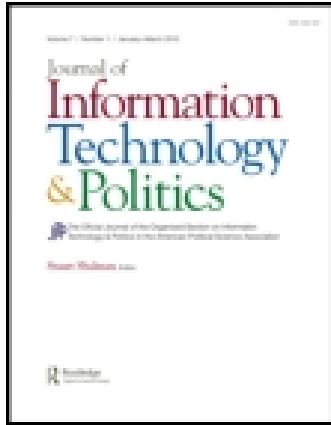


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Campaign Agenda-Building Online: The Effects of Online Information Source and Interactivity on Affective Evaluations and the Salience of the Election

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Campaign Agenda-Building Online: The Effects of Online Information Source and Interactivity on Affective Evaluations and the Salience of the Election

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ABSTRACT. The 2×3 experimental design study was conducted with 300 undergraduate participants during Florida's 2010 gubernatorial election. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six different conditions based on type of online site (campaign Web site vs. social network sites) and level of interactivity (user-to-system, user-to-document, and user-to-user), and emotional and evaluative responses to online campaign information were examined. Interaction effects in one campaign notwithstanding, the emotions and evaluations elicited by the other campaign were positively associated with public agenda-building. Thus, those responding favorably to the winner's campaign considered the election more important and were more likely to vote.

KEYWORDS. Campaign agenda-building, social media, interactivity, emotions

The 2010 midterm election was characterized as the year that social media came of age to play a distinctive role in political campaigns. Compared to 2008, candidates drastically expanded their use of online resources to target voters whose reliance on the Internet for political information increased by more than threefold (Pew, 2010). Since the nature of Internet channels and computer-mediated interactions vary widely, however, online information sources

and interactivity levels must be specified to measure, compare, and draw inferences about their distinct effects on communication outcomes. For instance, recent research suggests the widespread adoption of computer-mediated communication channels may satisfy intrinsic emotional and social needs while inspiring a sense of urgency about participating in politics, especially when involving two-way communication (Owen, 2006; Schlozman,

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Verba, & Brady, 2010; Utz, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Although candidates have used official campaign Web sites since 1996 and social network sites since 2008, compelling questions about the differential effects of these online information sources and users' interactions have yet to be fully addressed.

Official campaign Web sites and social networking sites can be distinguished in regard to the characteristics of their content, the informational format, the design of the interface, the purposes of the platforms, and the users' profiles. Moreover, scholars suggest that the different levels of interactivity of online information sources can be a useful indicator to distinguish one online medium from others and to compare the effectiveness of the medium on communication outcomes (e.g., Owen, 2006; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010; Utz, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). In this current study, the effectiveness of campaign strategies was measured by comparing users' affective evaluations of the candidates and their perceptions of the election's salience.

Based on a functional approach to analyzing media platforms, one purpose of this investigation is to test for the main effects of online information sources by comparing the influence of social network sites and official campaign Web sites on users' emotional responses to the candidates, evaluations of the campaigns, and perceived salience of the election. Since the Internet requires more active users and offers more readily available feedback channels than traditional media, the second purpose of this study is to test for the main effects of interactivity on the same dependent variables. The third purpose of this study is to parse the effects of information source and interactivity by testing for interactions that identify which information source and interactive condition exerted the greatest influence on users' responses to the campaigns' online communications. By testing for interaction effects, we may also delimit bidirectional communication models by describing boundary conditions and identifying which information source facilitates the mediating effects of computer-mediated communication. Finally, relationships among users' responses to each campaign's online communications are

examined to determine how their affective evaluations of the candidates and their campaigns influenced perceptions of the election's salience or their sense of urgency about participating in the election.

2010 CAMPAIGN CONTEXT

Midterm elections are less salient than general elections, with much lower and vastly different rates of participation (Wolfinger, Rosenstone, & McIntosh, 1981). One major reason for this dramatic drop-off in midterm voter participation is the increased opportunity costs for casting an informed vote (Jackson, 1993). To lessen these information costs, candidates in the 2010 midterm elections not only advertised extensively on television but also devoted unprecedented resources developing their official campaign Web sites and social network sites to elicit specific emotional responses, to shape candidate evaluations, and to influence perceptions of the elections' salience among potential voters who skewed significantly more conservative in 2010 than in 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2010). These campaigns' attempts to shape voters' affective evaluations of the candidates are a means to an end: they are designed to influence candidate preference. Campaigns' attempts to influence voters' sense of urgency about participating in the election, on the other hand, are intended to shape the composition of the electorate by positively associating affective evaluations of their own candidacy with the salience of the election.

Pundits labeled nine gubernatorial races tossups in 2010, but Florida's election was largely characterized as a struggle between insurgent big money and the political establishment. The winner, Rick Scott (R), outspent his opponents in both the primary and general elections by a margin of 10 to 1 (Gilbert, 2010). Scott spent more than \$50 million of his own money and made this gubernatorial contest not only the most expensive and negative in Florida's history, but also second only to California in terms of campaign spending during the 2010 cycle (Mills & Hale, 2010). On the other hand, his opponent, Alex

Sink (D) lost the election, even though she received more favorable public responses as well as endorsements from every major newspaper in the state. This apparent contradiction inspired our questions about the effectiveness of the campaigns' strategies on the electoral outcome, focusing on their ability to elicit specific affective and cognitive responses from voters, to shape their evaluations of the candidates, and to influence their decisions whether and for whom to vote.

AGENDA BUILDING: SALIENCE OF THE ELECTION

In the early 1970s, agenda-setting emerged as a theory that explained how the news media may transfer issue salience to the public's agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This seminal theory also led scholars to examine the antecedents of media agenda-setting, developing the construct of agenda-building. In the context of political campaigns, scholars explored the effects of various public relations efforts on public opinion (e.g., Kioussis et al., 2006; Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2010), and they quantified a close relationship between public relations efforts and public opinion (Schleuder, McCombs, & Wanta, 1991). For instance, Kioussis et al. (2006) found strong correlations among news releases, news media content, and public opinion in Florida's 2002 gubernatorial race.

To explore the salience relationship, scholars distinguished two levels of agenda setting and/or building. On the first level, scholars focus on the salience of objects including issues, political candidates, or organizations; while on the second level, they focus on the salience of attributes in terms of frames, tones, or candidate personality (e.g., Kioussis et al., 2006; McCombs, 2004). Additionally, scholars explained that there are two types of attributes: substantive and affective attributes (Kioussis, 2005; McCombs, 2004). Simply put, substantive attributes refer to the cognitive aspect of an object, and affective attributes refer to the affective or emotional aspect of an object (Ghanem, 1997; Kioussis, 2005; McCombs, 2004).

Moreover, prior research also indicates that there are clear relationships between the two levels of agenda setting and agenda building. Scholars have noted that emotional responses to a message may influence cognitive information processing, with the emotions elicited by a political candidate influencing the overall assessment of that candidate (Coleman & Wu, 2010; Keller & Block, 1996; Sheafer, 2007). Overall, the evidence suggests that emotional responses to campaign communications significantly influence evaluative responses—that an affective orientation toward any object involves an assessment describing it as relatively positive or negative, valuable or worthless, important or trivial (Coleman & Wu, 2010; Sheafer, 2007). Similar to previous agenda setting and agenda building research that explored the manner in which issue or attribute salience was transferred from one agenda to another (e.g., from the media or the campaign to the public), this investigation measures the transfer of the 2012 election's salience from two distinct online information sources to users. This study finds its place in the literature by investigating the differential affective and cognitive responses to candidates' use of social network sites and campaign Web sites and testing the relationships among users' responses to the campaigns and the salience of the midterm election.

EMOTIONAL AND EVALUATIVE RESPONSES

Political campaigns' powerful and pervasive use of emotional appeals to influence voters' affective candidate evaluations and voting decisions have been widely analyzed for at least the past 70 years (Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Brader, 2005; Kaid, Leland, & Whitney, 1992; Kern, 1989; Neuman, Marcus, Crigler, & MacKuen, 2007; Schwartz, 1973). Prior research indicating attitudes toward a candidate are important predictors of voting decisions provided the rationale for studying viewers' emotional responses to campaign communications (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Specifically, research using a social-cognitive model of candidate appraisal indicates

voters' affects toward the candidates summarize electoral judgments and accounts for half the variation in voting decisions according to Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan (1990). Thus, emotional responses may play a central role in both shaping overall candidate evaluations and perceptions of the importance of the election. That is, on the individual level, not only do emotional responses influence affective candidate orientations, but they also may impact the perceived salience of an issue, object, or a political event.

ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES

This experimental investigation examined the effects of online information sources and the level of interactivity on participants' emotional and evaluative responses to candidates and perceptions of the salience of the election. First, based on a functional approach to the analysis of media effects, this investigation makes a theoretical distinction between campaign Web sites and social network sites since the content of official campaign Web sites is controlled by the candidate, whereas the content on social network sites is collaboratively produced. Furthermore, functionality differences as well as purposes of these online information sources are also distinctly different. Hence, the differential effects of online information sources and interactivity levels on the positivity of users' emotional responses to the candidates, evaluations of the campaigns, and perceived salience of the upcoming election, as well as the relationship among these variables, are of particular interest in this examination.

Campaign Web Sites

The Howard Dean campaign's successful use of blogs and hyperlinks on its Web site during the 2004 primaries revolutionized political candidates' use of the Internet (Jenkins, 2006; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006). Controlled, unfiltered messaging on campaign Web sites facilitates candidates' efforts to establish ideological unity and develop closer connections with their followers (Hindman, 2009). Campaign Web sites also

serve as an effective fundraising and recruiting tool (Pollard, Chesebro, & Studinski, 2009). Moreover, Web sites offer "an unmediated, holistic, and representative portrait of campaigns" (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2009, p. 343). Unlike news coverage, Web sites give voters a unique opportunity to access a campaign directly, enhancing unfiltered communication from politicians to their electorates (Smith, 2009). Similar to advertising, campaigns retain control of their messaging on their official Web sites, generally offering only the appearance of interactivity or two-way communication (Foot & Schneider, 2006). Since candidates control the messaging designed to persuade, organize, and activate supporters on their official campaign Web sites (Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006), this online information source is expected to exert greater influence on users' sense of urgency about participating in the election than social network sites, where other users' postings may dilute the campaigns' efforts to influence users' perceptions of the election's salience.

Social Network Sites

There are thousands of social network sites, but Facebook and YouTube are the most prominent platforms, each drawing about 40% of total daily Internet users (Alexa.com, 2012a, 2012b). Analyses of online information sources reveal users prefer social network sites and perceive them as more interactive than other sites (Beer, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2000; Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006; Sweetser & Weaver-Lariscy, 2007). This preference for social network sites is based on the format's unique ability to fulfill social utility and emotional needs (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Therefore, the impact of exposure to these sites on users' emotional responses should be greater than among users exposed to campaign Web sites that are controlled by the candidates and limit users' social interactions (Kaye & Johnson, 2004; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). Since social network sites are designed to facilitate two-way communications and satisfy socio-emotional needs, it is also expected that users will evaluate the campaigns more positively

on this platform than on campaign Web sites. Specifically, we predict three distinct main effects of information source:

- H1a: Exposure to candidates' social network sites will elicit more positive emotional responses than will exposure to campaign Web sites.
- H1b: Exposure to social network sites will result in more positive candidate communication strategy evaluations than will exposure to campaign Web sites.
- H1c: Exposure to candidate Web sites will result in the perception that the election is more important than will exposure to social network sites.

INTERACTIVITY

One of the earliest findings among media scholars was that interpersonal communication had a much greater impact on emotions, cognitions, and attitudes than did exposure to mediated information (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Klapper, 1960). With the development of digital media platforms, however, measuring information exposure requires researchers to capture the effects of mediating variables that may satisfy social needs similar to interpersonal communication, such as the level of interactivity in the transaction. When applied to political campaigns' use of the Internet, for instance, researchers have found that the more interactive the Web site, the more favorable the impression made by the sponsoring candidate (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). Since this study explores the emotional, evaluative, and agenda-building effects of political campaigns' online efforts, the level of interactivity in the exposure may also affect participants' information processing (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013; Lee, & Shin, 2012). Moreover, replicable experimental investigations comparing the relative effects of exposure to various online stimuli under conditions with differing levels of interactivity may be the best method for testing these effects (Cho, Cheng, & Lai, 2009; Kim, 2006).

Based on her synthesis of the various frameworks for analyzing interactivity, McMillan (2002) developed a functional typology that allows for distinctions based on the use of a Web site's features by distinguishing between user-to-system, user-to-document, and user-to-user interactions. McMillan describes user-to-system interactivity as the interface between a user and a computer, or the most rudimentary form of interactivity. User-to-system interactions include such relatively passive activities as activating links, reading text, and viewing videos. User-to-document interactivity describes the interaction between a user and the content of a Web site and includes activities such as commenting on the content of a Web page or "liking" a Facebook post. The most sophisticated form of interactivity occurs at the user-to-user level. This type of interactivity is defined as the computer-mediated communication (CMC) occurring between two or more people, making Internet transactions at this level the closest to interpersonal communication. Conceptualized as the most influential, user-to-user interactivity includes activities such as messaging another user or posting content on a Facebook page.

This distinction between interactivity levels is also supported by research suggesting both the expectation of future expression and the nature of such expression may be manipulated as independent variables with participants randomly assigned to various interactive conditions (Pingree, 2007). Pingree's (2007) model predicted that "the expectation of future expression can improve attention to, cognitive processing of, and memory for received messages" (p. 446). In addition to expectation of expression effects, Pingree's bidirectional model also includes message release effects dependent on the type of message sent. For example, relatively anonymous comments posted on a Web page in the user-to-document condition may not be perceived as making a social commitment. Thus, the nature of the message may affect the extent to which one's sense of social commitment, ego-involvement, or feeling heard is engaged. Similar to the theoretical mechanism underlying the elaboration likelihood model, the cognitive and affective effects of information are conceptualized as greatest among those who expect to

express themselves by making a social commitment that triggers ego-involvement in the user-to-user condition.

Political communication scholars have also adapted a theoretical framework for analyzing the effects of citizens' communication processes on relationships between elite-driven campaign communications and political outcomes (Huckfeldt, Sprague, & Levine, 2000; Just, Crigler, Alger, Cook, Kern, & West, 1996; Page, 1996; Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006). This line of research suggests expression may trigger reasoning processes that mediate the effects of information, particularly when the expression occurs online and triggers ego-involvement or a social commitment (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). For instance, Tedesco (2007) found that interactive features on political information Web sites positively impact young adults' political information efficacy across a variety of information sources. This investigation, on the other hand, isolates and compares the main and interaction effects of information source and interactivity by focusing on specific online platforms under three interactive conditions. Specifically, we expect to find three distinct main effects of interactivity:

- H2a: There will be a positive association between the level of interactivity and the positivity of the emotional responses elicited by the online campaigns.
- H2b: There will be a positive association between the level of interactivity and candidate communication strategy evaluations.
- H2c: There will be a positive association between level of interactivity and perceived importance of the election.

Since the nature of the online information source may influence the extent to which users perceive making a social commitment in their interactions, we pose three more hypotheses testing for interactions that parse the effects of online information source and interactivity.

- H3a: The interaction between online format and interactivity level will

result in the most positive emotional responses occurring among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition.

- H3b: The interaction between online format and interactivity level will result in the most positive candidates communication strategy evaluations occurring among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition.
- H3c: The interaction between online format and interactivity level will result in the highest perceptions of the election's importance among those exposed to campaign Web sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition.

Finally, to determine the extent to which emotional responses and campaign evaluations may influence online information users' sense of urgency about participating in the election, we pose a research question to test the relationships among these variables. Specifically, we ask:

- RQ1: How are eliciting emotional responses, candidate and campaign evaluations, and participants' perceived importance of the election related to one another?

METHOD

Procedure and Participants

A two-by-three between-subjects factorial design with 300 undergraduate students from a large state university was used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. The experiment was conducted in a research laboratory, and participants were randomly assigned to one of six different experimental conditions. Each participant explored either the candidates' official campaign Web sites or their social network sites on Facebook and YouTube. The level of interactivity was also manipulated according to the assigned activities appropriate for the three conditions: user-to-system, user-to-document, and user-to-user interactivity.

Manipulation

The format, our first independent variable, had two conditions: the official campaign Web sites and the candidates' social network sites. Participants assigned to the campaign Web sites condition explored the official sites of both Alex Sink and Rick Scott, and those assigned to the social network sites condition explored the candidates' Facebook and YouTube sites. These Web sites were selected as the campaigns' major online public relations resources.

Additionally, the level of interactivity was manipulated using three conditions: user-to-system, user-to-document, and user-to-user interactivity. User-to-system interactivity refers to the interaction between people and the computer systems (e.g., activating hyperlinks); user-to-document interactivity refers to the interaction between people and the content (e.g., commenting on a Web site); and user-to-user interactivity refers to the interactions among people (i.e., computer-mediated communication). The instructions for the three conditions included a section directing participants to spend a minimum total of 20 minutes interacting with either the official campaign Web sites or social network sites in addition to completing a minimum of two tasks determined appropriate for each of the interactive conditions (see Appendix).

Dependent Variables and Measurements

Emotions Toward Candidate and Campaign

Ten 7-point bipolar scales were used to measure participants' emotional responses toward each candidate. The word-pair items were angry-not angry; afraid-not afraid; irritated-not irritated; unsafe-safe; alienated-not alienated; proud-not proud; hopeful-not hopeful; optimistic-not optimistic; secure-not secure; included-not included (Abelson et al., 1982; Marcus, 1988). Five items were reverse coded so that the higher a candidate's score, the more positive the emotions elicited. Cronbach's α of the 10 items was .89 for Scott, and .91 for Sink. To reduce the 70-point total rating to a 7-point scale, the participants' average rating of their

emotional responses to each campaign was used as the dependent variable in the analysis.

Candidate Communication Strategy Evaluations

Participants evaluated each candidate's communication strategy. This evaluation was conducted using a 5-point Likert scale on the following five items: the public benefits that the candidate provides would be important to people like me; receiving regular communications from the candidate would be beneficial to people like me; the candidate's communication with public would be courteous; the candidate would attempt to make interactions with the public enjoyable; and the candidate would be cooperative when handling disagreements with public (Ki & Hon, 2009). Cronbach's α of the five items was .85 for Scott, and .74 for Sink. To reduce the 25-point total rating to a 5-point scale, the participants' average rating of the campaigns' communication strategies was used in the analysis.

Election Salience

Participants were asked to state their perceptions of the saliency of the 2010 Florida gubernatorial election on a 7-point Likert scale on the following six items (Zaichowsky, 1985): the upcoming election has prominent value in society; the upcoming election has significant value in society; the upcoming election has important value in society; the upcoming election is well known in society; the upcoming election has fundamental value in society; and I am concerned about the upcoming election. Cronbach's α of the six items was .81. To reduce the 35-point total rating to a 7-point scale, the participants' average rating of the campaigns' communication strategies was used in the analysis.

RESULTS

Demographics and Manipulation Check

Sixty-nine percent of the participants were female, and 80% were between 19 and 21 years old. The results of analysis of

TABLE 1. Main Effects of Information Source

	Social network sites*	Campaign Web sites*	F- value	df	p
Emotions toward Scott	4.28	4.05	2.23	294	0.14
Emotions toward Sink	4.67	4.52	1.71	294	0.19
Scott Campaign Evaluation	3.25	3.20	0.16	294	0.69
Sink Campaign Evaluation	3.52	3.44	1.73	294	0.19
Election Saliency	5.14	5.41	7.22	294	0.01

*The average scores reduced from 70-point total to 7-point scale.

variance tests revealed no significant differences ($p > .05$) among the conditions based on gender or age; thus these variables were dropped from subsequent analyses. The manipulation of interactivity level was deemed satisfactory after MediaLab software verified that 300 of the 311 total participants completed the activities appropriate to their level of interactivity as listed in the Appendix. The responses of the 11 participants who did not follow the directions for interacting with the online information in the manner appropriate for their level of interactivity were deleted from the analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

The first set of hypotheses predicted three main distinct effects of information source on the dependent variables. Specifically, H1a predicted that exposure to candidates' social network sites would elicit more positive emotional responses than exposure to candidate Web sites. As shown in the first two rows of Table 1, the results of an analysis of variance test revealed that the main effects of information source on the positivity of emotions elicited by the Scott and Sink campaigns were not significant, $p > .05$, so H1a was not supported. H1b predicted that exposure to social network sites would

result in more positive candidate communication strategy evaluations than exposure to candidate Web sites. As shown in the second two rows of Table 1, the results of an analysis of variance test revealed that the main effect of information source on evaluations of the Scott or Sink campaign were not significant, $p > .05$, so H1b was not supported. H1c predicted those exposed to campaign Web sites would report perceiving the election was more important than would those exposed to social network sites. As shown in the last row of Table 2, a significant main effect of the online format was found ($F = 7.22$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Participants who explored the candidates' Web sites ascribed greater saliency to the election ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.75$) than did those exposed to the candidates' social network sites ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.98$). Thus, H1c was strongly supported. Overall, the main effect of information source was limited to perceptions of the election's saliency since participants reported statistically equivalent emotional and evaluative responses to each campaigns' social network sites and campaign Web sites.

The second group of hypotheses tested for the main effects of interactivity on the dependent variables. First, H2a predicted that there would be a positive association between the level of interactivity and the emotional responses

TABLE 2. Interaction Effect on Emotions Toward Sink

Source	Interactivity	N	M	SD	F	df	p
Social Network Sites	User-to-system	46	4.67	1.13	3.50	294	0.03
	User-to-document	54	4.28	1.42			
	User-to-user*	44	5.16*	1.27			
Campaign Web site	User-to-system	54	4.47	1.05			
	User-to-document	52	4.56	1.29			
	User-to-user	50	4.52	0.87			

*Condition reporting most positive emotions toward Sink.

elicited by each of the online campaigns. The results of an analysis of variance revealed that there were no significant differences among those in the user-to-system, user-to-document, or user-to-user conditions in terms of the positivity of the emotional responses to either the Scott or Sink campaigns, $p > .05$. A similar pattern emerged when testing H2b, which predicted a positive association between the level of interactivity and evaluations of the candidates' campaigns. An analysis of variance test revealed that there was no significant main effect of interactivity for either candidate because participants' evaluations of each campaign were statistically equivalent across all interactivity levels, $p > .05$. Likewise, H2c predicted a positive association between the level of interactivity and participants' perceptions of the election's salience. An analysis of variance test, however, revealed that there were no significant differences in participants' perceptions of the elections' salience among the interactive conditions. Thus, H2a, H2b, and H2c were not supported because there were no significant main effects of interactivity on evaluations of either campaign or the salience of the election.

The third group of hypotheses combined the main effect predictions from the first two sets of hypotheses to test for interactions that identify which information source facilitated the mediating effects of interactivity. First, H3a predicted the interaction between online format and interactivity level would result in the most positive emotional responses occurring among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition. A univariate analysis of variance test revealed that there was no significant interaction effect on the positivity

of emotions elicited by Scott ($p > .05$), but there was a significant interaction effect for Sink ($F = 3.50$, $df = 294$, $p < .05$). Specifically, as shown in Table 2, the impact of interactivity on the positivity of the Sink campaign's communication strategy evaluations is greater among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.27$) than among those in the user-to-document ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.42$) and user-to-system ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.13$) conditions as well as among those exposed to the candidate's Web site in the user-to-user ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.87$); user-to-document ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.29$); and user-to-system ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.05$) interactivity conditions. Thus, H3a was partially supported. Hypothesis 3b predicted that the interaction between online information source and interactivity would result in the most positive campaign evaluations occurring among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition. The results of a univariate analysis of variance test revealed that there was no interaction effect on evaluations of the Scott campaign, but there was a significant interaction for the Sink campaign, $F = 3.37$, $df = 294$, $p < .05$. As shown in Table 3, however, the impact of interactivity on evaluations of the Sink campaign is greater among those exposed to social network sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.59$) than among those in the user-to-document ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.87$) and user-to-system ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.58$) conditions as well as among those exposed to the candidate's Web site in the user-to-user ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.56$); user-to-document ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.70$); and user-to-system ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.51$) interactivity

TABLE 3. Interaction Effect on Sink Campaign's Communication Strategy

Source	Interactivity	N	M	SD	F	df	p
Social Network Sites	User-to-system	46	3.48	0.58	3.50	294	0.04
	User-to-document	54	3.35	0.87			
	User-to-user*	44	3.78*	0.59			
Campaign Web site	User-to-system	54	3.45	0.51	3.50		
	User-to-document	52	0.70	3.50			
	User-to-user	50	3.41	0.56			

*Condition reporting highest evaluations of Sink campaign's communication strategy.

conditions. Thus, H3b was partially supported. Finally, H3c predicted the interaction between online format and interactivity level would result in those exposed to campaign Web sites in the user-to-user interactivity condition reporting the highest perceptions of the election's salience. The results of a univariate analysis of variance test, however, revealed that this interaction effect was not significant, $p > .05$.

To determine the extent to which Scott and Sink were able to associate positive emotional responses to and evaluations of their campaigns with participants' sense of urgency about participating in the election, we posed a research question that requires an investigation into the relationships among the dependent variables. A correlation analysis revealed participants' emotional responses to Scott were positively related to evaluations of his campaign Scott, $r(295) = 0.69, p < .01$, as well as the perceived importance of the election, $r(295) = .31, p < .001$. The emotions elicited by Sink, on the other hand, were also related to evaluations of her campaign ($r = 0.66, p < .01$), but neither emotional responses to nor evaluations of the Sink campaign were related to the perceived importance of election, $p > .05$. To ensure these results were not confounded by demographic factors or political party affiliation, they were then subjected to a first-order partial correlation to test the relationships while controlling for gender, ethnicity, and political party affiliation. As shown in Table 4, once subjected to these controls, the relationship between emotional responses to Scott and evaluations of his campaign remained significant, $r(295) = 0.56$, with the positivity of emotions toward Scott,

$r(295) = 0.21, p < .01$, and evaluations of his campaign, $r(295) = 0.19, p < .01$, also significantly related to the salience of the election. Alternately, the relationship between emotional responses to Sink and evaluations of her campaign remained significant, $r(294=5) = 0.60, p < .01$, but neither the positivity of emotions toward Sink or evaluations of her campaign were related to the salience of the election, $p > .05$.

To answer our research question, an investigation into the relationships among the dependent variables is required. As shown in Table 5, participants' evaluations of Scott's communication strategy were positively related to emotions elicited by Scott ($r = .69, p < .001$) as well as the perceived importance of the election ($r = .31, p < .001$). On the other hand, the evaluations of Sink's communication strategy were positively related to the emotions elicited by Sink ($r = .66, p < .001$), but were not related to the perceived importance of election ($r = .017, p > .05$). Similarly, emotions toward Sink were not related to the perceived importance of the election ($r = -.04, p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to measure, compare, and draw inferences about the differential effects of political campaigns' online strategies on viewers' emotional responses to the candidates, evaluations of the campaigns, and the perceptions of the salience of the election. Moreover, the nature of the relationship among these variables in relation to each

TABLE 4. Relationships among Campaign Evaluations, Emotional Responses, and Election Saliency

	Emotions Toward Sink	Scott Campaign Evaluation	Sink Campaign Evaluation	Election Saliency
<i>Variables</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficients (n = 300)</i>			
1. Emotions toward Scott	-0.07	0.56*	-0.03	0.2*
2. Emotions toward Sink		-0.25*	0.60*	0.06
3. Scott Campaign Evaluation			-0.28*	0.19*
4. Sink Campaign Evaluation				-.040

* $p < .01$.

TABLE 5. Emotional Responses and Evaluations by Campaign

	Means	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotions toward Scott	4.1.6 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2.0)	−3.84	299	0.00
Emotions toward Sink	4.5.9 (<i>SD</i> = 1.2.1)			
Scott Campaign Evaluation	3.22 (<i>SD</i> = 0.88)	−3.66	299	0.00
Sink Campaign Evaluation	3.48 (<i>SD</i> = 0.66)			

campaign was also explored to determine if one candidate was more successful in terms of inspiring a sense of urgency among supporters about participating in the election. In the end, a mixed picture emerges in terms of the practical and theoretical implications stemming from the results of this study. The findings provide compelling evidence that candidate Web sites may influence viewers' perceptions of the election's importance to a greater extent than social network sites and that the impact of interactivity on users' emotional responses to the candidates is greater on social network sites than it is on candidate Web sites. On the other hand, there appears to be no difference in the impact on users' candidate evaluations between social network sites and campaign Web sites. Furthermore, we found different, yet interesting and important, patterns in the relationships among the dependent variables from each campaign.

Theoretically, this study establishes new directions in the development of agenda building theory in public relations. Traditionally, many agenda building studies have relied on content analyses and surveys to show correlations between public relations materials and media content but not necessarily public opinion. There is a distinct lack of experimental testing of the causal relationships in the agenda building process, especially in regard to the impact on public opinion. The experimental method used in this study lends strength to prior work in this field, and indicates a potential causal link between the format of online public relations content and the perceived salience of an election. Additionally, although scholars have found that affective attributes can elicit emotional responses and shape overall evaluations of an object, this study moves one step further, providing evidence of the link between

affective evaluations of the object and object salience. Finally, our study notes the necessity of including interactivity (rather than simple exposure) when studying the effects of online public relations content. Contrary to previous research noting increases in favorable impressions of candidates as interactivity increased (Sundar et al., 2003), our results did not provide support for a main effect of interactivity. We did, however, find interaction effects, showing that the level of interactivity has a significantly greater effect on social networking sites than on campaign Web sites. The results of this study potentially help delimit and refine theories about the ways in which active use of online content may affect political communication outcomes.

Practically speaking, the results of this study suggest that it is important for political campaigns to make use of both the traditional campaign Web site and the newer social network sites. Interestingly, our results provide support for prior scholarship but may also drive new interpretations or place limits on previous findings. In particular, scholars have found that emotion accounts for much of the variance in voting decisions (Rahn et al., 1990). It has been assumed that this influence must also translate into an influence on perceived salience of the election, because participants were moving from evaluation to action. However, this study did not find increased election salience in the condition that saw the strongest positive emotional involvement—social network sites. Although more positive emotions about a campaign and a candidate are elicited among those in the high-interactivity social network sites condition, the impact on electoral outcomes may be negligible if the election is not perceived as important. Thus, the campaign Web site becomes crucial as this format appears much more effective

at transferring salience than social network sites. As Kioussis et al. (1999) noted, portrayals of candidate qualifications in the media may influence how the public perceives political candidates. Specifically, the results of this study extend that scholarship, highlighting a candidate Web site's particular ability to portray candidate qualifications and raise the salience of the election. It seems apparent, then, that campaigns should not only make use of both formats but also should actively promote and prominently display links to the candidate's social network sites on the official campaign Web site, and vice versa.

Additionally, the effectiveness of social network sites shown here may be particularly important to political campaigners because of its dual nature—both passive and active. While one has to intentionally search for a traditional campaign Web site, a candidate's social network presence is highly likely to appear in a news-feed or an advertisement on the site. This type of passive introduction to the campaign reduces the cost of seeking out information and may be persuasive if recommended by a "friend" who has chosen to "like" the page. This social relationship may convince a person to, at minimum, view a campaign's social network page—an action he or she may not have taken without prompting. On the other hand, social network sites can also be very active—prompting a person to comment and engage in the social nature of the format. Conventional campaigning wisdom notes that this small change from passive to active information processing also makes one more likely to contribute to the campaign or volunteer—both important additions to a successful campaign.

Interestingly, while emotions elicited by the Scott campaign, evaluations of Scott and his campaign, and participants' perceptions of the importance of the election were all positively related to each other, such was not the case for the Sink campaign. In fact, we found no significant relationship at all among all the dependent variables for the Sink campaign. In other words, the Sink campaign had the ability to elicit positive emotions or make participants feel positively about Sink as a candidate, but it was not able to convert those feelings into perceptions

that the election was important. Increasing positive evaluations for the candidate and eliciting positive emotions in the electorate are important first steps but may not be instrumental if they do not also lead to action. Although one could argue that the perceived importance of the election does not directly measure or predict behavior, it seems intuitive that those who perceive an election to be more important are also more likely to vote. In fact, our results showed that evaluations of Scott (the winner of the election) and emotions elicited by his campaign were positively related to participants' perceptions of the election's importance. It seems clear that Scott's campaign created a sense of urgency in supporters and was able to connect the positive emotions that his public relations content elicited to a sense of the election's importance, and thus, a need to vote.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its theoretical and practical implications, this study also has some notable limitations. First, the online media formats are not mutually exclusive in real campaign communication settings. Some of the content on the candidates' Web sites is identical to the content on their Facebook pages, and hyperlinks allow users to explore both formats. Hence, future research may need to explore the impact of the combinations of online social media channels on building campaign agenda. Second, this study attempted to measure the agenda-building power of political public relations in an experimental setting; however, it tested only correlational linkages between the first and second level of agenda building. Hence, causal relationships should be tested further among emotional responses, candidate evaluations, and the perceived importance of the election. The differences observed in these linkages between the two campaigns, while interesting, are not fully explained by the results of this study. Future research should explore how differences in communication strategies, types of emotions elicited by campaigns, and citizens' pre-existing attitudes (i.e., knowledge or opinions on candidates) impact a campaign's ability to link

positive evaluations with the perceived importance of an election. Since all participants were recruited in Florida during the 2010 Florida election context, future investigation may need to explore the relationships in other national or gubernatorial campaign contexts in other states. Furthermore, future research should expand our discussion on agenda-building outcomes such as voting intentions or donation intentions to a political party.

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2. Reading about political candidates on Facebook or the campaign Web site.
 3. Watching a video.
 4. Clicking on hyperlinks to read online stories.
- b. User-to-Document:
5. Friending a candidate on Facebook.
 6. Commenting on a video.
 7. “Liking” news story linked to Facebook.
 8. “Liking” a candidate’s Facebook wall post.
 9. Becoming a follower of a candidate, journalist, or news service on Twitter.
 10. Signing-up to receive e-mails from candidates or campaign organizations.
 11. Bookmarking, tagging, and linking news stories to Delicious or other social bookmarking Web services.
 12. Subscribing to a candidate or campaign YouTube channel.
 13. Comment on a blog entry on a campaign Web site.
 13. “Endorse” a candidate’s plan on campaign Web site.
- c. User-to-User:
14. Contacting or sending a candidate an e-mail.
 15. Forwarding a video to another person to watch.
 16. Send the candidate or campaign a message through a Web site.
 17. Reposting a candidate’s Facebook wall post to your own Facebook wall.
 18. Posting information about a candidate on your Facebook page.
 19. Sign up to receive campaign e-mails, texts, or alerts.
 20. Sending or forwarding another person an e-mail about a candidate or campaign.

APPENDIX

Based on the user-to-system; user-to-document; user-to-user interactivity typology (McMillan, 2002), participants in each condition were instructed to complete a minimum of two of the following activities:

- a. User-to-System:
1. Following hyperlinks to view candidate or political organizations’ Flickr photo galleries.