

**The Changing Face of Incumbency:  
Joe Lieberman's Digital Presentation of Self**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper explores how Joe Lieberman's digital presentation of self changed throughout the course of the 2006 election. Based on content analysis of Lieberman's campaign website, three unique self-presentation phases are identified: Democrat, Transitional, and Independent-Democrat. The Lieberman case study demonstrates how a consistent presentation of self is not necessarily required for electoral success. Collectively, these three phases also present a dramatic shift in how elected officials can choose to represent themselves in a digital context. It indicates that as the larger political scene changes, politicians adapt in both the online and offline contexts. Finally, this work emphasizes the importance of engaging cross-disciplinary scholarship between political science, political marketing, and sociology.

With digital technology having become commonplace in United States campaigns, the Internet has become a medium for elected officials to express and negotiate their presentation of self in an online context. This negotiation includes wearing certain types of clothing, using specific language, and putting particular images on their website. While most candidates seek to remain consistent in their presentation of self, this is not always possible to achieve. This is especially true when an incumbent decides to switch political parties. This paper explores how Joe Lieberman's digital presentation of self changed throughout the course of the 2006 election, the year when he switched from Democrat to Independent. Based on content analysis of Lieberman's campaign website, three unique self-presentation phases are identified: Democrat, Transitional, and Independent-Democrat. Collectively, these three phases present a dramatic shift in how elected officials can choose to represent themselves to their constituency.

The Lieberman case study demonstrates how a consistent presentation of self is not necessarily required for electoral success. This poses a direct contradiction to Erving Goffman's (1959) emphasis on consistency as a key to successful self presentation. Further, adding to the scholarship of Lees-Marshment (2001, 2004), these findings suggest the importance of engaging cross-disciplinary scholarship between political science, political marketing, and sociology to help explain complicated campaigning behavior.

### **The Political Players**

It was no surprise when Democrat Joe Lieberman announced that he would be seeking his fourth term in the United States Senate in 2006. A popular incumbent in years past, Lieberman came to power in 1988 by upsetting moderate Republican Lowell Weicker by a margin of 10,000 votes. He won his next three elections by significant margins. In 1994 he landed the biggest landslide ever in the history of Connecticut Senate races, raking in 67% of the

vote. While the Senator's vice-presidential bid failed in 2000 and his presidential bid failed four years later, he was still able to retain his seat in the Senate. He won reelection in both 2000 and 2006. However, 2006 proved to be a far cry from his previous landslide victories. Months out, no political forecaster was able to predict the viability of Democratic Party challenger Ned Lamont.

Ned Lamont, a successful businessman from the southwest region of Fairfield County, announced his candidacy for United States Senate on March 13, 2006. A virtual political newcomer, his only experience in office was in the capacity of a selectman for the town of Greenwich. He also served on various civic boards. Given that he started the campaign as a virtual unknown throughout Connecticut, few could have predicted the fight that he would give Lieberman. Amidst heated negative sentiments towards President Bush and the Iraq war, Lamont consistently attacked Lieberman on the television, radio, and Internet. Accusing the Senator of being an avid Bush supporter, Lamont painted his opponent as a staunch Republican and disloyal Democrat. He continually reminded constituents that Lieberman voted in favor of the Iraq war resolution and attacked his attendance on the Senate floor. As the summer went on, this message began to take hold and Lamont slowly started to gain name recognition throughout the state.

By July, Lamont found himself in a statistical dead heat with the Lieberman in statewide polls. Lieberman's ads became increasingly defensive and he began to flounder in his support of the Iraq war. Lamont made creative use of the incumbent's own words to drive home his argument about the need for new blood in the Senate. Taking a clip from Lieberman's 1998 debate against Republican incumbent Lowell Weicker, Lamont captured a video file of Lieberman stating he would never run for four consecutive senate terms. This message

bombarded the airwaves in the weeks leading up to the election and on August 8, 2006, the previously unknown challenger made national headlines by beating the three-time incumbent in the Democratic Party primary.

In the days leading up to this primary defeat, Lieberman began collecting signatures to get on the ballot as an independent candidate. While he likely would have preferred to keep this move as quiet as possible until after the primary, he was forced to abide by Connecticut campaign laws. State statutes required him to submit 7,500 valid signatures the day after the primary in order to earn a place on the November ballot. When the word broke about his signature collection, this resulted in more negative attention for Lieberman. In the end, despite narrowly losing the primary by 10,119 votes, Lieberman was ultimately able to capitalize on the large independent base in the state. He also benefited from the lack of a viable Republican Party challenger. He took 70% of the Republican Party vote in the general election, winning by a margin of 115,648 votes over Lamont (CNN 2006).

### **Background and Significance**

#### **The Symbolic Interactionist Framework**

Individuals can express and negotiate their presentation of self in numerous ways. This includes wearing particular types of clothing, using specific language, or putting certain types of images on their websites. To consider the social-psychological basis for how and why this presentation occurs, it is useful to draw from sociology's symbolic interactionist perspective (Cooley 1902, Mead 1934, Goffman 1959). Stemming from Mead (1934), this theoretical framework focuses on individuals and their daily interactions with one another. It emphasizes the mind's ability to interpret symbols, and argues that society is a product of daily social interactions. Individuals are seen as dynamic, conscious actors who attach meaning to symbols

as they progress through their life course. These symbols serve as a way to communicate different expectations, ideologies, and perceptions within the course of daily interaction (Mead 1934). As we will see, using different symbols, words, and images, Lieberman changed his digital presentation of self significantly over the course of the 2006 election.

Further informing the symbolic interactionist framework is Erving Goffman and his classical work *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman helps us to understand how ordinary people present themselves in a multitude of situations, as well as how individuals attempt to control the impressions that other people make of them. Goffman's dramaturgical approach illuminates how dynamic everyday social interactions are much like that of a performance (1959). As individuals, we go through life on a variety of different stages, corresponding within the context of the different roles that we play during any given day. While operating in a specific capacity, according to Goffman, we will attempt to win over the audience by persuading them that we are "fit" for that role. Considering this in the context of politics, the use of certain Web-based images assists in a politician's impression management while on stage. It helps them to control and maintain consistency in the presentation of self being portrayed.

Even before the introduction of the Internet into our political system, Fenno (1978) set the stage for a lively discussion regarding the presentation of the political self. His seminal work *Home Style* (1978) helps us to understand how the presentation of a political self is constructed. The goal of a politician is to build trust with constituents, which Fenno argues may result in more policy flexibility while in Washington. Not all members of Congress attempt to convey the same "professional politician" image, with many attempting to keep a perceived connection with their home districts (Fenno 1978). Members of the U.S. Senate, Fenno argues, push a presentation of self that is based on experience, accomplishments in office, honesty, and

their “good character” (1978, 325). As we will explore, a handful of studies have creatively applied a mixture of Fenno, Goffman, and symbolic interactionist theoretical frameworks to the Internet politics literature (see Bystrom et al. 2004, Gulati 2004). The symbolic interactionist framework has also been used to explore presentation of self in numerous online contexts. These contexts include online dating environments (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs 2006), personal home pages (Papacharissi 2002), online personals (Gibbs, Ellison and Heino 2006), and top blog sites (Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005).

Political communications scholars advanced the discussion of digital self-presentation by identifying the phenomenon of WebStyle (Bystrom et al. 2004). WebStyle describes how one goes about constructing their presentation of self on the Internet, focusing on such features as content, pictures, and interactivity. Embracing the work of Goffman, a number of pieces talk about the importance of controlling the message through a self-presentation style (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Non-verbal content, such as colors, images, and layout all communicate a message about a member of Congress. Similarly, verbal content, such as attacks against opponents or discussion of policy positions, work to bolster a pre-concocted presentation of self (Bystrom et al. 2004). The continual attempt to adhere to this desired self-projection is known as “impression management” (Goffman 1959). Impression management is activated in an attempt to maintain role validity in the eyes of others (Baumeister 1982, Schlenker 1980). In today’s time, embracing interactivity on a website could be seen as a very strong way to engage in impression management (Druckman, Kifer and Parkin 2007). Through personalization, candidates can push information in a targeted, effective manner.

Unfortunately, in presenting a static “snapshot” view of one website at one point in time, academic literature has failed to address the concept of *consistency* in the presentation of self. If

we as actors make a conscientious effort to persuade audiences that we are good at a particular role, it is not hard to imagine why we would want to be consistent in the way we portray ourselves. Consider the context of business as an example. While playing the role of a businessperson, one wants to appear competent, experienced, and professional. To do this an individual might “play” that role by wearing a suit or skirt, arriving to work before expected, and being courteous to fellow employees. If this same individual decides one day to come to work in jeans and a baseball cap, shows up late, and interrupts colleagues during a meeting, the “audience” will regard him or her in a very different light. The consistency in image is broken and the professional presentation of self is breached.

While applying Goffman’s framework to the business world seems intuitive, its application to the political world is a little more complex. Should politicians project themselves in the same way all the time? This is a tough question to answer. One of the major sources of complication stems from the fact that, in the case of incumbents running for re-election, politicians have two roles—that of both candidate and elected official. It may not be reasonable to assume that an incumbent would present him or herself the same in these two different capacities. While one may be quick to assert that we should see a consistent presentation of self over time, we must remember the fluidity and complexity of American political campaigns. Campaign offices seek to employ the most effective strategy that will help the incumbent win the election, the candidate’s primary goal (Mayhew 1975). A campaign includes professional staff that spends countless hours analyzing the political landscape of the constituency, creating themes and messages, writing a campaign plan, and conducting opposition research (Thurber and Nelson 1995, Shea and Burton 2001). They also rely heavily on surveys to test messages and gather unique up-to-date opinions about the candidate and his/her opponent(s). As we see in the

Lieberman case study, the larger political climate worked to actively shape the Senator's digital presentation. Ultimately, his online presentation shifted dramatically over a nine-month period. Three key stages emerged during this time span. Contrary to what Goffman may suggest, there was little evidence of consistency in his online presentation. The three stages that emerged, Democrat, Transitional, and Independent-Democrat, were all uniquely different. They were based on different political tones, themes, and messages.

### **An Interdisciplinary Approach**

A potential reason why Goffman's concept of consistency may not apply to all political environments stems from the every-growing "marketing model" orientation in American politics. Lees-Marshment (2001) discusses how political parties go through a "marketing process" in attempting to achieve their desired outcomes —satisfying voters' demands. The result of this process, the ultimate "product," is what potential voters see. Individual politicians go through the same marketing process (Bowler and Farrell 1992, Franklin 1994, Kavagh 1995, Scammell 1995). This is the case both while campaigning and governing (Herrnson 2007). Politicians are in a perpetual customer relationship with their constituents. The fact that Lieberman found himself in a position to lose the Democratic Party primary reflects the importance of effectively engaging and nurturing this relationship, especially in the digital world.

Jennifer Lees-Marshment describes the relationship between political science and marketing as a "marriage between two disciplines" (2001, 693). When it comes to the study of political presentation of self, I see utility in adding a third discipline to this marriage—sociology. The three models that Lees-Marshment describes, Product-Oriented, Sales-Oriented, and Market-Oriented, all seem predicated on the establishment of a highly polished "self." Attempting to be as authentic as possible in projecting that "self" relies on the use of symbols. Sociology provides



us with a powerful theoretical lens through which we can better understand the cultural meanings associated with the symbols that politicians may use in their day-to-day operation. The symbolic interactionist perspective, a framework discussed earlier, allows us to analyze the subjective meaning of human interactions surrounding these cultural artifacts. I argue that the “marriage” that Lees-Marshment discusses may actually be improved by inviting a third party, forming a polygamous relationship between marketing, political science, and sociology. All three disciplines play a role in describing how and why politicians represent themselves in online and offline contexts. We can see benefits of applying this interdisciplinary triangle when analyzing the Joe Lieberman case study.

### **The Uniqueness of this Case Study**

While it has happened at various points in United States history, it is relatively rare that an incumbent will switch party affiliation, particularly at the senatorial level (Nokken and Poole 2004).<sup>1</sup> It is even more notable when this switch occurs during the course of an election. Due to the rarity of this occurrence, the Connecticut Senate race provides a particularly unique context for exploring how members of Congress tactically change their digital presentation of self. The reality of Ned Lamont winning the primary forced Lieberman to make a very difficult campaign decision: to continue running for the Senate without the backing of the Democratic Party or to drop out of the race all together and back the party’s nominee. Believing he could draw strength from Democratic-leaning Republicans and Independents, both of whom were ineligible to vote in the primary, Lieberman decided to stay in the race under the newfound label of “Independent Democrat.”<sup>2</sup> With this new label came a significant shift in his presentation of self in both the

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive list of representatives who switched parties, visit [http://en.allexperts.com/e/p/pa/party\\_switching\\_in\\_the\\_united\\_states.htm](http://en.allexperts.com/e/p/pa/party_switching_in_the_united_states.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Lieberman’s placement on the ballot was under the party label “Connecticut for Lieberman.” The term “Independent Democrat” is used because that was how Lieberman referred to himself in the media.

online and offline worlds. While other incumbents made image changes in both their senatorial and campaign capacities during this time, no change was as dramatic as Joe Lieberman's.

Lieberman went through a complete campaign overhaul in both the online and offline worlds, including firing his campaign manager and asking other top staffers to resign.

### **Methodological Approach**

This research is based on a nine-month content analysis of Joe Lieberman's campaign website during the 2006 election cycle. Specific data points on a coding sheet were collected once per week. The coding sheet required recording details such as words per pages, themes of images and features, reference to the opponent, and reference to the self. Similar coding strategies have been successfully employed by others in the field of political communication (see Gibson and Ward 2002, Gulati and Williams 2007, Stein 2009). In addition to this detailed content analysis, Lieberman's website was also analyzed for major themes. This was done using grounded theory analysis. An inductive method, grounded theory allows researchers to investigate topics without any preconceptions or hypotheses (Strauss and Corbin 1994, Glaser 1992). To complete this analysis, I archived every phrase and sentence found on Lieberman's campaign home page. Using Nvivo, a qualitative software program, I coded each of these themes and sentences. Initial codes included terms such as "confidence" and "seniority." As the campaign moved on, the codes shifted to terms such as "aggression" and "engaging opponent." This sensitized me to the shifting dialogue that was occurring. Following the grounded theory method, I engaged in the continual refinement of concepts until themes began to emerge (Glaser 1992). The result was the identification of three distinct campaign phases— Democrat, Transitional, and Independent-Democrat. Both grounded theory and content analysis informed my understanding of these phases. Grounded theory helped me to identify the phases. At the

same time, content analysis helped me to understand the dynamics within and between each phase. Each phase is discussed in detail in the next section.

### **Analysis: The Three Phases of Lieberman's Campaign**

#### **Phase One: The Democrat Phase**

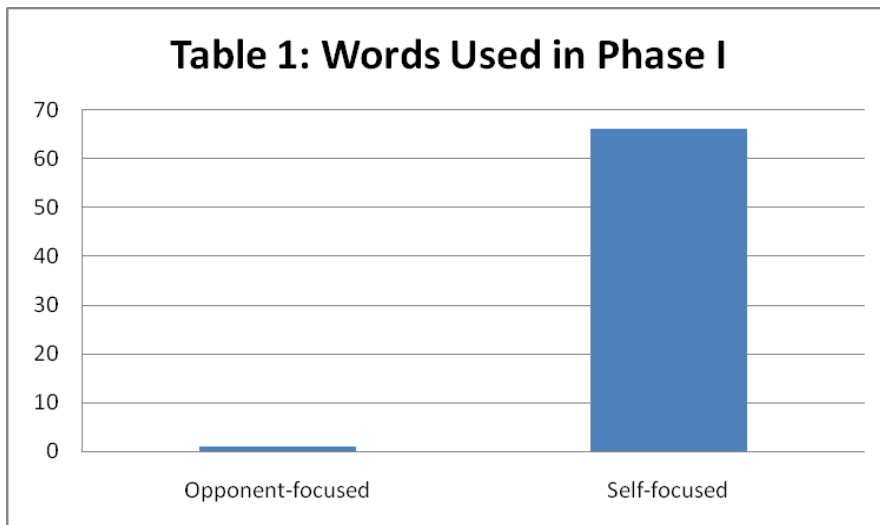
While vying for the Democratic Party nomination, Lieberman kept a very up-to-date, conservatively non-interactive campaign home page. The upper-right hand said “Fighting for Connecticut” and highlighted an accomplishment that changed daily. The center of the page featured a letter from the Senator, or on days where a special campaign event was occurring, a recap and pictures from the day’s events. Scrolling down the page, under the text “Join Joe’s Fight,” the campaign had links to the Senator’s stances on different issues. Characteristics of the page that were immediately striking upon reading the content were how Lieberman consistently described himself as a “fighter,” offered scarce mention of his opponent, and used a lot of words to describe himself.

Lieberman’s website was notably conservative from a digital campaigning perspective. It offered no user interactivity. There was no blog, no streaming video, and no personalized log-in features. The most interactive feature one could engage was to submit a story on how Lieberman’s work in the Senate impacted their personal lives. This lack of interactivity was a far cry from what many other senatorial campaign websites were presenting in 2006, particularly in comparison to Ned Lamont, Lieberman’s primary opponent. Lamont’s site could be described as highly interactive and cutting-edge, utilizing new technology such as the Family, Friends and Neighbors function (Tagaris 2006). This feature allowed site visitors to personalize their own post cards. The cards were then printed and mailed by the campaign. By comparison, Lieberman’s site could best be characterized as informative yet conservative, giving out

information but offering no personalization. The message was all about Senator, controlled solely by the Senator’s campaign. These characteristics changed as the next few phases came alive.

*The Importance of Language*

In addition to pictures, logos, and other media, the use of language is very important in setting the tone of an online campaign (Vaccari 2008). It is also an important component of one’s overall political marketing strategy (Lees-Marshment 2001). Content analysis of Lieberman’s campaign prior to the primary revealed a portrayal as a fighter. Variations of the word “fight” were identified seven times on the July 22<sup>nd</sup> home page archive, giving credence to Lieberman’s use of this concept as a major theme in the campaign.<sup>3</sup> There was also virtually no mention of his opponent, something that would change dramatically as later phases of Lieberman’s website are explored. The campaign home page used the words “Lamont” and “Ned” one time, respectively. As Table 1 illustrates, this language represented a clear emphasis on the self. Different permutations of Lieberman’s own name could be found 66 times.



<sup>3</sup>These variations include the words “fight,” “fighter,” and “fighting.”

Overall, we see that Lieberman relied heavily on language during this phase, using approximately 1,209 words on his home page alone.

### *Highlighting Democrat Allies*

During the pre-primary period, Lieberman stressed his relationship with other Democrats. This became evident through three main home page features. First, he often highlighted campaign events he had with other notable Democratic Party figures. This feature would often include a picture of Lieberman with his Democratic Party allies, brief text about the event, and a quote from the individual vouching for the Senator's candidacy. A powerful example of this is when Bill Clinton came to Connecticut to campaign on behalf of the Senator in July of 2006. The campaign archive dated July 30<sup>th</sup> prominently featured this historic visit. Directly under the headline "President Bill Clinton in Waterbury" reads a quote, "He is a good Democrat, he is a good man, and he'll do you proud" –Bill Clinton (Lieberman campaign home page, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2006). Looking at the entire home page, this quote is the only one that appears in bold text, making it stand out dramatically to the reader.

The second way Lieberman featured his relationship with other Democrats was in a section called "Who's Supporting Joe," an area located on the bottom right corner of his home page. This feature included an image of a person and a caption that described who the individual was. Featured supporters included Democratic candidate for Connecticut's Fourth Senatorial district Diane Farrel (July 30<sup>th</sup>) and Planned Parenthood (July 22<sup>nd</sup>). While a similar feature was present in the post-primary version of his webpage, Lieberman did not specifically refer to those supporters as Democrats during this time, again demonstrating the importance of his party connection in the pre-primary stage. The party connection was lost after his failed primary contest.

The third main feature that reflected the importance of Lieberman's partisanship in his self-presentation was a hotlink on his campaign home page titled "Democratic Links." This feature could be found towards the bottom of topics browsers could click on, and took users to a page of links to other Democratic candidates, the DNC, and other Party-related pages. As the primary campaign moved forward, the title was changed to "Election Websites" (starting with the June 15<sup>th</sup> archive). Notably, this feature did not appear on his campaign webpage after his primary loss.

### **Phase Two: The Transitional Phase**

After losing the Democratic Party primary, the Senator's campaign webpage remained relatively barren for approximately one month. The campaign left up the same image of Lieberman in the upper-left hand corner, as well as the "get involved" and "contribute" links. These were the only hyperlinked options on the page. The essence of the transitional site was a letter explaining why Joe wanted to continue his candidacy.

The vagueness present on his campaign website resembled the suddenly quiet persona he gave off in the offline world immediately following the primary loss. This was likely a time of redefinition; a time where the Senator and his new campaign staff had to decide what it meant to be Joe Lieberman the "Independent Democrat." The campaign home page, mostly in the form of a letter to browsers, contained 271 words (August 14<sup>th</sup> archive). This is in stark contrast to the 1,209 words used in the first phase of the campaign home page, a time when his candidacy had definition and direction.

### *Foreshadowing a Bipartisan Joe*

During this transitional time, site visitors that read the letter got insight into a theme that would be prominent in the next phase of his campaign—that of a bipartisan orientation. Multiple

phrases in Lieberman's Web letter alert us to this re-creation as a bipartisan candidate.

“So much needs to be done, but so little is actually getting done in Washington because our politics have become so partisan and polarized”

“I hope you will join me in this cause, no matter your political persuasion....”

“I do not and will not hesitate to work across party lines when it will get things done for my constituents”<sup>4</sup>

These quotes gave site visitors a good feel for the candidate Lieberman was about to transform into. It foreshadowed his shift to a more bipartisan entity. This bipartisan theme became the major platform for the independent stage of Lieberman's campaign.

It is worth noting the time duration of Lieberman's transitional phase. During this period, Lieberman was in the national spotlight and vigorously continued his campaign activity in the offline world. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, one day after the party primary loss, Lieberman's offline campaign moved on to the new stage of his candidacy. He increased his visibility by running a series of new advertisements. His online campaign was notably slow to follow suit. The fact that Lieberman's online transition from Democrat to Independent-Democrat took over a month could be the result of a few factors. It could be that the campaign was under a high degree of stress and the development of Web content was not a high priority in the redefinition of the Senator's candidacy. Conversely, it could be that the campaign gave very careful consideration to the development of the new Web content and needed the month to put out a quality product. Brainstorming new digital content is not an easy feat. The Internet represents an area where self-presentation takes place. It is important to consider how this presentation will look to constituents and potential voters. Notably, in addition to a new campaign manager, Lieberman brought new communication staff members on board after his primary loss. They may have needed time to get acquainted with the campaign in order to make this online transition.

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<sup>4</sup> Quotes taken from Joe Lieberman's e-letter, appearing on his home page August 9<sup>th</sup> through September 10th.

It is reasonable to think that the Senator's online presence took some sort of a cue from his new offline candidacy. The "normalization" hypothesis suggests that online content tends to resemble online politics (Resnick 1997, Margolis and Resnick 2000). Since Lieberman's campaign as an Independent Democrat was already in motion in the real world, that offline self-definition likely helped the campaign staff to determine how to project the Senator online. As we will see in the next phase, there was a high degree of media sharing between the radio, television, and Web streaming video. This type of connection between the online and offline campaign did not exist in the pre-primary stage. Now the connection between the Senator's online and offline presence took more of a center stage, with offline media flexing its muscles in Lieberman's online campaign.

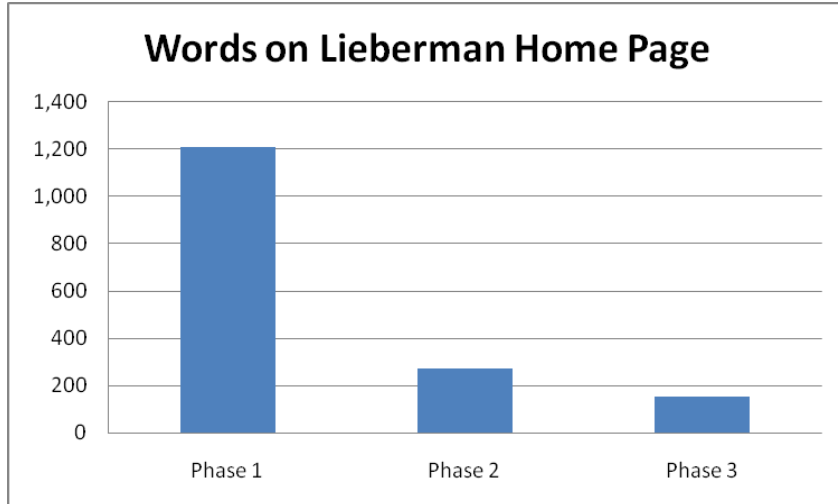
### **Phase Three: The Independent Democrat Phase**

After Lieberman's month-long transitional period came to an end, a new digital Lieberman emerged. The Senator completed his 2006 campaign with a final and unique phase, the Independent-Democrat. Everything about the website changed—the background, color scheme, headlines, and perhaps most critically, the demeanor. The time the campaign spent with the webpage down was clearly not just for maintenance purposes. Behind the scenes, a whole new digital presentation of self was being constructed.

#### *Now a Man of Few Words?*

One of the most striking changes in this new presentation was the difference in word count. Lieberman suddenly became a man of few words. As Table 2 reflects, where the pre-primary home page featured 1,209 words, the post-primary page had only 153 words (September 10<sup>th</sup> archive). This is an amazing transition that gave each of those 153 words on the new page a heightened importance.





Beyond a significant decrease in the total number of words used on the home page, website visitors also saw a dramatic shift in the *nature* of the content. Whereas Lieberman had a clear focus on himself in the pre-primary stage, defining his opponent took on a much more prevalent role in the Independent-Democrat phase of this online campaign. Recall that the pre-primary phase of Lieberman’s page only mentioned the words “Ned” and “Lamont” once, respectively. Now we see “Ned” mentioned three times and “Lamont” used once. While this may not seem like that significant of a change, examining the placement of those key words gives us a much clearer picture about how important those words are in the larger context of the page. Considering the context in which those words appear also displays just how dramatic a shift Lieberman went through.

It was very difficult to find Lieberman’s opponent mentioned anywhere in the home page archives leading up the primary. Often, one would have to scroll down about halfway down the page, and at that, only on certain dates. One example of a place where Lamont’s name was used is in a description of the senatorial debate that took place on July 6<sup>th</sup>. The campaign home page states, “Debate Highlights Lieberman's Strong Record of Delivering for CT and Lamont's Uncertainty and Inexperience” (Lieberman for Senate, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2006). Lamont’s name is

mentioned one more time in that article. In a dramatic twist for this final self-presentation phase, Lieberman becomes much more cynical in the contexts in which he refers to his opponent.

These quotes below come from the September 10th archive of the Lieberman campaign home page:

“Ned’s got foot-in-mouth disease”

“The FULL Lamonty: The Whole Truth about Ned”

“No less a figure than Senator Dodd is calling out Ned’s growing double talk habit”

While Lieberman ran a few negative television ads against Lamont prior to the primary, his webpage featured no negative campaigning during this time. Upon entering the third phase of his self-presentation, the site largely became dedicated to painting Lamont in an unattractive light. This strategy persisted from the September 10<sup>th</sup> archive through the end of the election. Examining the October 29<sup>th</sup> archive, Lieberman prominently featured two opponent attacks on the home page. These attacks came in the form of creative icons, both of which had messages contained within the images. The first attack could be found on the lower right-hand corner of the home page and featured a brown piece of paper with a wrinkle on the corner. Red writing states, “The *Full* Lamonty,” while black text underneath that reads, “The Whole Truth About Ned.” Even if the viewer does not click on the link to find out what specifically the reference is about, there is a clear message that constituents do not know everything they need to know about Ned. This message enticed browsers to explore the webpage further. These new eye-catching visual elements were nonexistent in the prior two phases of Lieberman’s digital presentation of self.

*Bipartisan Joe*

More than in the previous two stages of the campaign, Lieberman visibly mixed his offline and online campaign presentations during his Independent-Democrat phase. The top right corner of his new webpage featured commercials the campaign was airing on local television programming. These commercials clearly had a bipartisan tone, focusing on experience and desire to help his Connecticut constituency. One commercial that ran both on and offline featured the Senator standing in front of a chalkboard. With a line drawn through the middle of two polar opposite labels, Democrat and Republican, the Senator talks about the importance of a bipartisan effort. He recites his new campaign slogan, “It’s about people, not politics.” He uses the chalkboard in attempt to display his position as a “middle ground” between the two parties.

Looking at the new campaign home page, one would not be able to determine what party Lieberman was associated with. The top of the home page had an image of a flag with the words inside the borders spelling out “Vote Joe for Senate.” Another headline just under this box read “Team Connecticut.” Lastly, the color scheme of the page was red and blue, encompassing both the traditional Democrat and Republican Party colors. As the general election came closer, the campaign featured an image of a sign that read “Dems for Joe,” attempting to revive an online Democratic Party connection. This image linked to a page detailing various Democrats who were supporting Joe’s candidacy as an Independent. For a period of two weeks, from October 1<sup>st</sup> through October 15<sup>th</sup>, a new hyperlink appeared where browsers could view the Connecticut and national list of Democrats who were supporting Joe. Interestingly, this hyperlink disappeared before the next weekly Web archiving took place in late October.

Towards the end of October, the Lieberman campaign spent a lot of time attempting to educate voters on how to find Joe's name on the ballot. His name appeared on the very bottom of the ballot, a fact that clearly worried the campaign. Both Lieberman's offline and online campaigns made ballot placement a major issue, and again, we saw offline media's influence evident in the Senator's online presence. Radio and television ads made their way onto campaign Web space. The campaign created a jingle which aired on local radio channels. This jingle subsequently found its way to a center headline on the campaign home page. The Senator's staff also created a new television commercial on the topic which aired in the upper right hand corner of the webpage. The presentation of radio and television ads on the campaign Web space was a new phenomenon that occurred only during this third phase of the Senator's online presence.

### **Conclusion**

Time flies when we talk about the evolution of digital technology. Think back to just a decade ago, a time when campaign websites were nothing more than a template providing basic information about a candidate. Today crafting a campaign digital presence is a work of art, with online campaigning being just as dynamic as the larger political world it resides in. Looking at the 2006 election cycle, Joe Lieberman's digital transformation is worthy of study. It illuminates how Web presence and presentation of self can change dramatically over a single election cycle. Notably, even despite inconsistencies in presentation of self, Lieberman was able to pull out electoral victory. The Senator moved from a powerful Democratic Party candidate, through a transitional phase, finally landing as an Independent-Democrat. Accompanying each of these phases was a major shift in language and tone. While these dramatic shifts may have turned off some voters, they were not enough to end his tenure in the Senate. This indicates that Goffman's

(1957) emphasis on consistency in presentation of self may not strictly apply in the world of digital politics. Going through different phases of self presentation is not, in it of itself, enough to end a campaign. Other factors must come into play for defeat to occur.

Ultimately, it is hard to gauge precisely how influential Lieberman's shift in online identity was to the final vote tally. While we know that people are increasingly turning to the Internet as a source of political information, researchers are still at the early stages of measuring how look, content, and the availability of interactive features on a webpage may influence potential voters. This is particularly true of non-Presidential candidates. A few large-scale studies have attempted to tease out various forms of Web-based interactivity (Foot et al. 2003, Kiouisis 2002, McMillan 2002). Still, this research is in its early stage. For years, many down-ballot candidates did not engage in digital interactivity (Foot et al. 2003). Warnick et al. (2005) found that, in 2002, 90% of U.S. House, Senate, and gubernatorial candidates avoided interactive features such as live events and interactive polls. Given these late adoption trends, researchers are still discovering new ways that candidates present themselves in an online context. This work represents one of the first pieces to identify phases in a single candidate's self-presentation.

This Joe Lieberman case study is offered to the scholarly community in hopes of encouraging others to bring new examples of shifting digital presentation of self to the political communication literature. Future scholarship could seek to identify new typologies in presentation of self. Do all candidates undergo some sort of presentation "shift?" What are the conditions that help explain such shifts? More broadly, can we identify specific typologies to help characterize various forms of political self-presentation? Future research can also expand our understanding of incumbents who changed party affiliation. Examining these cases would allow scholars to draw comparisons in digital presentation. To enhance this line of future

research, I suggest drawing from theoretical perspectives that aims to integrate the fields of political science, political marketing, and sociology.

One suggestion for future work is the more detailed application of Fenno's work (1978) to the digital context. In this article, we saw how the first phase of Lieberman's presentation of self supported Fenno's findings regarding central candidate traits. Recall how Fenno argues that members of the U.S. Senate push a self-presentation that is based on experience, accomplishments in office, honesty, and their "good character." Subscription to these traits eroded as Lieberman's phase changes went on. Future research could explore the extent to which politicians express empathy, also a key consideration for Fenno, in a digital context. Additional scholarship could also explore the emphasis on "qualification, identification, and empathy" as central components of a digital U.S. House campaign (Fenno 1978, 325).

This case study represents the tip of the iceberg in understanding how a senatorial presentation of self is created on the World Wide Web. Joe Lieberman shows us that even powerful incumbents are not immune to digital facelifts. These facelifts can sometimes be dramatic. As the Internet becomes an increasingly important tool for the gathering of political information, it behooves us to consider how Web presentation may impact the browsing constituent. Scholars are just beginning to understand how these presentations are created in our political world. As we refine our methods for such studies, future research can address how these presentations change both within and between election cycles. Just as people reflect on how presentations in television debates turn the tides for political candidates, Web presence may soon gain that same type of prominence. The digital presentation of self is often a calculated, strategic creation that both shapes and is shaped by our larger politics. Further research can help illuminate how different aspects of Web design work to shape an online presence.

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