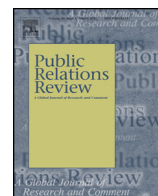




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## Public Relations Review



# Online political public relations and trust: Source and interactivity effects in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign

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### ABSTRACT

This experimental investigation ( $N=476$ ) parses the influence of information source and interactivity on the effects of the 2012 United States presidential candidates' online campaign communications on citizen-campaign political organization-public relations and political trust. The results indicate Facebook is differentially more effective than campaign websites at building both citizens' relationships with the campaigns and trust in government, especially among users who engage in expressive behaviors triggering higher levels of elaboration and self-awareness. These findings support the direction of the exposure effects in the political organization-public relations model and extend two-way communication models by testing the influence of interactivity and specifying the online platform on which political expression exerts the greatest effects on relational outcomes and political trust.

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## 1. Introduction

Similar to most businesses in the United States, contemporary U.S. presidential campaigns execute a variety of online relationship-building strategies to achieve organizational goals (Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, 2011). In addition to raising brand awareness and differentiating the organization/campaign from its competitors, these online communications are also designed to promote socially responsible behaviors and engage strategic publics (Levenshus, 2010). Grounded in the organization-public relations (OPR) literature, scholars have developed a political organization-public relations (POPR) framework for analyses of political communications and campaign effects on citizen-political party relationships and outcomes (Ledingham, 2011; Zhang & Seltzer, 2010). This line of research suggests strategic campaign communications significantly influence POPR with the political parties, which is related to individual levels of social capital, confidence in government and attitudes toward political parties' issue positions (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, 2011b; Zhang & Seltzer, 2010). Additionally, the degree of interactivity and the extent to which both the organization and its publics engage in conscious and dialogic communications may influence POPR states and other relevant outcomes (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Buskqvist, 2013; Kim, Painter, & Miles, 2013; Lee & Park, 2013). Based on survey research indicating strategic campaign communications affect on voters' POPR with the *political parties* (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, 2011b), this experimental investigation tests for the main effects of online information source on voters' POPR with the presidential campaigns and individual levels of political trust.

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Compared to traditional media, internet platforms allow for more interactive and two-way communication, and research indicates higher levels of interactivity may influence the effects of exposure to online political information (Pingree, 2007; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Shah et al., 2007; Tedesco, 2007). Moreover, research on the indirect effects of political communications suggest users who express themselves during interactions with political information experience higher levels of self-consciousness, awareness and ego-involvement, which influence their perceptions, attitudes and resulting behaviors (Cho et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2013; Kim, 2006; Pingree, 2007). Although much experimental public relations research focuses on the effects of message sources and/or contents, this study focuses on the influence of sending and receiving messages, or dialog, by manipulating users' online behaviors to test for the influence of interactivity. Specifically, this investigation tests for the main effects of interactivity by comparing the differential effects of surveillance and expressive behaviors on gains in voter-campaign POPR and political trust. Finally, this investigation finds its place in the literature by testing for differential effects and interactions to specify the online information source (Facebook versus campaign website) and interactivity level (surveillance versus expression) exerting the greatest influence on voter-campaign POPR and political trust.

## 2. The relational perspective, political trust and online information

Organization–public relations (OPR) is “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural or political well being of the other” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). To measure perceptions of relationship quality and the effects of strategic communications, Hon and Grunig (1999) developed four dimensions of organization–public relations: trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality. This relational perspective is appropriately applied to political public relations because “organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly” (Hung, 2005, p. 396). Thus, it may also be argued that the relational perspective uses these four indices to measure the extent to which the public trusts the organization to behave responsibly (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang, 2001).

### 2.1. Political organization–public relations (POPR)

Seltzer and Zhang (2011a, 2011b) developed a line of research on political organization–public relations between U.S. citizens and the two major political parties, Democrat and Republican. These researchers analyzed survey data that included measures of antecedent variables and self-reports of exposure to strategic partisan communications to measure their association with citizens' POPRs with the political parties, political participation, confidence in government and other outcomes (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, 2011b; Seltzer, Zhang, Gearhart, & Conduff, 2013; Zhang & Seltzer, 2010). Their analyses indicate strategic partisan communications, especially those using two-way or dialogic tactics, are positively associated with citizen–political party POPR states, attitudes, and supportive behaviors.

Although the two major parties hold conventions to officially nominate candidates for the U.S. presidential elections, presidential campaigns are independent organizations focused on marketing a single candidate who may face intra-party competition in primary contests determined by voters, not political party operatives (Parker, 2012). Indeed, contemporary presidential candidates may be conceptualized as individual brands supported by campaign organizations with specific sets of stakeholders and publics (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011; Needham, 2005; Zavattaro, 2010). While the individual campaigns may end on Election Day, the candidates vie for a position in an enduring institution through election to a government position. Indeed, presidential elections are the most salient events connecting U.S. voters with opportunities to influence their government and “also serve as a means by which parties and candidates can mobilize support for democratic processes” (Banducci & Karp, 2003, p. 443).

### 2.2. Political trust

The construct of political trust is conceptualized as an affective orientation toward the government based on an evaluation of its behaviors according to normative expectations (Miller, 1974; Stokes, 1962). Similar to the trust construct used in OPR research, political trust is based on evaluations of the government's integrity, fairness, dependability and competence, but includes individual orientations toward both government institutions and political actors. Scholars' concerns about Americans' steep decline in political trust and its persistence near the 50% mark over the past 40 years are based on the necessity of trust not only in citizen–government relationships, but also for the proper functioning of democracy (Banducci & Karp, 2003; Gallup, 2014; Hetherington, 1998). Indeed, the insidious nature of political distrust is evidenced in the modern spiral of widespread political distrust breeding disapproval, which constricts leaders' abilities to marshal resources and solve problems, thereby solving fewer problems and leading citizens to question both their relationships with the government and its legitimacy (Bowler & Karp, 2004; Neustadt, 1990; Rivers & Rose, 1985).

### 2.3. Online information sources

During the 2012 U.S. presidential elections, 47% of U.S. citizens cited the Internet as their main source of political information and 69% identified as social media users (Pew, 2013; Pew, 2012a). Moreover, 66% of social media users engaged in

online political expression and persuasion during the 2012 campaign (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2013). This rapid diffusion of the Internet and adoption of social media afforded political actors new opportunities for managing relationships and building political trust. No longer dependent on traditional media outlets or subject to the news media filter, political campaigns use their websites and social media channels to manage relationships with strategic publics (Sweetser, 2011). Since 2004, these strategic campaign communication platforms have become critical components of U.S. presidential campaigns (Stromer-Galley & Baker, 2006; Williams & Gulati, 2012). Research indicates campaign websites are unfiltered portals through which campaigns attempt to recruit volunteers, solicit donations, activate voters and manage relationships (Levenshus, 2010; Smith & Smith, 2009). Before 2008, presidential candidates were reluctant to tolerate dissenting views on their campaign websites (Smith, 2009; Stromer-Galley, 2000). By 2012, however, the two major party candidate websites presented a variety of two-way, interactive, and dialogic elements to manage relationships and influence outcomes more effectively (Pew, 2012b; Serazio, 2014). The increasingly interactive nature of this online information source notwithstanding; the purposes of the platform, the interface and the presence of users' profiles clearly distinguish social media from campaign websites.

The 2012 U.S. presidential election was the first to include a majority of voters who identified as social media users, and more than 92% of social media users reported they were on Facebook (Pew, 2013; Pew, 2011). During the 2012 election, more than half of Facebook users logged onto the site at least once daily, 38% "liked" political material posted by others, and 35% encouraged people to vote on the site (Pew, 2013). Moreover, concerns that selective processes would create echo chambers among like-minded friends and limit political discussions on social media failed to materialize in 2012 when most Facebook users reported they "only sometimes" or "never" agreed with the political content posted by their friends (Pew, 2013). Thus, Facebook users in 2012 were generally accustomed to seeing a wide variety of consonant and oppositional views when they encountered political posts on this social media platform.

Survey research suggests exposure to strategic campaign communications is positively related to voter-political party POPR states (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, 2011b), but no previous experimental research testing the differential effects of campaign websites and social media on relational states and political trust could be located in the literature. The results from one experimental study, however, indicate exposure to candidates' Facebook pages exerted significantly greater effects on users' political information efficacy and the salience of the 2012 election than did online news or campaign websites (Painter, Fernandes, Mahone, & Al Nashmi, 2014). The rationale for the differential effects of social media compared to online news or campaign websites include their popularity and unique ability to fulfill social utility needs, which may increase users' self-awareness and ego-involvement (Beer, 2008; Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011; Painter et al., 2014; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006). Moreover, the personalization of the candidates on the world's most popular social network site may foster stronger relationships between the campaigns and their publics, humanize the opposition, and result in greater levels of political trust (Baldwin-Philippi, 2012; Sweetser, 2011). Therefore, this investigation poses two hypotheses to test for the main effects of information source:

**H1a.** Those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages will report greater gains in citizen-campaign POPR than will those exposed to the official campaign websites.

**H1b.** Those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages will report greater gains in political trust than will those exposed to the official campaign websites.

### 3. Interactivity and consciousness: surveillance and expression effects

The diffusion of internet technologies combined with Grunig's (1992) conceptualization of public relations as "building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission" shifted public relations from a predominantly one-way communication model of relationship management to more conscious, interactive, two-way communication models for developing OPR states (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The functional approach to interactivity identifies the critical element in this dialogic or conscious communication model: two-way communication among the organization, its stakeholders, and publics. This type of dialogic communication facilitates a higher degree of consciousness among organizations and their publics, fostering mutual understanding, agreement and perceptions that the organization both listens to and considers the publics' concerns legitimate (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Research on the effects of interactive, dialogic communication indicates interactivity on organizational websites and blogs is positively related to viewers' ratings of their OPR states (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Lee & Park, 2013).

When investigating the effects of exposure to online political information in an experimental setting, participants' interactions with the communications technology and their surveillance or expressive behaviors may be controlled by randomly assigning participants to specific treatment conditions. The distinction between these two levels of interactivity is derived from research differentiating surveillance – or more passive consumption behaviors such as clicking links, reading text, and/or watching videos – and expression, or more active behaviors such as "liking," sharing, commenting upon, or messaging another person (Painter et al., 2014; Stromer-Galley, 2004). Moreover, compelling participants in high interactivity to express themselves may also heighten the message receivers' consciousness and self-awareness by activating more elaborate information processing and triggering ego-involvement (Pingree, 2007). Since this investigation compares the gains in voter-campaign POPR and political trust based on research indicating there is a positive relationship between dialogic

elements facilitating expression and the influence of online political information, two hypotheses are posed to test for the main effects of interactivity:

**H2a.** Those in the expression condition will report greater gains in voter-campaign POPR than will those in the surveillance condition.

**H2b.** Those in the expression condition will report greater gains in political trust than will those in the surveillance condition.

To identify which of the four conditions reported the greatest effects, the theoretical bases for the predictions in the main effects hypotheses are combined and two interaction hypotheses are posed:

**H3a.** Those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages in the expression condition will report the greatest gains in voter-campaign POPR.

**H3b.** Those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages in the expression condition will report the greatest gains in political trust.

#### 4. Method

A two- (online information source) by-two (interactivity level) pretest–posttest factorial design was used to test the hypotheses. Participants were 476 students from either a large research institution or career college in the Southeast. Participants completed the project online between October 14 and October 24, 2012.

##### 4.1. Procedure

All participants completed a pretest questionnaire that included items measuring demographics, POPR with the campaigns, and political trust. Upon completion of the pretest, the software directed participants to one of the four conditions, presented them with video and written instructions, and exposed them to the stimulus. After completing the tasks in the assigned condition, the software directed participants to the posttest questionnaire that included items reassessing POPR with the campaigns and political trust.

##### 4.1.1. Manipulation

The online information source has two conditions: the candidates' Facebook pages or the official campaign websites. The level of interactivity was manipulated using two conditions: surveillance and expression. In the surveillance (low interactivity) condition, participants were instructed to spend at least 5 min reading the information, viewing videos and activating hyperlinks to information on each Facebook page or campaign website, depending on their assignment. The software forced 5 min of exposure to the stimulus. In the expression (high interactivity) condition, participants were instructed not only to view the information, but also to express themselves during the transaction. This expression could occur by posting content on Facebook; "liking" a post on a Facebook page or using a social media share button on a campaign website; forwarding information or videos to another person, or messaging the candidate or another person. Participants in the high interactivity condition also were told that they were required to express themselves after the exposure by entering an email address and a minimum five-word comment in the item on the posttest questionnaire that forwarded the information to another person.

##### 4.1.2. Dependent variables

**4.1.2.1. POPR.** A series of 14 items from Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship scale measured participants' POPR with the campaigns. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements measuring the four dimensions (trust, satisfaction, commitment and control mutuality) of POPR using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree" (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011a, 2011b). The items were summed to create a POPR variable for the Obama campaign (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94 pretest; 0.89 posttest) and the Romney campaign (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92 pretest; 0.87 posttest). Next, the candidates' pretest POPR scores were subtracted from their posttest POPR scores to create the citizen-campaign POPR gain variable. Finally, the two candidates' POPR gain scores were summed to calculate the overall POPR gain variable used in the analysis.

**4.1.2.2. Political trust.** A series of six items adapted from the ANES (2012) and previous research (Hetherington, 1998; Mutz & Reeves, 2005) measured participants' levels of political trust. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with these statements using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree." Responses to the items were summed to create an overall political trust score (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92 pretest; 0.89 posttest). Finally, participants' pretest political trust scores were subtracted from their posttest political trust scores to create the Trust Gain variable used in the analysis.

## 5. Results

The participants were 52% female, and 58% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic, 15% African-American, 7% multi-racial and 2% Asian-American. The participants' average age was 22, and 26% identified as Republican, 41% as Independent, 27% as Democrat, and 6% as "Other." Participants were randomly assigned to either the surveillance (52%) or expression (48%) interactivity condition and then exposed to either the official campaign websites (49%) or the candidates' Facebook pages (51%).

### 5.1. Simple effects

Before comparing the differential gains in citizen-campaign POPR and political trust, the simple effects of exposure to strategic online campaign communications must be verified to validate the theoretical and empirical bases for the comparisons. Thus, a paired-samples *t*-test was executed to compare participants' pretest citizen-campaign POPR states ( $M = 76.56$ ,  $SD = 6.93$ ) to their posttest citizen-campaign POPR states ( $M = 87.06$ ,  $SD = 8.61$ ), and the difference was significant and positive,  $t(1, 445) = 12.46$ ,  $p < .01$ . Similarly, the results of a paired-samples *t*-test revealed that participants' posttest levels of political trust ( $M = 19.44$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ) were significantly greater than their pretest levels ( $M = 14.14$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ),  $t(1, 445) = 23.72$ .

### 5.2. Main effects of information source: Facebook versus websites

**H1a** predicted those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages would report greater gains in POPR than would those exposed to the campaigns' websites. The results of an ANOVA test revealed those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages ( $M = 12.11$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) reported significantly greater gains in POPR than did those exposed to the campaigns' websites ( $M = 9.99$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ),  $F(1, 442) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .01$ . When examining the effects of online information source on the individual campaigns' relationship outcomes, however, the results indicate these differential effects may be candidate dependent. Specifically, participants exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages reported significantly greater gains in POPR with the Obama campaign ( $M = 6.56$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) than did those exposed to the campaigns' websites ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $F(1, 442) = 13.83$ ,  $p < .01$ . Gains in POPR with the Romney campaign, on the other hand, were not significantly different between those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages ( $M = 5.67$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) and those exposed to the campaigns' websites ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ),  $p > .05$ . Although these results suggest gains in POPR may be candidate dependent, overall they provide moderately strong support for the main effect of online information source on citizen-campaign POPR states.

**H1b** predicted those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages would report greater gains in political trust than would those exposed to the campaign websites. The results of an ANOVA test support this prediction since those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) reported significantly greater gains in political trust than did those exposed to the campaign websites ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ),  $F(1, 446) = 12.25$ ,  $p < .01$ . These results provide strong support for a main effect of online information source on political trust.

### 5.3. Main effects of interactivity: expression versus surveillance

**H2a** predicted a positive relationship between interactivity and gains in POPR with the campaigns. Specifically, this hypothesis predicted those who engaged in political expression would report greater gains in POPR than would those who did not engage in political expression. The results of an ANOVA test revealed those in the expression condition ( $M = 12.21$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) reported significantly greater gains in POPR than did those in the surveillance condition ( $M = 11.68$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $F(1, 446) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .05$ . These results provide strong support for a main effect of interactivity on POPR with the campaigns. Once again, however, these results may be candidate dependent because participants in the expression condition ( $M = 6.58$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) reported significantly greater gains in POPR with the Obama campaign than did those in the surveillance condition ( $M = 6.14$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1, 466) = 11.16$ ,  $p < .01$ . When comparing gains in POPR with the Romney campaign, however, the results indicate those in the expression ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) and surveillance conditions ( $M = 5.58$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) were statistically equivalent,  $p > .05$ .

**H2b** predicted a positive relationship between interactivity level and political trust. The results of an ANOVA test revealed those in the expression condition ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = 2.96$ ) reported significantly greater gains in political trust than did those in the surveillance condition ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ),  $F(1, 466) = 75.20$ ,  $p < .01$ . These results provide strong support for a main effect of interactivity on political trust.

### 5.4. Interaction effects: information source and interactivity

**H3a** predicted the interaction between online information source and interactivity would result in participants exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages who expressed themselves would report the greatest gains in POPR with the campaigns. As shown in the first row of [Table 1](#), the results of a factorial ANOVA revealed the interaction between online information source and interactivity was significant,  $F(3, 443) = 4.92$ ,  $p < .05$ . An analysis of simple effects revealed those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages who engaged in political expression reported the greatest gains in POPR with the campaigns. As with the main effects of online information source and interactivity, however, these interaction effects may be candidate dependent. As shown in the second and third rows of [Table 1](#), those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages who engaged



**Table 1**  
 POPR and political trust gains by information source and interactivity level.

	Facebook		Websites		F	df	p
	Surveillance (n = 119)	Expression (n = 109)	Surveillance (n = 113)	Expression (n = 105)			
Campaign POPR	11.76 (SD = 9.47)	12.55 (SD = 9.76)	11.48 (SD = 10.33)	11.89 (SD = 9.39)	4.92	3	0.03
Obama POPR	6.05 (SD = 4.81)	7.02 (SD = 5.97)	6.03 (SD = 5.25)	6.21 (SD = 5.46)	26.13	3	0.00
Romney POPR	5.71 (SD = 5.02)	5.53 (SD = 5.03)	5.45 (SD = 4.11)	5.68 (SD = 4.37)	2.99	3	0.08
Political Trust	4.31 (SD = 3.49)	5.87 (SD = 5.52)	4.28 (SD = 4.29)	4.85 (SD = 3.59)	51.66	3	0.00

in political expression reported the greatest gains in POPR with the Obama campaign,  $F(3, 443) = 26.13, p < .01$ , but differences in POPR gains with the Romney campaign across the four conditions were not significant,  $p > .05$ . Overall, however, these results provide moderately strong support for H3a.

H3b predicted the interaction between online information source and interactivity would result in participants exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages who expressed themselves would report the greatest gains in political trust. As shown in the fourth row of Table 1, the results of a factorial ANOVA revealed the interaction between online information source and interactivity was significant,  $F(3, 443) = 51.66, p < .01$ . An analysis of simple effects revealed those exposed to the candidates Facebook pages who engaged in political expression reported the greatest gains in political trust. Therefore, these results provide strong support for H3b.

## 6. Discussion

Overall, these results suggest exposure to the 2012 presidential campaigns' strategic online communications not only positively influenced citizen-campaign POPRs and political trust, but also that Facebook is a powerful tool for building citizen-campaign relationships and trust in the political system, especially when users engaged in political expression. Although the simple effects of exposure to the campaigns' strategic online communications were not the focus of this investigation, it is important to note that significantly greater levels of citizen-campaign POPRs and political trust were reported across conditions. This result not only supports the theoretical basis for this study's focus on the differential effects of online information source and interactivity level, but also verifies the direction of the effects in the POPR model.

### 6.1. Citizen-campaign POPR

While the results in this study revealed main effects of both information source and interactivity level on gains in citizen-campaign POPR states, this finding was driven by the differentially significant gains for the Obama campaign. The hypotheses testing for interaction effects mirrored the results in the main effects hypotheses since those exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages who engaged in political expression reported the greatest gains in citizen-campaign POPR across the candidates, but this finding was also dependent solely on the differentially significant gains for the Obama campaign. Considering that the Obama campaign devoted significantly greater resources to their online strategies than the Romney campaign, this finding is not surprising. In Rutledge's (2012) analysis of Obama's social media victory over Romney, she concluded that, "Obama dominated the social media space because his team got how networks work. The real power of social media is not in the number of posts or Tweets but in user engagement measured by content spreadability. For example, Obama logged twice as many Facebook 'Likes' and nearly 20 times as many re-tweets as Romney" (p. 1).

### 6.2. Political trust

The results of hypothesis testing regarding political trust revealed those exposed to Facebook reported differentially greater gains in political trust than did those exposed to the campaign websites. Further, the greatest effect size reported in this investigation resulted from the analysis comparing the gains in political trust between those in the surveillance and expression interactivity conditions. Specifically, interactivity exerted differentially positive and powerful effects among those in the expression condition compared to those in the surveillance condition across both Facebook and the campaign websites. Finally, the interaction results extend previous research on two-way, dialogic communication on social network sites since those exposed to Facebook who engaged in political expression reported the greatest gains in political trust.

## 7. Implications

Theoretically, this investigation extends political public relations research by applying the POPR model to online campaign communications and experimentally testing the differential influence of online information source and interactivity on citizen-campaign POPR and political trust. First, this investigation provides compelling evidence that exposure to the campaign's strategic online communications influenced participants' POPR states, whereas previous survey research was subject to speculation that the correlation between POPR states and exposure to strategic political communication was due to respondents with pre-existing strong political relationships seeking more strategic communications than those with

weaker relationships with the political parties. Second, the results in this investigation indicate those exposed to Facebook who engaged in more dialogic, interactive and expressive behaviors reported the greatest gains in citizen-campaign POPRs and political trust. This result extends research on two-way communication models focused on message-sender effects by demonstrating that the influence of expression is differentially greater on social media sites that trigger higher levels of self-awareness, consciousness, and ego-involvement than on campaign websites primarily designed to fulfill information-seeking or candidate promotion needs. The findings in this investigation also suggest that online political campaign relationship building is not necessarily a zero-sum game because strategic online campaign communications may exert positive influences on citizen-campaign POPRs across the candidate choices. Unlike research focused on the effects of issue-specific partisan communications on citizen-political party POPRs (Seltzer & Zhang, 2011b), this investigation found significant increases in citizen-campaign POPRs across the candidates, with increases in POPR with one candidate not dependent on corresponding decreases in POPR with the other candidate. These increases in citizen-campaign POPR states across the candidates coincided with powerful and differential gains in political trust, particularly among those exposed to Facebook who expressed themselves. These findings suggest political communications designed to influence POPR with the candidates also build trust in the political system as citizens learn more about the candidates' personal, social, and political characteristics, and especially when this learning occurs on social media sites and includes more interactive activities such as expression. Practically, these results suggest online platforms are effective channels for campaigns to use in building relationships with voters, especially when this communication takes place on social media sites and engages users in dialog or self-expression. Indeed, these strategic online campaign communications may not only build stronger relationships between the citizens and the candidates, shaping candidate affect and voting preferences, but arguably more importantly, they may build trust in the political system.

## 8. Limitations and recommendations

As with all experimental investigations testing theoretical principles, the exposure to the stimuli and the manipulation were artificial. Additionally, the participants were college students who may be more sophisticated in their online information consumption and creation than other age groups; however, all but the oldest citizens now use online platforms to fulfill information seeking and social utility needs (Pew, 2011). Future research focused on specific dimensions of POPR states may test associations between individual variables in the OPR indices and other political relevant outcomes. Finally, content analyses of strategic online campaign communications combined with experimental manipulations of source, content, and interactivity may parse the influence of dialogic communication variables among a population increasingly reliant on Internet sources to fulfill political information-seeking and social utility needs.

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