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Riding the Wave:

How the Moulton Campaign
Leveraged Digital and Social Media
To Win in 2014

Written in collaboration with

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This case study was created as part of the Open Technology Institute's (OTI) effort to create a curriculum focused on how digital technology is transforming public policy and governance. It is intended for use in a classroom setting.

RIDING THE WAVE

In March 2014, Seth Moulton, then a congressional candidate in Massachusetts' sixth district, convened his staff for one of the most important meetings of his campaign to date. Eight months earlier, Moulton had announced that he would run against Representative John Tierney in the Democratic primary; but with limited funds, he and his team—which then consisted of a handful of paid staff-members and consultants—had only recently done an in-depth poll.¹ Now they had gathered to receive the results of a benchmark analysis performed by the Mellman Group, a Washington, D.C.-based polling firm. The picture was grim: Tierney enjoyed a 75% favorability rating; what's more, the nine-term incumbent led Moulton, then a 35-year old Iraq War veteran with no political experience, by more than fifty percentage points.²

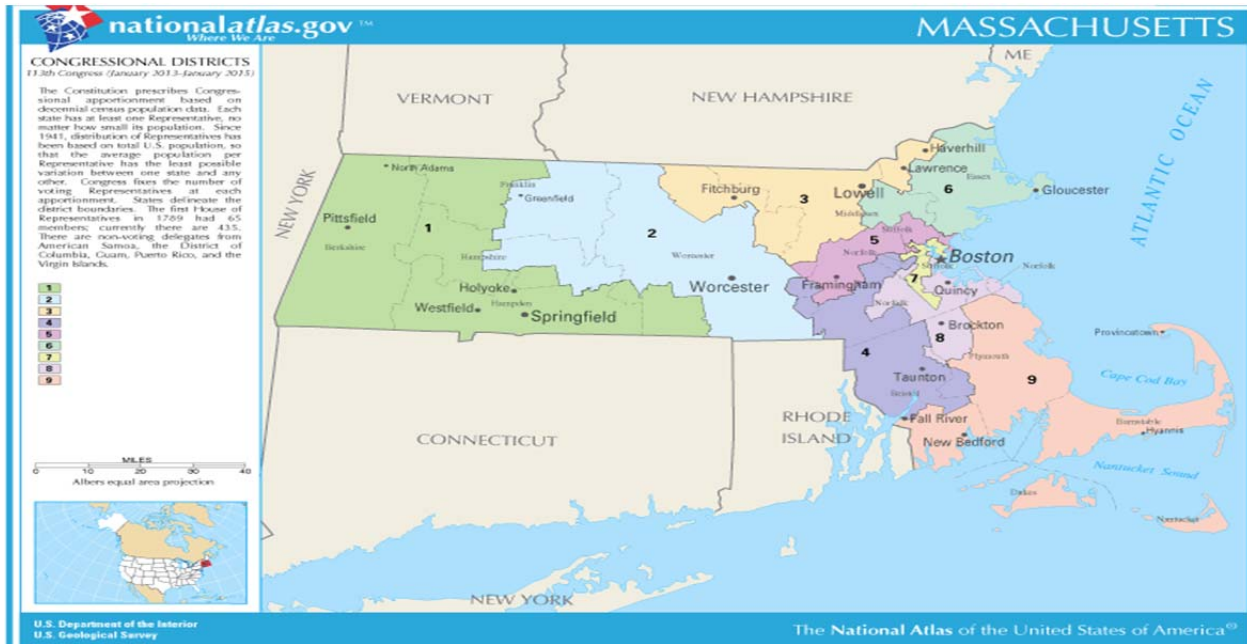
At first, some staff found the news discouraging. Entering the campaign, they had realized that Moulton's candidacy was a long-shot (in Massachusetts, an incumbent had not lost in a primary since 1992); now, however, as Tom Rossmeissl, a director at Trippi & Associates, recalled, it seemed like they needed a "hail mary pass" to win. The team's disappointment gave way to renewed determination when they heard their candidate's response: as Rossmeissl recalled, Moulton simply said, "We're going to pull this off." This impressed, Rossmeissl added, because other young candidates might have said, "It's not my time."

Moulton remained committed and confident, so his staff did, too.

To win, the campaign would need to blend strategy, hard work, and luck. As was often true, its prospects would hinge heavily on a series of television advertisements several weeks before the primary. With that blitz months away, Moulton's team used digital and social media—ranging from mainstream outlets like Twitter and Facebook to sophisticated tools like Fanatical, a software program that helps organizations expand their digital following—as a way to disseminate and amplify its message. The campaign was initially drawn to these platforms because of their price: whereas a television advertisement cost tens of thousands of dollars, the campaign could promote a Facebook post for \$30 (or less). Over time, the staff realized that employing modern technologies resonated with their depiction of Moulton as a fresh face. More importantly, social media provided a tool to target high-yield donors and critical demographics. By late August, the campaign was employing at least nine digital media platforms.³

Even as they leveraged these technologies, campaign officials feared tradeoffs and risks. While it was easy to use Twitter or Facebook, mastering these and other media required time and expertise. In an insurgent campaign with finite resources, every hour and dollar devoted to digital came at the expense of something else. Of greater concern was that an off-tune Tweet could

Map of Massachusetts' Congressional Districts



This is a map of Massachusetts' congressional districts. The sixth district is located in the northeast corner of the map. Source: "Massachusetts," nationalmap.gov, U.S. Geological Survey, available at http://nationalmap.gov/small_scale/printable/printableViewer.htm?imgF=images/preview/congdist/pagecgd113_ma.gif&imgW=792&imgH=612 (accessed on March 31, 2015).

counteract the campaign's message about Moulton's leadership or even worse that an off-color post could go viral and torpedo the campaign. Most fundamentally, they worried about whether this approach—which led to dialogue with unpredictable and sometimes antagonistic followers—was compatible with Moulton's commitment to running an upbeat campaign.

In short, Moulton and his team faced numerous questions about their digital and social media strategy. Could they develop the technical expertise to harness these media without sacrificing other priorities? Would the platforms reinforce their message? Would these techniques further or impede the democratic process?

Background

Located in northeastern Massachusetts, the sixth congressional district consists of 39 municipalities featuring substantial geographic, economic, and socioeconomic diversity. A large portion of the district sits on the North Shore and in Cape Ann, but it extends inland to towns that abut some of Boston's most prominent suburbs. The district's communities have varied economies. Saugus, a town that lies slightly inland, is famous for its once-booming iron works and now has a more service-based economy; Gloucester, a municipality in Cape Ann, helps to anchor the state's fishing sector; and multiple coastal communities are small enclaves that are popular vacation destinations and home to substantial white-collar populations.⁴ Buoyed in part by these wealthy

coastal towns, only 8.8% of the district's 750,623 people live below the poverty line (compared to 11.4% across the state), and the district's median household income of \$76,182 is 13.9% higher than the state average. Nonetheless, a substantial swath of the district is poor: most notably, 21% of Lynn's 90,329 residents fall below the poverty line, and the city's median household income is \$44,849.⁵

In 2014, the district was represented by Tierney, a nine-term incumbent Democrat who had developed a reputation as a reliably liberal and popular congressman but who had recently come under increased scrutiny due to his family's legal problems. Raised in Salem, one of the district's wealthier port cities, Tierney, who holds a B.A. in political science from Salem State University and a J.D. from Suffolk University Law School, had begun his career in private legal practice in the late 1970s. He simultaneously became active in the Salem Chamber of Commerce, and in 1996, shortly after becoming that organization's president, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.^{6, 7} Over the next 12 years, Tierney—who developed a reputation as an “unwavering liberal” for his support of (among other things) expanding health care, promoting green jobs, and strengthening public education—won reelection with at least 55% percent of the vote.⁸ However, following his wife's conviction for tax fraud in 2010, his seat became more fragile. In 2012, he edged former State Senator Richard Tisei, a Republican, 48%-47%; and heading into the 2014 elections, *Roll Call* labeled him one of the House of Representative's ten most vulnerable incumbents.⁹

Like Tierney, Moulton had devoted his career to public service, but he had received his training at elite universities, in the military, and (to a smaller degree) in the private sector. A native of Marblehead, another of the district's wealthier

coastal communities, Moulton attended Phillips Academy Andover, a prestigious boarding school; he then matriculated to Harvard College where in 2001 he delivered a commencement address on service. He said, “We enter Harvard Yard through Dexter Gate, whose inscription enjoins us to ‘Grow in wisdom.’ But few seem to notice the invocation as we leave. To our world of individualism it speaks of solidarity and unity of purpose. It says this: ‘Depart to serve better thy country and thy kind.’”¹⁰

As a senior, Moulton had decided to enlist in the Marines; and shortly after the September 11 attacks, he deployed to Iraq, where over five years and four tours (the last two of which were voluntary), he made a substantial impact and began to develop a local and national media profile. Moulton was one of the first U.S. troops to enter Baghdad; reported to General David Petraeus; and produced a television show, *Moulton and Mohammed*, with an Iraqi translator about local conditions. In part because of the show's popularity, Moulton was interviewed or profiled on CNN, MSNBC, and in several Boston-area news outlets.¹¹

Moulton retained strong ties to Massachusetts and the sixth district (where his parents live) and in 2008 returned to the Commonwealth for a joint graduate program in business and public policy at Harvard. Shortly after graduating in 2011, Moulton—who had taken a position as a Managing Director at Texas Central Railway, a Houston-based firm dedicated to bringing high-speed train service to the Houston area—considered opposing Tierney in the 2012 campaign.¹² Moulton decided that he did not have enough time to organize his campaign, but upon announcing his decision not to run in July

2012, he implied that he was keeping an eye on the seat. “I am committed to the ideals of public service,” he said, “and I would like to serve sometime in the future.”¹³

Digital Media and Political Campaigns

For political novices like Moulton, toppling incumbents seemed increasingly feasible in part because of the recent proliferation of digital and social media in insurgent political campaigns. The first candidate to leverage such technologies was Howard Dean in the 2004 Democratic primary. A doctor by trade who had become Vermont’s governor in 1991, Dean was considered such a long shot to become president that shortly after he announced his candidacy in 2002, *The Washington Post* published an article about him entitled, “Dr. Who?”¹⁴ Nonetheless, by December 2003, when Vice President Al Gore endorsed him, the doctor was the undisputed “front-runner.”¹⁵ Dean’s rise stemmed in part from his forceful, outspoken stances, especially his opposition to the Iraq War; it was also a byproduct of his campaign’s innovative use of “MeetUp.Com,” a recently created website that convened people with shared interests. The platform enabled the campaign to identify and bring together over 140,000 Dean supporters; it also facilitated an unprecedented influx of small, online donations.¹⁶ Ultimately, Dean lost to John Kerry; but as Dean campaign manager (and eventual Moulton advisor) Joe Trippi argued in his book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, his campaign “prove[d] the Internet as a vibrant political tool.”¹⁷

Web-based campaigning intensified with President Barack Obama in 2008. Just as Dean had, Obama 2008 leveraged the web to organize supporters and raise money.¹⁸ It also employed “Web 2.0” platforms¹⁹ to put supporters in dialogue, defend

Obama, and disseminate his message; to cite a few examples, BarackObama.Com and Facebook connected backers; Obama’s supporters used the Internet to fact-check opponents and disseminate Obama’s responses to attacks; and YouTube provided the functional equivalent of free advertising to millions of people.²⁰ As Arianna Huffington argued, “Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee.”²¹

In 2012, the Obama campaign took its use of digital technology to new heights by employing “big data” analytics to raise \$1 billion, shape its electoral strategy, and craft messages for “microtargeted” voters.²² The effort began over the course of 18 months before the election during which the campaign merged all of its voter data into a single database. This allowed the campaign to develop tailored fundraising pitches, simulate the election results 66,000 times each day, and use demographic data and other information to design its advertisements and get out the vote. Most importantly, it allowed the campaign to make better use of its scarcest resource. “In the end, modeling became something way bigger for us in ’12 than in ’08,” one campaign official said, “because it made our *time* more efficient.”²³

Still, many analysts cautioned that information technology was at best a complement to, not a substitute for, a strong campaign and candidate. In *Groundbreakers: How Obama’s 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*, Hahrie Han, a political scientist at Wellesley College, and Elizabeth McKenna, a doctoral student in sociology at UC Berkley, argue that while big data and information

technology sharpened the Obama campaign's decision making, the campaign nonetheless relied on an army of well-organized supporters to implement those policies.²⁴ More importantly, neither volunteers nor big data would have sustained the campaign without enthusiasm about the candidate.²⁵ In fact, digital and social media can cause enormous damage when a candidate errs. For example, Dean suffered a setback when he placed third in the Iowa Caucuses, but his undoing began that night when he unleashed a guttural roar in his concession speech. Referred to as the "Dean scream," the clip was broadcast widely on network television, but it was also replayed—and mashed up to (among other things) Outkast's popular song, "Hey Ya!"—and went viral online.²⁶ The candidate, not the Internet, remains paramount.

A Start Up's "Perfect Storm" – The Campaign Begins: December 2012 – March 2014

In late 2012, Moulton returned to Massachusetts where multiple Democratic Party officials were encouraging him to run against Tierney in 2014. From their vantage point, the incumbent, having narrowly held the seat in 2012, was vulnerable to a Republican challenge. Moulton therefore began speaking with trusted advisors about whether he could win the race and whether it would be good for him to run. "The answer to both [questions]," said Aaron Bartnick, a field organizer on President Obama's 2012 campaign and one of several advisors with whom Moulton conferred, "was yes." Thus, on July 8, 2013, Moulton released a video on www.sethmoulton.com announcing his candidacy.²⁷

Over the next ten days, Moulton visited all 39 municipalities in the sixth district.²⁸ However, his primary focus early on was fundraising. Despite his

political and personal challenges, Tierney enjoyed backing from the state's traditional Democratic donors. Consequently, Moulton had to identify alternative supporters.²⁹ Employing what several campaign officials described as a "start up" mentality, Moulton and his staff began brainstorming creative ways to approach other donors.

One idea came from Jesse Bardo, a Phillips Academy alumnus and the founder of EverTrue, a company that helps non-profits (especially universities) leverage information technology to improve their donor databases and craft more targeted development strategies. Bardo, whose father had taught Moulton in English at Phillips Academy and who remained connected to the candidate through alumni development events, volunteered for the campaign and began talking to campaign officials about how to employ digital and social media.

Up to that point, the campaign had launched a website and maintained several social and digital media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr); it had also been among the first campaigns in Massachusetts to use standard hash tags (e.g., #MA6 and #MAPOLI) to facilitate dialogue on social media.³⁰

Still, Bardo felt that they could make more effective use of those outlets. One tactic was employing Facebook's analytics (which are free for organization's pages) and paying small amounts (e.g., five or ten cents per "Facebook like") to promote posts. More importantly, Bardo believed that they could leverage LinkedIn to connect with and raise money from people in the powerful networks to which Moulton was connected (i.e., Phillips Academy, and

Harvard alumni, and veterans). As Bardo explained, these institutional connections, as well as Moulton's age and strong track record, combined to make him a "perfect storm" when it came to social media and campaigning. Over the next six months, Bardo and campaign staff built a LinkedIn page ("Seth Moulton for Congress") and used LinkedIn's alumni search tool to identify potential supporters based on their profession, location, and shared institutional connections. To cite just one example, the campaign used LinkedIn to build a list of 100 venture capitalists in target cities (e.g., Boston and Los Angeles) who were alumni of Harvard and to whom Moulton had connections (which they could also identify through LinkedIn).³¹

The campaign then used more traditional off-line techniques—such as phone calls, meetings, and parties—to meet and cultivate these donors. According to Bardo, it was imperative for the campaign to use these personal approaches because organizations "walk fine lines" when using the Internet to raise money. On the one hand, they can learn a great deal about people on the web. On the other, there is a limit to what one can infer from that information, including whether that person wants to connect offline. It is therefore critical, Bardo added, for groups to "show some tact" when learning about potential supporters online and remember that in a best-case scenario, "data...only opens the door...to actually have the right offline conversation."

The Moulton campaign struck that balance, and the results were prodigious. Buoyed in part by LinkedIn, it outraised Tierney's campaign for three consecutive quarters in the first nine months of the campaign, and it raised about \$450,000 in the first quarter of 2014.³²

Building the Drumbeat: April 1 – August 12, 2014

Although the campaign's fundraising success was a boon, the results of the March 2014 benchmark analysis from the Mellman Group provided a sobering reminder that Moulton had a long way to go.

As spring began, campaign officials began refining their strategy. One point of debate was how much the campaign should rely on digital and social media. A portion of the team—which was still limited to a handful of paid staff, consultants, and volunteers—felt that the campaign should continue to focus on fundraising and in-person campaign appearances and *not* devote substantial resources to digital and social media. They believed that the campaign's fate would hinge on the television advertising push several weeks before the primary, so Moulton had to do everything he could beforehand to raise money and cultivate his message about being a new leader. They added that digital and social media could prove extraneous to their priorities because they were likely to be used heavily by young people, a demographic that votes infrequently; and they could yield negative outcomes, ranging from digital and social media eating into staff time to an ill-advised tweet undermining the campaign's message.

Others suggested expanding the campaign's use of these technologies. From their perspective, they needed to introduce Moulton to as many people as possible, and Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other outlets were ideal platforms to accomplish this because they were cheap and could host and disseminate photos and videos.

The digital media proponents unearthed evidence that older people in the district used these platforms and contended that leveraging modern communication technology was a great way to reinforce that Moulton was a fresh, “cutting edge” candidate.³³ Finally, while there was always the risk of an off-color tweet, the campaign had a substantial set of safeguards in place to avoid a gaffe: Bartnick—who was Moulton’s speech writer and therefore in tune with his voice—drafted each tweet and ran it by Moulton for approval. As Bartnick explained, Moulton saw this as a “matter of integrity;” and while waiting for the candidate’s approval could be frustrating, the “right way” and the “fastest way” are often not the same.

After a series of discussions that Communications Director Carrie Rankin characterized as emblematic of the “normal tension in any functioning office,” the campaign refined and expanded its digital and social media approach. To some extent, this involved posting more on Twitter and Facebook. The campaign also began using what Bartnick described as “trial and error” to see what material was impactful. For example, the campaign realized that Facebook and Twitter users were far more likely to follow a link with a photo attached and that if it began a post with the word “BREAKING,” people were more likely to interact with it. Finally, the campaign started using digital and social media in a playful manner to define Moulton against Tierney. Most notably, Moulton’s staff created a pair of websites with timelines juxtaposing Tierney’s legislative record with Moulton’s leadership. Specifically, the Tierney timeline used a plain white background that was extremely long and had large gaps to illuminate their view that the Congressman had had a long and largely unproductive tenure; by contrast, the “Moulton timeline” highlighted the growing support for his campaign and his

substantial service.³⁴

The campaign’s biggest change vis-à-vis digital and social media was that it started to use some of the targeting techniques that President Obama had adeptly employed in the 2008 and 2012 campaigns. Moulton’s primary point of contact for targeting was Garrett Law, a fellow Harvard alumnus who had co-founded and become the Chief Strategy Officer of Attention Span Media, a California-based digital and social media agency. Initially operating in an advisory role, Law suggested to Bartnick and other campaign officials that it was best to introduce Moulton to voters in a way that was “meaningful to them” and that the team could pay Facebook a small amount to advertise posts to crucial demographics. For instance, after Moulton met with a group of fishermen, they developed a Facebook post that they promoted to people in Gloucester with information related to fishing in their profile. Similarly, after Lynn’s former mayor endorsed Moulton, the campaign promoted a Facebook post about the endorsement to Lynn residents.³⁵

As they started to gain support from some of these groups, one campaign official who had served in the military realized that while television advertisements may be comparable to “carpet bombing,” targeting was like a “special operations team.” More broadly, as Rossmeyssl added, the staff had come to see that none of the digital and social media techniques was likely to win the race, but they helped to build the “drumbeat” as the primary drew closer.

The Push to the Primary: August 13 – September 9, 2014

In mid-August, the campaign began its much-

anticipated television push with a series of advertisements that depicted Moulton as an energetic and effective leader and painted Tierney as stale and unproductive. The first spot, which aired from August 13 to August 18 on CNN and MSNBC and which the campaign posted on its website and YouTube page, began with Moulton standing in a kitchen; staring into the camera, he introduced himself as a “progressive Democrat,” summarized his service in Iraq, and said, “I’m Seth Moulton, and I approve this message because instead of reelecting more of the same, I’m a Democrat for real change.”³⁶

In the following weeks, the campaign intensified its advertising barrage, airing some spots that reinforced the message, as Rossmeissl explained, that Moulton was a “leader our party needs,” and others suggesting that Tierney was not measuring up. In one advertisement, the Moulton team said that Tierney had passed one bill in 18 years in Congress, paid more than \$83,000 for campaign violations, and missed more votes than most Congressmen. After making the claims, which appeared in white letters against a flickering black background, Moulton appeared and repeated, “I approve this message because instead of reelecting more of the same, I’m a Democrat for real change.”³⁷

The strategy worked. Soon after the advertising blitz began, the campaign, Rossmeissl recalled, began to see “a lot of positive movement” in the polls, attendance at campaign rallies swelled, and Congressman Tierney responded. In particular, in late August, the Tierney campaign issued a press release saying that the Moulton group provided “zero citations” in its television advertisement about Tierney’s Congressional record; it concluded by saying, “Mr. Moulton is either unaware of the way the legislative process in Congress works, or he is comfortable smearing someone else’s record for his

own personal gain.”³⁸

Moulton’s staff responded via digital and social media. Specifically, Bartnick posted on BuzzFeed a redline mark-up of the press release that contained pointed but comedic criticisms. For instance, where the Tierney campaign said that Moulton’s advertisement referred to a fine from 1983, Moulton’s campaign joked, “TIME HEALS ALL FINES?” Likewise, where the press release referred to Moulton as “Mr. Moulton,” the markup reads, “TOO FORMAL. ‘SETH’ IS FINE.” The post—to which the campaign posted a link on its Facebook page—generated more than 8,000 organic Facebook impressions on a page with only 3,000 likes at the time, and mainstream journalists reported on how comical the response was. To Bartnick, one of the benefits of this approach was that the campaign could take its message directly to voters and not “litigate it through reporters;” more broadly, Bartnick added, it demonstrated that the Internet provides space for and rewards creativity.^{39, 40}

As the primary approached, and support for Moulton grew, the campaign used digital and social media, as Rossmeissl said, to amplify the “echo chamber” they had started to create through their television advertisements. For example, after *The Boston Globe* endorsed Moulton on September 1, the campaign created and promoted a Facebook post announcing the news; it generated 25,552 organic views, 3,888 paid views, and 107 shares.⁴¹

A more successful post came six days later when *The New York Times* published a profile of Moulton saying that the Democrats were more likely to keep the seat if Moulton won the

primary. From Bartnick's perspective, this validated the message that the campaign had been communicating all along; but with 48 hours before the primary, they did not have time to do a large media blitz and get the news into peoples' morning papers. Instead they financed a Facebook post highlighting the article's argument, as well as the prior endorsements from *The Boston Globe* and *The Boston Herald*. Between September 8 and September 9, the post reached 44,768 likely Democratic primary voters, only one of whom flagged the post as one he/she did not want to see; it also, Bartnick added, was retweeted extensively by reporters.⁴²

The supportive sentiment carried through to the polls on September 9 when Moulton defeated Tierney 50.8% to 40.1%.⁴³ That evening, Moulton spoke at the Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Salem, saying, "Our win tonight says two things: first, that we are fed up with the gridlock in Washington. And second, that voters want to keep this seat blue." He also posted a picture of him on Facebook, accompanied by a concise, "Thank You." Over 840 people "liked" the post.⁴⁴

The General Election: September 10 – November 4, 2014

On the morning after winning the primary, Moulton smiled as he shook hands with a voter at a Salem Commuter Rail station. He and his campaign had a great deal about which to be excited. By unseating an incumbent Democratic Congressman, he had accomplished something that as Jon Keller, a local television host and political commentator, said, doesn't "happen very often in Massachusetts." With an influx of new funds and support from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and others, the campaign was also

developing plans to increase rapidly its full-time staff (the campaign had had eight full-time staff members just before the primary). And with early polls indicating that Moulton was ahead of his Republican opponent, former State Senator Richard Tisei, there was a growing sense that victory was within reach.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, Moulton and his team feared complacency. This was in part because national and local political winds were prevailing against Democrats. There was national angst over President Obama's performance, and in Massachusetts, a reliably blue state in presidential elections, Republicans were expected to fare unusually well because of the popularity of their moderate gubernatorial candidate, Charlie Baker.⁴⁶

What's more, Tisei, Moulton's opponent, had demonstrated his formidability in 2012 when he nearly knocked off Tierney. Thus, some campaign staff grew concerned when the DCCC announced in mid-October that it was confident Moulton would win and was therefore shifting \$430,000 worth of campaign advertisements to other candidates. "I'm glad the DCCC thinks we're safe," said Moulton spokesman Scott Ferson. "We are certainly seeing momentum in our voter [identification], but we're running the race like we're behind."⁴⁷

Moving forward, Moulton and his team developed impactful and efficient ways to communicate his vision. As was the case before the primary, television advertisements anchored the communications strategy. To that end, Rossmeissl and his colleagues at Trippi & Associates worked with Moulton and his team to quickly recut the primary advertisements and produce a series of additional advertisements that introduced Moulton to the broader electorate.⁴⁸ As was also the case before the primary, the

campaign used digital and social media to amplify this image of Moulton and to define him against Tisei. This entailed continuing to disseminate via Twitter and Facebook images and stories about support for Moulton (such as a campaign appearance and speech by Vice President Joe Biden), developing targeted messages for specific demographics (especially independent voters), and using playful techniques—such as a web-based “Tisei Timeline”—to highlight that Tisei—a long-time state legislator—was not as fresh a face as Moulton.⁴⁹

Although the campaign employed many of the same digital and social media techniques as it had in the primary, the combination of increased funds, experience, and technical expertise enabled it to amplify and target messages more effectively. One of the biggest developments was the increased use of Fanatical, a software platform developed by Attention Span Media, the company that Garrett Law co-founded, that helps organizations build a database about and analyze, disseminate, and send messages to their audiences. Before the primary, Law and his team had worked with the campaign in an advisory role and used Fanatical in targeted scenarios; in the general election, however, Attention Span and Law came on in a formal consulting capacity and began to use Fanatical more expansively. This included sending messages to targeted groups, such as veterans, and blasting messages to large swaths of voters that it felt had the potential to go viral. In one instance, the campaign used Fanatical to send a video of Moulton speaking to kids about Congress to 274 followers and asked them to tweet it: 139 did, enabling the campaign to reach 1.2 million people.⁵⁰

Yet even as digital and social media became an increasingly important plank in the campaign’s strategy, Moulton and his team decided not to use it

in one sensitive moment. On October 18, *The Boston Globe* reported that Moulton had never revealed that he had received the Bronze Star medal for valor and the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation medal for valor while serving in Iraq. Of his decision not to publicize the honors, Moulton said, “There is a healthy disrespect among veterans who served on the front lines for people who walk around telling war stories.”⁵¹ After the publication of the story, which appeared on the first page of the Metro section, the campaign did not post the article on digital and social media. “That is one point where we really did draw the line...,” said one campaign official, who explained that Moulton felt committed to maintaining his stance on discussing the war and that the campaign felt that it was important to depict him consistently.

In the 48 hours before the election, the campaign’s digital and social media efforts went full tilt as Moulton and his staff ignited a massive get out the vote effort. As had been the case for months, they employed Fanatical, Facebook, and Twitter to disseminate messages to supporters. They also increased their investment in Google advertisements, a system that allows an organization to pay for an advertisement to appear when a user in a specific geographic area searches for a keyword(s) (e.g., “Seth Moulton” AND “military”). Thanks primarily to the counsel of Christine Mitchell, a former Google employee who was then a student at Harvard Business School and had volunteered for the campaign, the campaign had used Google advertisements to great effect.⁵² But in the days before the election, traffic on the Google ads grew so rapidly that Google, thinking that they were spyware, shut them down. In a frantic few hours, campaign officials contacted Google to explain that the advertisements were legitimate. And once they were back up, they became one of several outlets into

which the campaign poured funds up until the last night because, as Rossmeissl explained, “You don’t want to lose by three votes and have \$30,000 in the bank.”

That problem never materialized. On November 4, Moulton defeated Tisei 55%-40%. That night, the congressman-elect stood before a crowd at the Salem Waterfront Hotel and said, “It was the greatest honor of my life to serve my country in the Marines. Now I return to public service in a different venue but with that same commitment to serve you and our great country.”⁵³ Moulton posted an image on his Facebook page of him sporting a big smile and communicating the same message he had delivered after the primary: “Thank You.”⁵⁴

Transitioning to Office: November 5, 2014-March 2015

Shortly after the election, Moulton, his campaign staff, and an array of local leaders sat before a white board and started reflecting on the lessons from the campaign and developing a plan for Moulton as he took office. To some extent, this discussion—and more informal conversations that followed—focused on policy, but they also led to a range of takeaways about how best to use digital and social media. One, as Bartnick said, was the importance of “message discipline:” the campaign’s success on digital and social media platforms, he argued, owed largely to the fact that it avoided “ineffective cross talk” with its television advertising and among its digital platforms. Another was the significance of authenticity. As Rankin said, Moulton had taken a “risk with social media,” but he had also “remained true to [him]self and [his] values.” Law argued that the campaign’s use of digital and social media was an integral part of showing that you can win while running a positive campaign. Another campaign

official identified the most straightforward takeaway. He said, “We could have done more so.”

Thus, as Moulton took office, the staff from the campaign attempted to identify ways that Moulton could sustain and enhance his use of digital and social media. They agreed that Moulton would continue several practices from the campaign, such as maintaining an active Facebook page and updating his website. However, they also introduced a change: after personally approving all tweets on the campaign, Moulton would now directly manage his Twitter account. The shift, Moulton and his staff believed, came with risks: one errant tweet could create undesirable political waves, and Moulton’s time was already a scarce resource. However, it also yielded a desirable result: in the past, constituents would have to call the office and request a meeting (which often ended up being with a staff member) to get individual attention. Now they could tweet directly to the congressman, and Moulton could weigh in on an array of issues, ranging from reminding people to file their taxes to encouraging them to retweet supportive messages for Boston’s emergency responders.

A once-uncommon tool had become a key part of the congressman’s work.

Index

1. Katie Lannan, “Moulton Launches Tierney Challenge,” *The Lowell Sun*, July 10, 2013, available at http://www.lowellsun.com/news/ci_23632217/moulton-launches-tierney-challenge (accessed on March 31, 2015).
2. Interview with Tom Rossmeissl, Director, Trippi & Associates, by telephone, March 27, 2015. Hereafter cited as Rossmeissl interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Rossmeissl come from this interview; and Interview with Aaron Bartnick, Deputy Campaign Manager, Seth Moulton for Congress, by telephone, February 12, 2015. Hereafter cited as “Bartnick interview.” Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Bartnick come from this interview and a follow-up interview conducted on March 26, 2015.
3. The platforms included a website (www.sethmoulton.com), Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, BuzzFeed, Fanatical, LinkedIn, Timetoast, and Instagram. Bartnick interview.
4. Saugus Iron Works, National Historic Site of Massachusetts, available at <http://www.nps.gov/sair/index.htm> (accessed on April 15, 2015); Barry Bluestone, “Saugus: A Look at Demographics, Housing, and Economic Development,” Dukakis Center for Urban & Regional Policy, Northeastern University, March 20, 2014, available at http://www.saugus-ma.gov/pages/saugusma_townmanger/A%20Look%20at%20Demographics,%20Housing,%20and%20Economic%20Development/Northeastern%20University%20Assesment%20Results.pdf (accessed on April 15, 2015); and Jess Bidgood, “As Fisheries Struggle, Debate Heats Up Over How To Help,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/16/us/debate-over-how-to-help-massachusetts-fishing-towns.html> (accessed on April 1, 2015).
5. “My Congressional District,” United States Census, available at <http://www.census.gov/fastfacts/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); “Massachusetts,” State and County QuickFacts, United States Census, available at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/25000.html> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and “Lynn, Massachusetts,” American FactFinder, United States Census Bureau, available at http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml (accessed on April 1, 2015).
6. “About John,” John Tierney US Congress, available at <http://johntierney.com/about/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); Tierney, John F., “Biographical Directory of the United States Congress,” available at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000266> (accessed on April 15, 2015); and “John Tierney,” Ballotpedia, available at http://ballotpedia.org/John_Tierney#cite_note-Bio-2 (accessed on April 15, 2015).
7. Tierney had first run for Congress in 1994 when he won the Democratic primary but lost in the general election to Republican Peter Torkildsen, then a one-term incumbent. Other than Torkildsen, no Republican had held the seat in the past 45 years. Molly Peterson, “Tierney, Torkildsen Brace for Massachusetts Grudge Match,” *The Washington Post*, October 22, 1998, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/campaigns/keyraces98/stories/lisma102298.htm> (accessed on April 15, 2015).
8. Tierney, John F. (2009). In C. McCutcheon, & C. Lyons (Eds.), *CQ’s Politics in America 2010 (the 111th Congress)*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2009, p. 496. Retrieved from http://library.cqpress.com/pia/OEpl11_496 (accessed on April 1, 2015).
9. “John Tierney’s Wife Gets 30 Days for Tax Fraud,” *Politico*, January 13, 2011, available at http://www.politico.com/blogs/glenthrush/0111/John_Tierneys_wife_gets_30_days_for_tax_fraud.html (accessed on April 15, 2015); “Massachusetts Congressional District 6 Election Results,” NBC News, available at <http://elections.nbcnews.com/ns/politics/2012/massachusetts/house/6/#.VS77MTvF9Ew> (accessed on April 15, 2015); and Shira Center, Emily Cahn, and Abby Livingston, “Roll Call’s 10 Most Vulnerable House Members Revealed,” *Roll Call*, November 4, 2013, available at http://www.rollcall.com/news/roll_calls_10_most_vulnerable_house_members_revealed-228867-1.html (accessed on March 31, 2015).
10. Phyllis Karas, “How the Moultons Made Peace with the War,” *Boston Magazine*, February 2008, available at <http://www.bostonmagazine.com/2008/01/how-the-moultons-made-peace-with-the-war/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and Yaillette

Fernandez, "War Profiles: Seth W. Moulton '01, 2nd Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps," *The Crimson*, June 5, 2003, available at <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2003/6/5/war-profiles-seth-w-moulton-01/> (accessed on April 5, 2015).

11. Karas, "How the Moultons Made Peace...."

12. Michael Zuckerman, "Citizen Soldier," *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2014, available at <https://harvardmagazine.com/2014/03/citizen-soldier> (accessed on April 1, 2015); "Seth Moulton," LinkedIn profile, available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/seth-moulton/10/51/B73> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and "About Texas Central Railway," Texas Central Railway available at <http://texascentral.com/about-tcr/> (accessed on April 15, 2015).

13. Joshua Miller, "Massachusetts: Independent Seth Moulton Will Not Run," *Roll Call*, July 23, 2012, available at <http://atr.rollcall.com/massachusetts-independent-seth-moulton-will-not-run/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

14. Howard Kurtz, "Dr. Who? For President; Vermont's Physician Turned Governor Goes for a Long Shot," *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2002, C1.

15. "Al Gore Endorses Howard Dean," *CNN*, December 9, 2003, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/12/09/ec04.prez.gore.dean/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

16. Micah Sifry, "From Howard Dean to the Tea Party: The Power of Meetup.Com," *CNN*, November 7, 2011, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/07/tech/web/meetup-2012-campaign-sifry/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and Michael Cornfield, "The Internet and Campaign 2004: A Look Back at the Campaigners," March 6, 2005, Pew Research Center, available at http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2005/Cornfield_commentary.pdf (accessed on April 1, 2015).

17. Joe Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Harper Collins (e-book): 2009, accessed via Google Books, available at <https://books.google.com> (accessed on May 28, 2015).

18. Sarah Lai Stirland, "Propelled by Internet, Barack Obama Wins Presidency," *Wired*,

November 4, 2008, available at <http://www.wired.com/2008/11/propelled-by-in/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

19. Coined by Tim O'Reilly, the founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media, a company that publishes materials and organizes conferences on computer technology, Web 2.0 describes platforms like Facebook and Twitter that allow users to engage with data, not just digest information passively. Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software Design," O'Reilly.com, September 30, 2005, available at <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

20. A video of the speech in which Obama first said, "Yes we can," spread to millions of people. Soumitra Dutta and Matthew Fraser, "Barack Obama and the Facebook Election," *U.S. News & World Report*, November 19, 2008, available at <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2008/11/19/barack-obama-and-the-facebook-election?page=2> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

21. Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2008, available at <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

22. Big data analytics refers to the use of sophisticated techniques to analyze large data sets ("big data") that are too complex for traditional approaches. For more information, see "What is Big Data Analytics?" IBM, available at <http://www-01.ibm.com/software/data/infosphere/hadoop/what-is-big-data-analytics.html> (accessed on April 15, 2015).

23. Emphasis added. Eric Hellweg, "2012: The First Big Data Election," *Harvard Business Review*, November 13, 2012, available at <https://hbr.org/2012/11/2012-the-first-big-data-electi/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and Michael Scherer, "Inside The Secret World of The Data Crunchers Who Helped Obama Win," *Time*, November 7, 2012, available at <http://swampland.time.com/2012/11/07/inside-the-secret-world-of-quants-and-data-crunchers-who-helped-obama-win/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

24. Elizabeth McKenna and Hahrie Hahn, *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million*

Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America, Oxford University Press: New York, 2014, pp. 12-13.

25. After the first debate, during which, as *The Washington Post* reported, President Obama seemed “short of engaged,” Republican nominee Mitt Romney gained five percentage points to make the race (temporarily) a dead heat. Chris Cillizza, “Winners and Losers from The First Presidential Debate,” *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2012, available at

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/10/03/winners-and-losers-from-the-first-presidential-debate/> (accessed on April 1, 2015); and Rachel Weiner, “Romney Gets Debate Bump in Gallup Poll,” *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2012, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2012/10/08/obama-loses-five-point-edge-in-gallup-poll/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

26. Daniel Kurtzman, “Howard Dean Scream Remixes,” About.com, available at <http://politicalhumor.about.com/b/2004/01/21/howard-dean-scream-remixes.htm> (accessed on April 5, 2015); and Blake Morrison, “Dean Scream Gaining Cult-Like Status on Web,” *USA Today*, January 22, 2004, available at http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/nation/2004-01-22-dean-usat_x.htm (accessed on April 15, 2015).

27. In the video, Moulton emphasized that his desire to serve had spurred his decision to run. He said, “I believe that our party can do better – to charge forward with optimism, courage and ambition. To have big ideas, but also know how to bring people together and get things done. To take the fight for you to the House of Representatives – to put working people first.” Chris Helms, “Seth Moulton, Son of Marblehead, Announces Run for U.S. Congress,” *Marblehead Patch*, July 8, 2013, available at <http://patch.com/massachusetts/marblehead/seth-moulton-son-of-marblehead-announces-run-for-us-congress> (accessed on April 2, 2015).

28. Helms, “Seth Moulton....”

29. Bartnick interview.

30. Interview with Jesse Bardo, Founding Team Member, EverTrue, Volunteer, Seth Moulton for Congress, by telephone, March 4, 2015. Hereafter cited as Bardo interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Bardo come

from this interview and a follow-up interview conducted on March 27, 2015.

31. See the Moulton campaign’s LinkedIn page at <https://www.linkedin.com/company/seth-moulton-for-congress> (accessed on May 29, 2015).

32. Stephanie Ebbert, “Moulton Seeks Rare Upset of Fellow Democrat Tierney,” *The Boston Globe*, May 12, 2014, available at <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/05/11/marine-veteran-seth-moulton-wages-insurgent-campaign-against-fellow-democrat-john-tierney/3RdZyq5hE0o8QicDcNGVQO/story.html> (accessed on April 16, 2015).

33. Interview with Carrie Rankin, Senior Vice President, Liberty Square Group, Communications Director, Seth Moulton for Congress, by telephone, March 16, 2015. Hereafter cited as “Rankin interview.” Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Rankin come from this interview.

34. The timelines were built using a web platform called Timetoast, but the timelines had separate URLs (e.g., www.TierneyTimeline.com). See screenshot of Moulton timeline at “Seth Moulton’s Career,” Timetoast.com, available at <https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/seth-moulton-s-career> (accessed on April 3, 2015).

35. Interview with Garrett Law, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Attention Span Media, by telephone, February 25, 2015. Hereafter cited as “Law interview.” Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Law come from this interview.

36. Keith Spencer, “Congressional Candidate Seth Moulton Releases First TV Advertisement,” *NoBo Magazine*, August 2014, available at <http://www.nobomagazine.com/2014/08/13/congressional-candidate-seth-moulton-releases-first-tv-advertisement/> (accessed on April 4, 2015).

37. William Dowd, “Tierney Camp: Pro-Moulton Ads Hypocritical, Misleading,” *The Saugus Advertiser*, August 28, 2014, available at <http://saugus.wickedlocal.com/article/20140828/News/140826763> (accessed on April 4, 2015).

38. “Congressman Tierney Gets His Fact-Check Fact-Checked,” BuzzFeed, August 21, 2014, available at <http://www.buzzfeed.com/sethmoulton/congressman-tierney-gets-his-fact-check-fact-check-x8qo> (accessed on April 16, 2015). Emphasis in

original.

39. See BuzzFeed post at “Congressman Tierney Gets His Fact-Check Fact Checked,” BuzzFeed, August 21, 2014, available at <http://www.buzzfeed.com/sethmoulton/congressman-tierney-gets-his-fact-check-fact-check-x8qo> (accessed on May 26, 2015).

40. Tierney again went negative in early September when he launched an advertisement accusing Moulton of accepting money from White Mountain PAC, a conservative political action committee; in the ad, the narrator says, “Moulton took money from a special interest group that only funds Republicans. NRA-backed Republicans who voted to outlaw abortions. Tea partiers who say they’ll end the Medicare guarantee.” It concluded with the narrator saying, “Huh. What do they know that Seth Moulton won’t tell us?” The Moulton campaign—which had received and then returned \$1,000 from the PAC earlier in the campaign—used digital and social media to rebut the attacks. Specifically, it posted information on its website detailing Moulton’s strong affinity for the Democratic Party and issued tweets and Facebook posts about the information. Joshua Miller, “Tierney Fires Back at Rival in New TV Ad,” *The Boston Globe*, September 3, 2014, B1; and Bartnick interview.

41. The following day, the campaign posted a story from its website saying that for the first time in 18 years, *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Herald* had said it is time for a new Democrat. At first, Bartnick recalled, the post only received 4,368 organic views and 34 shares; but after the campaign paid \$30 to promote the post, it generated 21,968 additional views to reach more than 26,000 users.

42. This interaction was emblematic of a pattern described by Rankin in which the campaign tried to promote journalists’ work by retweeting their posts and hoped that journalists would do the same for their posts.

43. The remaining 9.1% of the vote went to lesser-known candidates. “Massachusetts Election Statistics,” Commonwealth of Massachusetts, available at http://electionstats.state.ma.us/elections/search/year_from:2014/year_to:2014/stage:Primaries (accessed on May 6, 2015).

44. See image of Facebook post at “Seth Moulton for Congress,” Facebook, available at <https://www.facebook.com/SethMoultonForCongress> (accessed on May 26, 2015); and Stephanie

Ebbert and Kathy McCabe, “Moulton Upends Tierney, Sets Sights on GOP’s Tisei,” *The Boston Globe*, September 10, 2014, available at <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/09/09/incident-democrat-rep-john-tierney-faces-battle-with-seth-moulton-insurgent-campaign/uvyHfF78AGOOovKbPEAZuJ/story.html#> (accessed on April 4, 2015).

45. “Keller: Seth Moulton’s Win A Bad Break for Richard Tisei,” *CBS Boston*, September 10, 2014, available at <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2014/09/10/keller-seth-moulton-wins-a-bad-break-for-richard-tisei/> (accessed on April 4, 2015).

46. Alexander Burns, “POLITICO Poll Shows Mounting Danger for Democrats,” *Politico*, May 19, 2014, available at <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/05/politico-poll-shows-mounting-danger-for-dems-106814.html> (accessed on April 4, 2015).

47. Jim O’Sullivan, “Confident in Moulton Against Tisei, Democrats Pull Ad Dollars,” *The Boston Globe*, October 17, 2014, available at <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/10/17/democrats-confident-seth-moulton-chances-against-richard-tisei-reallocate-advertising-dollars/v363K5xrhZX0uAdl7tRXUK/story.html> (accessed on April 5, 2015).

48. Rossmeissl interview.

49. Bartnick interview.

50. Law interview.

51. Walter Robinson, “Moulton Keeps Mum on Honors Won as Marine,” *The Boston Globe*, October 18, 2014, B1.

52. Interview with Christine Mitchell, Volunteer, Seth Moulton for Congress, February 26, 2015.

53. Deborah Becker, “Newcomer Moulton Cruises Past Tisei in 6th,” *WBUR*, November 5, 2014, available at <http://www.wbur.org/2014/11/05/moulton-beats-tisei-sixth> (accessed on April 4, 2015); and Neil Dempsey and Christian Wade, “Democrat Seth Moulton Wins in 6th District, ‘Forever Grateful,’” *The Salem News*, November 4, 2014, available at http://www.salemnews.com/election/update-democrat-seth-moulton-wins-in-th-district-forever-grateful/article_826d3942-6495-11e4-924f-3f4f76a9850e.html (accessed on April 4, 2015).

54. See image of Facebook post at “Seth Moulton

for Congress,” Facebook, available at <https://www.facebook.com/SethMoultonForCongress> (accessed on May 26, 2015).



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David Tannenwald

Riding the Wave:

How the Moulton Campaign
Leveraged Digital and Social Media
To Win in 2014 (Teaching Note)

Written in collaboration with

Dr. Hollie Russon Gilman, Civic Innovation Fellow, Open Technology Institute, New America

This teaching note was created as part of the Open Technology Institute's (OTI) effort to create a curriculum focused on how digital technology is transforming public policy and governance. It is intended for use in a classroom setting.

RIDING THE WAVE

“Riding the Wave: How the Moulton Campaign Leveraged Digital and Social Media to Win in 2014” provides a narrative account of Congressman Seth Moulton’s 2014 campaign, with a focus on the campaign’s use of digital and social media. It begins with the campaign crafting a strategy while trailing the incumbent John Tierney by more than 50 points; and then after providing context on the Massachusetts’ Sixth Congressional District and the candidates, it narrates how the campaign used digital and social media to 1) overcome an early fundraising disadvantage, 2) build momentum before the campaign’s television advertisements hit, 3) reinforce the subsequent television advertising campaign, and 4) sustain the consequent momentum in the primary and general elections. It concludes by 5) describing how Moulton has leveraged digital and social media since taking office.

By telling the story of the Moulton campaign through the lens of digital and social media, the case aims to facilitate class discussion about the growing role of information technology in politics. In particular, it is designed to prompt students to consider three questions. First, what are the core digital and social media technologies that have affected U.S. political campaigns, and how did the Moulton campaign make use of them? Second, how did the campaign ensure that these novel technologies reinforced more traditional campaign techniques? Finally, how do these technologies affect the democratic process?

The teaching note that follows elaborates on the significance of each of these questions and the data embedded in the case that animates each of them. It also suggests some readings that faculty might pair with the case.

Question One: Core Technologies and Their Use on the Campaign

The case functions in part as a tool to teach students about the history of the use of digital and social media on U.S. political campaigns as well as to spotlight key contemporary technologies. To equip students with this historical context, the subsection titled “Digital Media and Political Campaigns” reviews the use of digital and social media on three campaigns: 1) Dean 2004, which pioneered the use of websites like MeetUp.Com to organize supporters and raise funds; 2) Obama 2004, which leveraged Web 2.0 to increase dialogue and improve message dissemination (including more direct messaging between the candidate and voters and directly addressing opposition arguments); and 3) Obama 2012, which pioneered the use of Big Data.

The remainder of the narrative then illuminates how many of these same technologies were used on the Moulton campaign; in the process, the case introduces students to integral aspects of popular digital and social media platforms and powerful but less well-known software programs. Five technologies are highlighted:

1) LinkedIn's Search Tool: In the third section of the narrative ("A Start Up's 'Perfect Storm'"), the case describes how the campaign began using LinkedIn's search function to classify potential donors by location, profession, and shared relationships (institutional and personal) with Moulton.¹

2) Facebook Promotion and Targeting: On pages 12-13, the case describes how the campaign developed and promoted Facebook posts that were likely to be meaningful to specific demographics.

3) BuzzFeed: Although most readers are likely to be familiar with BuzzFeed, they might be less familiar with its application to political campaigns. On page 12, the case details how the campaign posted a redline markup of a Tierney press release and generated thousands of responses.

4) Fanatical: The campaign also employed Fanatical, a software platform that helps organizations expand, analyze, and send targeted messages to its digital audience. In particular, on page 14, the case details how Fanatical helped the campaign disseminate to more than one million people a video of Moulton speaking to kids about the importance of Congress.

5) Google Advertisements: In "The General Election" subsection, the case introduces students to the political application of Google Advertisements. Specifically, the campaign paid for Google to place advertisements on the web pages of people in the district (or select areas therein) who search for relevant key words (e.g., Seth Moulton AND veterans).

For further reading connecting to this discussion question, students can review the following:

Cain Miller, Claire. "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2008, available at <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

Scherer, Michael. "Inside the Secret World of the Data Crunchers Who Helped Obama Win," *Time*, November 7, 2012, available at <http://swampland.time.com/2012/11/07/inside-the-secret-world-of-quants-and-data-crunchers-who-helped-obama-win/> (accessed on April 1, 2015).

Trippi, Joe. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Harper Collins (e-book): 2009, accessed via Google Books, available at <https://books.google.com> (accessed on May 28, 2015).

Question Two: Ensuring That Traditional Campaign Techniques and Digital and Social Media Mesh

In addition to equipping students with knowledge about how key digital and social media are used, the case engages them with the question of how to meld these technologies with traditional campaign techniques. The case hints at this in the subsection titled "Digital Media and Political Campaigns" by introducing several points about the limitations of digital and social media, including 1) the argument made by some scholars that the Obama campaign's digital and social media effort succeeded because it dovetailed with a fantastic ground game; and 2) the claim that digital and social media can harm candidates, as was the case when the "Dean Scream" went viral. The implication is that campaigns cannot emphasize digital and social media at the expense of other techniques and (above all) at the expense of the candidate.

The remainder of the case contains data about how the Moulton campaign addressed the relationship between new media and traditional campaign techniques. Initially when trying to raise money in the primary, it made sure to combine online searches for possible donors with traditional fundraising techniques. In the next stage of the case (“Building the Drumbeat”), campaign officials have a substantial debate over how much to emphasize digital and social media. Some suggest that it should be minimized, lest it come at the expense of the campaign’s television blitz, interfere with its carefully crafted message, or lead to a gaffe. Others argue that it is cost effective; dovetails with the campaign’s message about Moulton being modern and compelling; and if managed carefully, is therefore worth using. Finally, the case captures how in the buildup to the primary and general election the campaign decided not to use digital and social media to discuss Moulton’s combat awards and how it took a controlled risk by using digital and social media to create timelines poking fun at Tierney and Tisei.

For further reading connecting to this discussion question, students can review the following:

McKenna, Elizabeth and Hahn, Hahrie, *Groundbreakers: How Obama’s 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2014.

Wichowski, Alexis. “Social Diplomacy: Or How Diplomats Learned To Stop Worrying and Love The Tweet,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 5, 2013, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/136300> (accessed on April 5, 2015).

Question Three: The Implications of Digital and Social Media for Democracy

Finally, the case is set up to engage students with the

question of how these technologies interact with the democratic process. The case hints at this question by establishing early on that Moulton was committed to being a different kind of leader and running a positive campaign. The case then contains data about how digital and social media interact with the democratic process in the following ways:

1) **Access to Power:** One question surrounding digital and social media is whether they are an equalizing force. On the one hand, any person can use them. For example, some of Moulton’s most senior advisors have limited digital and social media experience. On the other, it requires technical expertise to master them. Thus, the campaign relies on highly educated and successful digital and social media gurus to maximize the impact of these platforms. Students can debate whether the minimal barriers to entry make digital and social media an equalizing political force *or* if the sophistication required to master them has a countervailing effect.

2) **Donor Privacy:** Another issue connected to the Internet and democracy is privacy. In particular, some depict the Internet as a threat to privacy because so much sensitive information is readily available. The case nods toward this in the subsection titled “The Start Up,” which explores the importance of a campaign being sensitive to how much interaction people want to have based on the information it uncovers online. Given that the case does not explicitly discuss privacy, instructors will have to draw this point out; but if paired with outside readings (see below), the seed in the case can serve as a starting point for a discussion.

3) **Dialogue:** Another issue connected to the Internet and democracy is political dialogue. Some suggest that the Internet enhances dialogue because it makes it easier for different stakeholders to interact with one another—a phenomenon that is foundational to the democratic process. Others, such as Cass Sunstein, the author of *Republic.Com* (see readings below), argue that information technology creates conversations among people who already agree with one another and therefore results in “echo chambers;” Sunstein further argues that these “echo chambers” are far less valuable than (and may even come at the expense of) dialogue among citizens with conflicting opinions. Students can debate the merits of both perspectives by examining how digital and social media affected political dialogue on the Moulton campaign. For instance, at the end of the case, Moulton takes control of his personal Twitter account, which enables him to communicate directly with constituents. The case also describes activity on Facebook and Twitter in which supporters “like” or “retweet” pro-Moulton materials. Using data points such as these, students can debate whether the Internet facilitates healthy political dialogue, creates the “echo chambers” that Sunstein fears, or if the truth is somewhere in between.

4) **Journalism:** A fourth dimension of the implications of digital and social media for democracy is interaction with journalists. The case first points to this issue in the discussion of the campaign’s use of BuzzFeed to rebut the Tierney campaign’s press release; according to one campaign official, this decreased the need to respond to Tierney’s attack through traditional journalists. The case also raises this issue in footnote 42, which describes how the campaign often tried to promote journalists’ articles, with hopes that they would continue to promote the campaign’s progress. Students can debate what significance, if any, this

interaction has for the role of journalists/press in political campaigns and, more broadly, the place of traditional and new media in modern-day politics.

For further reading in this section, faculty can assign the following:

Hamby, Peter, “Did Twitter Kill the Boys on the Bus? Searching for a Better Way to Cover A Campaign,” Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Discussion Paper Series, September 2013, available at http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/d80_hambly.pdf (accessed on April 5, 2015).

Herrnson, Paul, Stokes-Brown, Atiya, and Hindman, Matthew, “Campaign Politics and the Digital Divide,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 2007, Volume 60, Number 1, pp. 31-42.

Sunstein, Cass, *Republic.Com*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2002.

Verba, Sidney, Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and Brady, Henry, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2012.

Index

1. To help students appreciate the impact of LinkedIn and other digital and social media on political campaigns, faculty could create interactive exercises for students that draw on data from these platforms (e.g., one might use LinkedIn's API to create a systems map).