some capacity in this campaign. But for the most part it did not occur on the election Web sites evaluated in this study. And when it did occur, it occurred through tightly controlled measures or outside the party web site environment. Hence, 'partial interactivity' (Cuilla Kamarck, 1999) is the best term to describe how the parties interacted on the Net in this election

What explains the lack of bi-lateral interactivity on the Web sites of the Liberals, Canadian Alliance, NDP and PC? Is it that Canadian political parties did not use the Internet to its fullest capacity? Or was it that they just didn't understand this new technology? Modern campaigns offer very few real and substantive opportunities for political parties and/or candidates to discuss issues with citizens. It might be argued that because this technology was so new, campaigns did not really comprehend the interactive possibilities of the Internet. At first glance, this seems like an appropriate explanation for the lack of bi-lateral interactivity seen during this and other cyber-campaigns. It may be, however, that the decision to not use bi-lateral interactivity in campaign 2000 was part of a conscious political strategy. Gronow of the Alliance described party sponsored chat rooms and discussion groups as a "pandora's box" for political parties. The problem was that discussion groups were potentially unwieldily and uncontrollable. If an inappropriate comment appeared on

your Web site, even if you didn't write it, some people might believe that the party somehow endorsed the comment (Personal Communication, January 2001). In an open Web forum, where all users of the Internet are able to participate in a chat, there is a possibility that misinformed or mischievous individuals from the opposition may write something that is offensive to others and effectively hurts the campaign. This is exactly what happened to the New Zealand First party according to Juliet Roper (1998). The Party's bulletin board was removed from their Web site "because of the negative comments which were being posted" (Roper, 1998, p. 78). The lack of control of a Web site chat room can pose a real danger for campaigns. According to Gronow, "once it's out there, to a large degree, the damage is done" (Personal Communication, 2001). While not addressed explicitly in the NDP interview, the strict admission regulations surrounding Mouseland, speak to what Gronow said. To some degree interactivity was seen as a liability for political parties using the Net as a communication tool during an election. Nixon and Johansson (1999) noted because the dynamic of the Internet is difficult to control or police, political parties in the Netherlands and Sweden were "wary of allowing their web site to slip from their control" (p. 147). It appears that Canadian political parties have similar concerns about this type of interaction on their Web sites. The Liberal Party, which is looking into adding a discussion group in the future, had a different concern related to bi-lateral interactivity. Their concern relates to the digital divide. Political discussion groups of today are online conversations among elites. Dan Hayward believes that as the digital divide is overcome and more people go online, discussion on the Web will begin to look more like normal discourse and will be more valuable (Personal Communication, 2001).

Overall, the sites in this study were partially interactive. Moreover, the Canadian experience with Web site interactivity follows the patterns seen in other studies. Depending on how interactivity is defined, the Web sites of the Liberals, Canadian Alliance, NDP, and PC were or were not interactive. The struggle over the definition is reflected in the parties' perceptions of interactivity as a characteristic of the Internet. When asked how important was interactivity to their campaigns (5 being 'very important' and 1 being 'not important'), the respondents all selected the neutral category of 3 (Table 2.). On one hand, the choice of the neutral category by the political parties reflects the fact that e-mail interactivity is necessary and beneficial to the campaign. It was clear that both political parties and users of the Internet saw e-mail interactivity as a useful way to create a dialogue between sender and receiver about campaign and political issues. But on the other hand bi-lateral interactivity was understood to be problematic and even politically damaging to the campaign. During this election, the Canadian parties opted not to have an open forum on their sites. The lesson to be learned from campaign 2000 is not that Canadian parties are unaware of the interactive capabilities of the Internet, but that they are choosing to use interactivity in a way that benefits their campaigns, and the ultimate goal of getting elected.

### **Voter Involvement**

Voter involvement was an important aspect of previous cyber-campaigns. In different capacities, campaigns attempted to get online visitors to support their activities by volunteering or donating money. The use of Web sites to stimulate greater voter involvement has been insignificant compared to other electioneering activities that the Internet can perform. With the exception of former Republican presidential candidate John McCain,

campaigns on the Net from 1996 onwards have not seen really big returns in terms of getting voters to participate. The four political parties had varying success with regard to the Internet being a vehicle to get users to commit time and/or money to their campaigns. From a form and content perspective, the Web sites of the four parties had various mechanisms to encourage voters to participate within the party and the campaign.

The goal of encouraging voter involvement was evident on all four party Web sites. Visitors to all of these sites, could join the party, volunteer to help with the campaign or donate money. In fact all of the party sites made it extremely easy to do so. Initially the Liberal's 'Join Our Fight' allowed an interested citizen to either join the party or make a financial contribution. However, users could not do this directly. A prospective member or contributor would fill out an online form and send it electronically. Once received a member of the Liberal Party would then contact the person via some other method to complete the transaction. As a result perhaps of seeing the other three parties' voter involvement links, the Liberal's updated their technology on Day 25 of the campaign. Interested voters could then directly join or contribute to the party by quickly and simply using a secured online form which was able to encrypt credit card information. If voters were unsure about using the online form, they could still fill out the form and opt to send a cheque to the party by snail mail. According to the party, this aspect of the Liberal Web site was not heavily used by visitors. In fact Dan Hayward described online donations as a "disappointment" (Personal Communication, March 30, 2001). The site received about three donations per day beginning during the third week of the campaign. The donations were usually for about \$100. According to Hayward, the relatively small percentage of online

contributions was due to the lateness of the secured link and also because it was not heavily promoted by the Party during the campaign (Personal Communication, March 14, 2001). Even though financial contributions through the Web site were disappointing, the same cannot be said for online memberships. The Liberal Party received about 1200 new memberships via the Internet during the election campaign. Approximately 300 individuals used the online form, described earlier, to join the party. Others directly e-mailed the Party with their membership information. One final note about voter involvement and the Liberal Party, 'Join Our Fight' allowed Canadians to join and/ contribute to the party. There was never any link or discussion on the Web site about how users could volunteer for the Liberal campaign effort. However, during the campaign the Liberal Web site processed a couple of hundred volunteers. Individuals wanting to volunteer were then directed to a the appropriate federal-provincial organization.

By the end of campaign 2000, there were five different voter involvement links on the homepage of the New Democratic Party Web site. On the first day of the campaign, NDP supporters who went online could choose 'Volunteer!' or 'Make a Donation!' from the main navigation bar. Also, on the homepage opposite to the left navigation bar there was a link for 'Make a Difference!' The caption read "This election is about choosing the kind of future we want - a future where we can build a Canada that helps working families realize their hopes and dreams. Together we will build a better Canada" (www.ndp.ca). After selecting this link, users were forwarded to the 'Make a Donation!' form. After filling in the required personal information, visitors could either use the secured form or send a cheque to NDP headquarters in Ottawa. The 'Volunteer!' link informed potential volunteers that they could contact the

local campaign directly or by filling in the online form. The Webmaster would forward the request to the appropriate constituency. On November 11, 2000, Day 21 of the campaign, two links for NDP membership were placed on the homepage. One 'Join the NDP' was placed on the menu navigation bar, while the other was found on the opposite side of the screen under the 'Make a Difference!' link. The 'Join the NDP' page described the benefits of NDP membership. The page informed potential members that membership applications were dealt with through the provincial and territorial parties. However, by filling out the form on the site, the national party would forward this information to the appropriate regional unit on behalf of the user. Finally, it is important to highlight one interesting voter involvement technique used by the NDP during this campaign. Several days into the campaign, when a visitor typed the NDP Web site address into their browser, a small pop box appeared on the main page. The box read "Make a difference! Support the NDP and we will build a better Canada." It also included a picture of leader Alexa McDonough amid a crowd of supporters. Selecting this link took visitors to the 'Make a Donation!' page. This is similar to the technique used on John McCain's Web site. The NDP spokesperson Wayne Harding noted that the NDP did very well in fundraising online. The Party received between five and ten donations per day through the Web site. According to Harding, this may have been because the Party generally receives more donations from ordinary people, not through fundraising dinners or large from large corporations. The Web site also attracted well-over 1500 new members. Harding recalls one weekend during the campaign where a new individual joined the Party about every twenty minutes (Personal Communication, April 5, 2001).

From the first day of the campaign, visitors to the Canadian Alliance site could easily

volunteer, become a member, and donate to the party through the Web site. Although the site offered two separate links, 'Volunteer' and 'Donations,' they were both handled by the same site page. Secured by the company Thwate, this page was similar to the those of the other parties. Users could use the secured form or send a cheque to headquarters in Calgary. There were two interesting aspects to the Canadian Alliance's membership/donation form. First, this page allowed for individuals that were already members of the party to quickly renew their memberships online. Second, the site asked those who had donated or joined the party if they would be willing to assist in the recruitment process. Users could select Yes or No to "Please send me a recruitment kit so I can sign up others" ([www.canadianalliance.ca](http://www.canadianalliance.ca)). A similar request was found on the 'Volunteer' page. This volunteer page was the most extensive of the four parties. In addition to asking the typical personal information, this page asked the prospective volunteer to identify their areas of campaign expertise and highlight their campaigning experience. It even asked users to indicate which days and times were most convenient. As was the case with the membership/donation page, this page allowed users to access a printable volunteer sign-up form in order to "distribute to friends and family"([www.canadianalliance.ca](http://www.canadianalliance.ca)) under the 'Recruit a Friend' link. Although the exact number of memberships received through the Web site during the campaign was not counted, the spokesperson indicated that they did receive new members 'quite regularly' this way. However, Gronow felt that the Web site had not yet replaced the traditional ways of attracting new members, such as learning about the party through friends, neighbours and associates (Personal Communication, January 2001).

The Progressive Conservative Web site offered several different voter involvement

links on the homepage. In addition to the main navigation bar link 'Do Something,' a second menu bar was located just under the Party's logo dedicated to voter involvement. The menu offered: 'Donate' 'Volunteer' and 'Be A Member.' 'Donate' offered visitors a lengthy description about the benefits of financially supporting the PC Party. Voters could choose to mail a cheque to the party headquarters or use the CIBC secured online form. As was the case with the Canadian Alliance site, this form was the same used for membership purposes and asked visitors about acquiring a recruitment kit. In order to volunteer, users could send an e-mail (direct e-mail link), print off a Volunteer Form(in Word97 format) or write to PC Headquarters. The national party then would put the prospective volunteer in contact with the local riding president. The party spokesperson described the Web site as important in attracting new people to the party (Personal Communication, March 16, 2001). The Tories received several hundred new memberships during the campaign through the Web site. The Progressive Conservatives offered one final voter involvement activity that was unique. In the section 'Do Something' there was an option to 'Write a Letter to the Editor of Your Newspaper.' This page's caption read

Canada is a proud democracy, and your views are important. Are you sick and tired of your newspaper's coverage or lack thereof? Or are you proud of it and want to congratulate the Editors? Just click on the titles below to send an e-mail to the Editors. ([www.pcparty.ca](http://www.pcparty.ca))

There was a list of thirty-eight newspapers from across the country. Visitors could directly and instantly e-mail the editor of their local newspapers.

'Recruit a Friend' and the recruitment kit were also instances of 'e-mail polling organization', used by the Conservatives and the Alliance. E-mail polling organization is a



Web-based campaign technique that “involves recruiting volunteers to recruit volunteers and members, using their computers” (May, 2000, May 29). According to Jalonick (2000), this was an extremely important technique in getting Internet users to feel engaged in a campaign. She suggests that because the Internet can distribute massive amounts of information quickly and easily, campaigns should give supporters an easy way to spread the campaign message. E-mail polling organization was the closest attempt in campaign 2000 to encourage supporters to forward their messages to others. The Liberals and the NDP did not take advantage of such techniques during this election campaign.

<b>Table 3. Importance of Web site for Voter Involvement</b>				
	<b>CA</b>	<b>Liberals</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>PC</b>
<b>Members</b>	3	2	3	5
<b>Volunteers</b>	3	2	2	3
<b>Campaign Contributions</b>	3	2	3	4

Evidently, all of the parties put considerable effort into the voter involvement function on their campaign Web sites during this election. Another thing that is evident, is that in 2000, online, secure recruiting forms were the norm. During the 1998 US mid-term elections, only 29.9% of senate contenders used secure online contribution forms (Dulio et al., 1999). Since the online campaigners have become more technologically savvy and have adopted e-commerce techniques. Table 3. shows the perceptions of selected party spokespeople about the importance of the Internet as a tool for voter involvement. There was a clear difference between the Progressive Conservative Party’s views of the Web campaign and those of the Canadian Alliance, the Liberals and New Democrats. Unlike the other three parties, the Tories believe that the Web was important, even very important in terms of recruiting

members, and for involving users in their campaigns. The NDP and Canadian Alliance were unable to decide on either side of the scale, selecting the neutral category in most cases. The Liberal felt the Internet was not important for voter involvement during campaign 2000. This result was not very surprising, Faucheux's (1998) study of 270 American campaign Web sites during the 1998 election cycle showed that recruiting campaign volunteers and raising money received a 2.8 and a 2.4 respectively (1 being not important and 5 being very important).

Here we have seen that the four political parties had varying success in engaging voters in their campaign through the Web site. There are two key issues that could have influenced voter involvement number during this campaign. First, as Liberal Dan Hayward points out, that the Canadian campaign is not as centralized as an American one. In Canada, for any given party there are many entry points for voter involvement, including the national party, the 301 local ridings, and the provincial and territorial associations. Several of the party spokespeople noted that typically volunteers and campaign contributions do not go through the national party; rather, interested individuals usually contact the local riding directly. Given this, the national party Web site would not be the most popular vehicle for voter involvement during a campaign. Second, last year the Canadian Government noted that only 25% of Canadians, with Internet access had ever purchased products online. Furthermore, 67% of all Canadians were concerned about the security of their credit card numbers, while just over half were worried about the privacy of their personal information online (Consumer Quarterly, 2000). It seems that Canadians are not quite ready to send their personal and financial information electronically over the Internet, to businesses or otherwise. Given these statistics, it is fair to suggest that concerns by Canadians about providing

information online hampered the parties' attempts to increase voter involvement via their Web sites during this election. Still, it is plausible that as Canadians become more comfortable with e-commerce, using the Net for voter involvement may become an increasing part of online politics. Several of the party representatives interviewed noted that there is a lot of room for growth for the Internet to attract volunteers, members, and dollars. Moreover, they expect that it will play a more central role in future campaigns.

### **Cyber-Campaign 2000 - The Parties' View**

Now that we have an understanding of what visitors saw and participated in online during this campaign, we should get an understanding of how the parties' viewed the success or failure of the Internet as an electioneering tool. The parties all had different perceptions of the importance of the Internet as a campaign tool. When asked about the importance of the Web site in their campaign, the spokespeople for the Liberals and the New Democrats claimed it was 'very important', while the representative from the Progressive Conservatives claimed it was 'important'. The Canadian Alliance spokesperson selected the neutral category. Regardless of these differences, all the parties believed that the Internet offered them important features that made it useful for campaign communications. Another indication of the importance of the Internet to campaigning can be seen in the fact that all four parties monitored the others' Web sites during the election. The Progressive Conservative representative noted that "it was important to monitor the other political parties web sites to find out everything from the Leader's schedule to their Press Releases" (Personal Communication, January 2001). The purpose of monitoring the other sites was put most effectively by the NDP's Harding who said "know thy enemy" (Personal Communication,

January 2001). Despite the importance attached to this new medium during the campaign, the Internet was far from being the central method of campaign communication. Table 4. shows how the representatives of the political parties ranked campaign communications methods in order of importance to their campaigns.

<b>Table 4. Ranking of Campaign Communication Methods in the 2000 Election Campaign.</b>			
<b>CA</b>	<b>Liberals</b>	<b>NDP</b>	<b>PC</b>
1. TV Advertising 2. Party Platform 3. Campaign Brochures 4. <i>Website</i> 5. Direct Mail 6. Lawn Signs 7. Debate 8. Public Meetings 9. TV News Coverage 10. Radio News Coverage 11. Print News Coverage 12. Non Traditional Media	1. TV News Coverage 2. Print New Coverage 3. TV Advertising 4. <i>Website</i> 5. Radio News Coverage 6. Debate 7. Non-Traditional Media 8. Lawn Signs 9. Campaign Brochures 10. Public Meetings 11. Party Platform 12. Direct Mail	1. TV Advertising 2. TV News Coverage 3. Print News Coverage 4. Radio News Coverage 5. Debate 6. Direct Mail 7. Campaign Brochures 8. Non traditional media 9. <i>Website</i> 10. Campaign Brochures 11. Lawn Signs 12. Public Meetings	1. Debate 2. Party Platform 3. Campaign Brochures 4. TV News Coverage 5. Radio News Coverage 6. Print News Coverage 7. TV Advertising 8. <i>Website</i> 9. Direct Mail 10. Lawn Signs 11. Public Meetings 12. Non Traditional Media

Three conclusions can be drawn from this table. First, the four parties had different perceptions about the utility of different communication techniques for getting their message to voters. Next with the exception of the Canadian Alliance and the Liberal Party, the Internet did not rank highly as a method of campaign communication. Last and not surprisingly, television, whether it was party advertising or news reports, remained far and away the most important means for communicating with voters. This chapter has shown that the Internet clearly had a function in this election campaign. However, it is also evident that there is room for growth and expansion in all of the ways in which it was used.

## **CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS**

### **The Function of the Internet in Canadian Electoral Politics**

The Internet has taken the world by storm. The Internet has existed in varying forms for more than three decades. However, the development of the World Wide Web, the graphical interface Web browser, and the search engine a little over ten years ago, “made the Internet a mass medium in its truest sense – a medium of, by and for ordinary people” (Rowland, 1999, p. 303). It is since the development of these three Internet milestones that millions and millions of people have gone online, especially in North America and Europe. Personal communication, commerce, education, popular music, information retrieval, and politics are just a few of the areas in which this new medium has begun to play a significant role. Without a doubt, the Internet is changing the way the social world operates. As the *State of the Internet 2000* report concludes, “few media in the last century, including television, have made a dramatic impact on daily life in so short a period” (ITTA & USIC, 2000, p. 57).

It is for these reasons and others discussed in the first chapter that the Internet has become an important research area for scholars. Internet research is being conducted in a variety of disciplines, from computer science to sociology. The purpose is to discover and analyze the role that the Internet and the World Wide Web can and will play in particular fields. The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the functioning of this new medium in Canadian political communications. Exploring the political uses and functions of the Internet is an extremely new research project. The first research study in this area is only four years old. Since then only a handful of scholars, mainly in the United States,

have been considering the new opportunities for political communication that the Internet can offer governments, public officials, interest groups, political parties and candidates. Much of this work has focussed on elections and campaigning. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Election in Canada provided an excellent opportunity to contribute to the developing body of literature on this topic. From a political communications standpoint, this election campaign was extremely significant. Campaign 2000 will be remembered as the debut of the Internet as a tool for political and electoral communication in this country. This election was the first in history in which all registered Canadian political parties had a presence on the World Wide Web and used it as a campaign tool. In addition hundreds of local candidates campaigned in cyberspace for the first time. Moreover, this was the first federal campaign in which a majority of Canadians had access to the Internet in some capacity (Gray, 2000, October 24). It can be argued that in terms of electoral uses of the Internet, this campaign was the equivalent of the American presidential campaign of 1996. As such, we can think of the cyber-campaign of 2000 as a landmark event.

The use of the Internet for political campaigning is still in its infancy. Therefore, this study, at this point, can only be exploratory. Using campaign 2000 as a case study, this thesis probed the political uses of the Internet by Canadian political parties. Guiding this process was the question: what function does the Internet play in Canadian electoral politics? As seen in the fourth chapter, the online campaign in this country was very dynamic. The Internet functioned in a variety of ways. The findings can be summarized in the following manner.

First, all four of these sites were extremely similar in terms of design features and site function. In cyber-campaign 2000, there were thirteen different functions that the campaign

Web sites performed. These functions were candidate information, campaign solicitation, contact information, Get Out The Vote activities, leader information, leader itinerary, media information, membership information, navigation, party information, party platform, party structures and volunteer recruitment. The names given to the links differed from site to site, but essentially the function and purpose of the links were the same.

The Internet is a multimedia, that is, it has the ability to integrate many different communication elements and display them all at the same time. Despite this static is the term that best described most of the Web sites examined in this study. For the Canadian Alliance, the Liberals and the NDP, text and visuals were the typical ways of presenting information on these Web sites. This makes these sites no different from a newspaper or campaign brochure in terms of integrating mediums. The Progressive Conservatives, on the other hand, offered Internet users a variety of audio and video elements in addition to text and graphics on their Web site. This site provided visitors with the most engaging experience allowing them to listen to, watch, and read about their campaign. Moreover, the amount of integration of mediums that occurred on the sites corresponded to the parties' perceptions about the importance of this characteristic. The Tories considered integrating mediums an important aspect of their campaign Web, which was reflected in their Web site design. The other three parties only gave minimal importance to this characteristic.

Much of what appeared on Web sites of the 2000 election could be described as shovelware or brochureware. With regards to information dissemination, this campaign garnered similar results as previous cyber-campaigns. Visitors to the four political party Web sites were exposed to a plethora of information. However, there was a tendency by the

parties to use information created for other campaign purposes such as displaying the party platform and press releases. In the past, these terms have had a negative connotation. However, if election Web sites are supposed to be a repository for campaign-related information, as campaign professionals suggest, these four Web sites fit the bill. Additionally, the election Web sites can also be referred to as mediaware. News releases were the most central way that the parties delivered campaign-related information on their Web sites. Almost daily, all four of the parties would upload at least one new press release. Its format implies that its central purpose was to provide information to the traditional mass media. Additionally, spokespeople for the Canadian Alliance, the Progressive Conservatives and the NDP all indicated that they saw journalists as an important audience for their Web sites.

The 2000 election has been described as one of the most negative campaigns in Canadian history. One central feature of this cyber-campaign was the use of the Internet by all four parties for negative campaigning practices. The negativism that plagued the campaign on the ground was also evident in cyberspace. The main vehicle for negative campaigning were the daily press releases. In this campaign, 49% of the press releases uploaded by the four political parties had a negative component to them. The New Democrats and the Canadian Alliance organized their negative news in a separate category from the rest of their press releases. The NDP's 'Surreality Check' and the Alliances's 'Reality Check' were the portal for their negative new releases. This finding runs contrary to the findings of other online electioneering studies which found that candidates used their Web sites only for positive self-promotion.

The Internet functioned as a tool for intra-party communication in this election



campaign. Communication between the national party and the local riding level was evident on all of the four party campaign Web sites. In addition to providing a list of their candidates, the national parties also used the Internet for disseminating information to the local campaigns. The Progressive Conservatives established a database and the other three of the parties established Intranet sites. The benefit was that the Internet allowed the national party organization to communicate easily and quickly with the local ridings. Therefore we can suggest that the Internet had both an external and internal face during this election. That being said, it is important to point out that information flowed in only one direction, downwards. The Internet was not used to enhance bottom-up or discursive democracy for the local campaigns.

Partial interactivity best describes how parties interacted with Canadians through their Web sites. If interactivity is measured by whether or not voters were allowed the opportunity to send direct e-mail to candidates or political parties, then all campaign Web sites were interactive. All of the sites offered several different ways that visitors could send e-mail. Canadians participated in this type of interactivity by sending several thousand e-mails to the parties over the thirty-six-day campaign. The sheer amount of e-mail received during the campaign was enough to warrant all the parties assigning several staff or volunteers to the task of responding to inquiries from individuals. The e-mail received was typically generic in nature, including requests for information or general comments about the campaign. However, if the bi-lateral definition of interactivity is used, then all the campaign Web sites failed to use the Net to its fullest capacity. Chat rooms and discussion groups were practically non-existent on party Web sites in this election. One explanation for this finding

is that bi-lateral interactivity can be considered a liability for political parties, because they have little control over what people will write.

All of the parties put considerable effort into their online voter involvement links. A visitor to any of the four sites had the opportunity to become a member of the party, volunteer or donate money to the campaign. Even though voter involvement links were evident on the campaign Web sites, their ability to engage voters varied from party to party. For instance, the Liberal Party described online donations as disappointing whereas the NDP and the Progressive Conservatives were pleased with the number of financial contributions they received through their Web sites. What is clear is that there is considerable room for growth by all of the parties in this area. Moreover, as Canadians become more comfortable with sending their personal and financial information over the Internet, online voter involvement may increase in importance.

It should be clear at this point that Canada's first real experience with online campaigning was very dynamic. From this work one should get a real sense of what Internet users found when they visited party Web sites during campaign 2000, a sense of the form and content of election Web sites in this country. Additionally, one should also get a deeper understanding of the perceptions of some of the people directly involved in the cyber-campaign.

### **Cyber-Campaign 2000 - Inside the Debate**

Now that we have seen what functions the Internet performed during the 2000 election campaigns, it is time to consider a more normative level of analysis. For some time scholars and political commentators have been questioning the role that this new medium will

play in the political sphere. As outlined in the second chapter, at least three perspectives have emerged in the debate over the role of the Internet in politics. First, the utopian perspective argues that the ICTs and the Internet will create an electronic democracy. In this electronic democracy, netizens will be more knowledgeable about government and politics and more engaged in the political process. Opposing this position is the dystopian perspective. Dystopians argue that the Internet will have negative repercussions, creating a new age of conflict and misinformation. For instance, this school argues that the digital technology creates a digital divide with some citizens being the 'information poor' and others 'information rich.' This gap that will exacerbate divisions that already exist in society. The final perspective is Margolis et al.'s (1999) normalization hypothesis. Proponents of the normalization hypothesis see the Internet as reinforcing the socioeconomic patterns of normal everyday life. Instead of bringing a radical change in the political behaviour of individuals and political organizations, politics on the Net will reflect previous political patterns and power relationships.

Where does Canada's first real experience with the Internet as a campaigning tool fit in this debate? Really there is no clear cut answer to this question. These were aspects of the on-line campaign that could support each of these perspectives. It is important to point out that without conducting an analysis on the users of these political Web sites, it is impossible to fully gauge how this experience fits into these perspectives. Hence, this section represents only an impressionistic discussion on this subject based on the data collected.

One tenet of utopian thought contends that the Internet can enhance levels of participation by making it easier and quicker for citizens to communicate with political

candidates and elected officials. As discussed in the last chapter, there were several ways for Canadian voters to communicate with and participate within the campaign via the World Wide Web. The first method was through direct e-mail interactivity. The opportunity to interact with the political parties through their Web sites by citizens was well-taken advantage of during campaign 2000. Several thousand e-mails were sent from Canadians and individuals outside of Canada during the election. The four parties also offered visitors a variety of ways in which they could get involved with the campaign. It is unknown whether or not the individuals that contacted any of the four political parties during the campaign through their Web sites would have done so if this medium did not exist. However, the parties all provided the opportunity to participate and connections were definitely made through the Internet.

Political disintermediation, that is, the reduction of middlemen in the political process is another tenet of utopian thought. In the electronic democracy envisioned by Utopians, information would go directly to individuals without being mediated or interpreted by secondary parties, such as the mass media. The unmediated quality of the Internet and the opportunity to bypass the press was valued by all of the political parties in this study. Nearly all the information on these Web sites was unmediated. By using the Internet, visitors were exposed to a huge repository of party and campaign information that had come directly from the mouths of the political parties.

Utopians also claim that the Internet will enhance democratic practices by providing citizens with a treasure trove of vital information. To put it bluntly, the four Web sites had a lot of information posted on them. This then brings us to the dystopian accusation of information overload. The sites covered a wide range in terms of the sheer amount and the

depth of the information provided. For instance, the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Web sites were much fuller sites than those of the other two parties. An individual's familiarity with a party Web site or with the Internet, in general, would influence how easily they could navigate through the Web site. Therefore, it is very possible that a new user of the Internet could experience information overload and become very lost trying to find something specific. A technologically savvy visitor would have had no problems at all. It would be unfair given the four sites that were examined to discount the dystopian claim about information overload.

Dystopians also question the integrity of the information found on the Internet. They would then point to the negative nature of much of the material found on the four Web sites. As we have seen almost 50% of the press releases uploaded during this campaign had a negative component to them. The purpose of the negative press releases and reality check is to tarnish opponents and inflict damage to candidates and to the campaign. Therefore, this would bolster the dystopian argument that information on the Net can bring about greater confusion and misunderstanding. They would question how citizens would be able to make effective political decisions with this type of biased and slanted information.

Margolis et al. (1999) argue that three principles underlie the normalization hypothesis. The first states that major political parties and candidates will have a greater presence on the Internet and that their Web sites will be more technically sophisticated than those of minor political actors. Second, while in cyberspace minor political parties and candidates may have a greater presence than what they might receive from mass media coverage, they will still be overshadowed by the major actors. Furthermore, this greater

relative presence on the Web will have no impact on electoral success in the real world. Since these first two principles deal with the major and minor parties, they are not relevant to a study focussed on four major political parties. However, the third claim is relevant to this study. Margolis et al. (1999) claim that as the Internet becomes normalized

party representatives and Webmasters will not emphasize using their Web sites to increase members' participation in party policy making or otherwise to enhance internal party democracy; rather they will emphasize organizational advantages, such as using them for recruiting new party members or for communicating with party activists or promoting party candidates and platforms (p. 27).

It is clear that's that the organizational practices identified in this passage did exist during campaign 2000. For instance, it was seen in this election that hidden sites, databases and Intranet sites were all employed by the parties in order to communicate quickly, easily and cost-effectively with local constituencies and candidates. All of the party spokespeople saw this as an organizational advantage. What is also clear is that during this election campaign, the Web sites of the four parties did not allow members to participate in decision-making. Since there was no meaningful bi-lateral interactivity on the Web sites, there was no venue for discursive democracy, that is "bottom up discursive interactions which citizens not only consume, but play a part in the creation of politics" (Nixon & Johansson, 1999, p. 135).

Attempting to determine where researchers can situate the Canadian experience with the Internet as a campaign tool in terms of these three perspectives produces some difficulties. In varying ways the Canadian experience in 2000 reflects differing aspects of each school of thought. Utopians could gather hope from campaign 2000, as could dystopians and supporters of the normalization hypothesis. Moreover because of the newness of this

technology and Internet research, it may still be too early to know what impacts the Internet might have in the political sphere. What is clear, however, is that the Internet *is* playing a role in Canadian election politics. It has been eighty years since Zworykin invented the television, and what it means to the functioning of politics is still a popular topic for discussion and debate. Obviously, we need more time before we can decide conclusively what the Internet means to politics and the role it will play in democratic politics in Canada or abroad.

### **The Internet in Canadian Politics - Concluding Thoughts**

On Monday, November 27, 2000, 63% of eligible Canadian went to the ballot box to elect the 37<sup>th</sup> government of Canada. In the end, the House of Commons did not look any different from the way it did before the election. Jean Chrétien and the Liberals won their third and largest straight majority. The Canadian Alliance failed to make a much needed breakthrough east of Manitoba, but remained the Official Opposition. The Bloc Québécois kept their stronghold in the province of Québec. The New Democrats and the Progressive Conservatives did not meet their election goals, but both won enough seats to keep their official party status. For pundits, this election campaign will likely be remembered for being the “most negative and divisive in modern memory” (McCarthy, 2000, November 28). For political communications scholars, campaign 2000 will be remembered as “the nation’s first Internet election” (Bourette, 2000, October 30, p. A9). For the first time ever, a federal election was being fought not only on the ground and in the mass media, but also in cyberspace. In this election, political campaigning went online, becoming *cyber-campaigning*. Political parties, riding associations and some local candidates all went to the World Wide Web to get their messages to Canadians. Additionally, the traditional mass

media went online to cover this election. Major media organs such as the CBC, the *Globe and Mail*, CTV and the *Toronto Star* created subsections of their Web sites dedicated to election news and coverage. Political Web sites such as Politics Canada or CanadianDebate.com which sought to supply Canadians with independent sources of information and opinions ([www.politicscanada.com](http://www.politicscanada.com)), uploaded an assortment of election-related information for voters. There were even a few parody or attack Web sites created for the election. Daywatch created by Guerrilla Media produced several cartoons over the duration of the campaign about Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day. They produced a spoof of the television show Baywatch in which Day starred as a lifeguard to the rich, giving “Canadians a chance to experience the thrills and chills of the Alliance agenda from the safety and comfort of their personal computers” ([www.daywatch2000.com](http://www.daywatch2000.com)). Another site, [www.dumpchretien.com](http://www.dumpchretien.com) chronicled the alleged failings of the Prime Minister, providing users with reasons to dump Chrétien (Calamai, 2000, November 15). Finally, according to a Media Metrix (2001) press release, during November 2000 there were 463, 000 individual visitors to the Elections Canada Web site. While we might be able to debate the type of impact or effect that the Internet will play on the political sphere., there should be no doubt that Canadian politics has gone electronic. From this point forward *e-politics* and *e-campaigning* will be a part of the Canadian political experience.

In the first chapter, it was suggested that for better or for worse, the Internet will change politics and politicking, as did television, radio and newspapers before it. The question was not if but how the Internet would change politics. The underlying intent of this project was to gauge, preliminarily, the roles and functions that the Internet played in an



election. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Election provided an excellent testing ground. Examining the Internet during this election is a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on cyber-campaigning. The Internet is just so new and so different from its predecessors that at this point in time, any and all research in this area, is exploring uncharted territory. A lot of the literature on the Internet in the political arena is anecdotal. While the normalization hypothesis has developed out of research, the utopian and dystopian debate is essentially theoretical. With the Internet growing at such an exponential rate in terms of access and use, it presents opportunities to move beyond theorizing by studying these issues empirically. As was seen in the second chapter, with the exception of Roper (1998), Gibson & Ward (1998) and Nixon and Johansson (1999), American scholarship dominates and informs this field of research. Without a doubt, the political uses of the Internet in Canada will soon become a part of this literature. This study evaluated just one particular aspect of the ways in which the Internet can function in the political arena

After an in-depth examination of the four political parties Web sites and discussions with members of the communication staffs of these political parties, we have seen that the Internet does, in fact, play a role in Canadian electoral politics at the party level. True, this role might be small and insignificant, especially when compared to that played by TV. But, why should it not be? The Internet and the World Wide Web have yet to prove themselves and prove that their use can translate into votes. But we should never discount the inroads made by Internet campaigning during this election. First, all of the Canadian political parties, whether they are major, minor and non-registered parties, have created Web sites, thereby, indicating that they see it as an important tool for political and election communication.

Second, several thousand Canadians went online during this election and surfed political Web sites, including those of the four political parties examined in this study. This thesis began with the concept of the tripartite system, whereby the media, government and the public, as a unit, create politics. There are many who believe that the Internet has the power to challenge, or at the very least modify, the role that the mass media performs in this system. However, in line with the normalized view of the Internet, instead of taking over the role of the media, it is more reasonable to suggest that the Internet will create a new venue for politics and political discourse: a venue that is accessible at the click of a mouse.

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Universal Resource Locator. The address of a computer or an address on the Internet.
2. Hypertext Mark Up Language. The language used to create hypertext and hypermedia documents on the World Wide Web.
3. This perspective is also found in Margolis, Resnick & Tu (1997), Resnick( 1998) and Margolis, Resnick & Wolfe (1999). Resnick, D. (1998) Politics on the Internet - The Normalization of Cyberspace. In C. Toulouse & T.W. Luke (Eds.), The politics of cyberspace: A new political science reader. (pp. 48-68). New York: Routledge.
4. Computer-mediated communication.
5. This number may be inflated due to the site being indexed by search engines which "crawl" through all the pages on the site (D. Hayward, Personal Communication, March 2001).
6. The sign is a reference to the fact that prior to becoming leader of the Canadian Alliance, Day was a cabinet minister in Alberta. The Alberta Government introduced and passed Bill 11 that allowed regional health authorities the option to contract-out minor surgical procedures. The Bill caused much controversy, and the Alberta government was accused of creating a two-tier health system in the province.
7. There were two other statements on the animation, "Two-tiers are not enough" and 'Today's Desert Special: Two-tier-amisu.'
8. 'Message of the Day' did not become a link on 'Election 2000' until Day 20 of the campaign.
9. An Intranet is a network similar to the World Wide Web having access restricted to a limited group of authorized users.
10. The bulletin board system is a "computer system that allows users of an electronic network to leave messages that will be read by many other users" at a later time or date (Dutton, 1999, p. 345).
11. The participants CANOE's online chats during campaign 2000 were Stockwell Day, Liberal cabinet minister John Manley, Preston Manning (CA candidate), Paul Hellyner (Canadian Action Party leader), Alexa McDonough, Susan Elliot (PC National Campaign Director), Lorne Nystrom (NDP finance critic), and Ted Morton (professor & Alberta Senator in Waiting)
12. After the election, Mouseland became a main navigation bar link on the NDP homepage.

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### **Websites**

Canadian Conservative Reform Alliance - [www.canadianalliance.ca](http://www.canadianalliance.ca)

Liberal Party of Canada - [www.liberalparty.ca](http://www.liberalparty.ca)

New Democratic Party - [www.ndp.ca](http://www.ndp.ca)

Progressive Conservative Party of Canada - [www.pcparty.ca](http://www.pcparty.ca)

## **APPENDIX A - EVALUATION CRITERIA**

1. Does the political party have an election Web site? (y/n)
2. Can the homepage be found by major search engines (i.e. Yahoo!, AltaVista)? - (y/n)
3. Is the Web site an election site (i.e. different from parties Web site)? - (y/n)
4. What are the links on the first page? (list)
5. Design Feature - Does the Web site exhibit the following design features? Describe.
  - a. Graphics
  - b. Pictures
  - c. Splits screen (frames)
  - d. Flashing/moving icons
  - e. Audio (company used)
  - f. Video (company used)
  - g. Other (i.e. Acrobat)
6. Is there a special section for the press? - (y/n) - Describe.
7. Is there a special section for any other group? - (y/n) - Describe
8. Is the site interactive? (i.e. discussion groups, email links to party or candidates)
  - a. Does the Web site allow for personalization?
9. Does the site target younger voters?
10. Does the site provide information about candidates?
  - a. Number of candidates.
  - b. Email link (number)
  - c. Web page link (number)
11. Does the site provide links to other sites? List?
12. Were any hyperlinks closed?
13. Updating - How often was the Web site updated?
  - a. Describe additions to site link.
  - b. Where the changes significant?
  - c. Was material removed from Web site?
  - d. Was there promised information that did not materialize?
  - e. Were press releases updated?

14. Does the Web site provide a search engine? (y/n)
15. Does the Web site provide a site map? (y/n)
16. Issue Substance:
  - a. What issues are covered on the Web site?
  - b. How much space is dedicated to issue discussion?
17. Personalizing - Does the site provide personal information about the leader or candidates? (y/n)
  - a. Describe. (i.e. childhood anecdotes, marital status, names and number of children, religious affiliation, hobbies)
18. Negative campaigning (mentioning opponents with the intent of placing them in an unfavourable light) - Is negative campaigning evident on the Web site? (y/n)
  - a. Describe.
  - b. personal negative campaigning vs. political negative campaigning
19. Get Involved - Does the Web site allow user to get involved in the campaign?
  - a. Volunteers - Can a user volunteer for the campaign?
    - i. Email
    - ii. Phone
    - iii. Online form
  - b. Can the user join the political party?
    - i. Email
    - ii. Phone
    - iii. Online form
  - c. Can the user purchase products?
20. Reference Points :
  - a. What contact information is listed on the Web site? List.
    - i. Email
    - ii. Phone
    - iii. Mailing Address
  - b. Does site allow users to request information from party?
    - i. Email
    - ii. Phone
    - iii. Mailing Address

21. **Campaign Contributions: Does the Web site solicit campaign contributions? (y/n)**
- a. **Type of contribution:**
    - i. asking the donor to pledge
    - ii. Inviting the contributor to send in a contribution by mail
    - iii. inviting the donor to download, print, and complete a form and send in a contribution by mail
    - iv. online contribution form
- (1) Are online contributions secure? (y/n)
22. **Privacy - Does indicate the Web sites privacy policy?**



## **APPENDIX B: POLITICAL PARTY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name:**

**Title:**

**Organization:**

**1. What was the intent of creating an election Web site?**

**2. What feature of the Internet do you feel makes it an appropriate tool for campaign communications?**

**3. How important is the Web site in your campaign? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**4. How is the Internet integrated into your communications campaign?**

**5. How did the organization decide what information would be posted on the Web site?**

**6. How was the web site staffed?**

**7. What were the qualifications of your Webmaster(s)?**

**8. How was the Webmaster/web site staff integrated into the communications campaign?**

9. Rank the following campaign communication methods in order of importance.

Television Advertising  
 Television News Coverage  
 Radio News Coverage  
 Print News Coverage  
 Non Traditional Media (i.e. talk shows)  
 Website  
 Lawn Signs  
 Direct Mail  
 Campaign Brochures  
 Party Platform  
 Debate  
 Public Meetings

10. How important are the following characteristics of the Internet to your campaign? (5=very important; 1=not important).

Interactivity	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to target message	1	2	3	4	5
Integration of Medium (i.e. text, audio, video)	1	2	3	4	5
User Initiated	1	2	3	4	5
Unmediated	1	2	3	4	5
Levels the playing field	1	2	3	4	5
Cost	1	2	3	4	5
Transgression of Physical Proximity	1	2	3	4	5
Always open	1	2	3	4	5

**11. How many people visited your Web site during the election campaign?**

**12. To your knowledge how many of these people visited more than once?**

**13. How important is the Internet for targeting the following groups during the election? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

Undecided Voters	1	2	3	4	5
Party Supporters/Members	1	2	3	4	5
Press	1	2	3	4	5
Younger Voters	1	2	3	4	5
Interest Groups	1	2	3	4	5

**14. Describe what efforts were made to target groups the organization deemed *important* or *very important* (refer to question 13).**

**15. Does your organization collect information (i.e. cookies) from visitors? If so, what does the organization do with the information?**

**16. How important is the Web site in recruiting new members? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**17. How many new membership did your organization obtain from the Web site during the election?**

**18. How important is the Web site is recruiting campaign volunteers? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**19. How many campaign volunteers did your organization obtain from the Web site during the election?**

**20. How important is the Web site is for soliciting campaign contributions? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**21. What is the total number of contributions and/or total sum of donations collected through the Web site during the election?**

**22. During the election, how advantageous was the Internet for intraparty communication? (5=very advantageous 1=not advantageous)**

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**23. During the election, what types of information or instructions were delivered to local constituencies or candidates from party headquarters via the Internet o E-mail?**

**24. During the election, what types of information were delivered from local constituencies or candidates to party headquarters via the Internet or E-mail?**

**25. How many constituency or local candidate Web sites exist?**

**26. Were constituencies or local candidate sites linked to the main party site?**

**27. Do constituencies or local candidates require central approval for the creation of a Web site?**

**28. How many e-mails did your organization receive during the election campaign through the Web site?**

**29. What was the nature of the E-mail?**

**30. Who is responsible for responding to E-mails?**

**31. Were chat rooms or discussion groups available on your Web site? Why or why not?**

**32. When did your organization develop a Web site?**



**33. How much did the Web site cost?**

**34. How does the Web site cost rank compared to other methods of campaign communications?**

**35. Who designed the Web site?**

**36. How was the Web site advertised?**

**37. What are the disadvantages of the Internet as a communications tool? (5=very important; 1=not important).**

<b>Too much Information</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Too Complex (computer literacy)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>User Cost</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Elite Appeal</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Investment Return</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Too Interpersonal</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Limited User Demographics</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

**38. Did your organization view or monitor other political party Web sites during the 2000 election campaign? If yes, please explain why.**

**39. Additional comments.**