

Book Review

Response to Wainer Lusoli's review of Web Campaigning, by Kirsten Foot and Steven Schneider, eds,
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Wainer Lusoli articulated many interesting points in his thoughtful review. In this response we will address a few of them, namely those concerning digital scholarship and the theoretical contributions of the book. First, as Lusoli noted, there are only about a dozen mouse icons originally intended to indicate the presence of supplemental digital materials in the margins of the book. His observation reveals one of the core challenges of innovating digital representations of digital scholarship in conjunction with book publisher's timeframes. In our initial negotiations with MIT Press, well before the manuscript had been completed, we had reached an agreement to produce a digital supplement for the book, to be made available on the publisher's website. Our original concept for the digital supplement was that it would consist of about a dozen sets annotated archival webpages that would illustrate some key aspects of the book (since it would be far too costly to the publisher to include so many full-color screenshots in the book itself). However, after completing the book we received the publisher's permission to create a digital installation containing archival impressions of all of the nearly 300 webpages referenced as objects of critique in the book, as well as sixty percent of the book text. This later agreement, reached during the publisher's production process, enabled us to do a much more robust digital installation than we had envisioned when we had inserted the mouse icons into the final manuscript for the book – and it rendered those icons obsolete.

Happily, the Web Campaigning Digital Supplement (WCDS) was released simultaneously with the book at the URL provided in the preface of the book, (<http://mitpress.mit.edu/webcampaigning>). Employing a tiddly-wiki platform which enables multiple paths for exploration and analysis, the WCDS exemplifies a novel and powerful way to represent web-based scholarship online which we hope will inspire further innovation. The installation illustrates all of the concepts discussed in the book via text-embedded screenshots with links to archived copies of the full websites in their original hypertextual context. By publishing all of the webpages referenced in the book, other scholars can verify our findings, or conduct other kinds of analyses in correspondence with their own research questions.

Another of Lusoli's main points of critique concerned the contributions of this book to STS and practice-based theorizing. Although we addressed the value of employing practice theory throughout the book and especially in the first and last chapters, we agree that the contributions of our work to STS and practice-based theorizing could have been presented more explicitly in the final chapter. In brief, we defined web campaigning as those activities with political objectives that are manifested in, inscribed on, and enabled through the web, consisting of practices instantiated through particular production techniques. This definition was intended to focus our analysis on how and why campaign organizations created specific online structures as they sought to enact and extend campaign activities, and thereby shape relations between the campaign and citizens, the campaign and journalists, citizens and nongovernmental organizations, etc. The concept of web practices, or acts of making on the web, corresponds closely with ideas about production practices in other domains that have been investigated previously in both STS and media studies. We argue that all web producers engage in web practices of some kind, and the web objects they produce reflect the practices in which they engage. A practice-based

approach to studies of web phenomena grounds such studies in the actual rather than the assumed uses of web technologies. In tracing the ways in which web technologies are employed, the approach makes possible analyses of the under-employment or absence of specific practices which may carry cultural, social, or political significance. Addressing Lusoli's critique more specifically, it also extends practice-based theorizing into the domains of political campaigning and of web production – moves that have not been made previously by STS scholars.

In addition, this book contributes to practice theory by adding further illumination to the reciprocal relationship between micro-level techniques and meso-level practices with macro-level structures. To elaborate, we found that concerns about control underlie many of the web production decisions campaigns make, and that the evolving norms of campaign web production shaped the choices made by individual campaign site producers. We also found that political system factors tended to be of less value in explaining web campaigning practices than the structuring effects of practice on practice. These findings highlight the importance of focusing on web campaigning as a set of practices. In addition to indicating how and to what extent web campaigning practices have evolved over time, we demonstrate that as they have evolved, the reciprocal relationship between these practices and the structures of the campaign organization and the electoral arena has become more evident. In other words, the practices of web campaigning reflect offline structures at the meso-level (addressed by [2]) and the macro-level (addressed by [1]), and create online structures at the micro- and meso- levels. We argue that these micro- and meso-level structures shape political relations in the electoral arena and thus hold implications and potential influence for macro structures. While the influence of existing offline structures on web campaigning practices is clear, and is the focus of much research on technology and politics, this book is among the first to analyze the influence of campaigns' evolving web practices on the kinds of meso-level organizational and political structures that are of interest to scholars of STS and political communication alike.

Finally, as we note in the concluding chapter, the particular web practices we identified in the electoral arena – informing, involving, connecting, and mobilizing – are not solely employed by campaigns. This set of practices is used by many kinds of actors involved in persuasive activities, and thus the book sets the theoretical stage for others interested in the interplay between these practices and structures in other arenas. For example, issue advocates employ these practices in political activities that are not necessarily electoral in focus; savvy marketers employ them in promoting goods or services; and government entities employ them to engineer social changes such as healthier lifestyles. Each one of the practices is used individually by an even larger array of actors. A news organization inviting and enabling feedback or commentary from readers on articles on its site engages in involving, whether its motive is stimulating civic engagement or building a customer base. A phone company site enabling customers to recruit friends and relatives as customers is attempting to mobilize via the web. A health care institution providing online structures for patients suffering from a particular disease to interact with each other is engaging in connecting, in the hope that facilitating the exchange of support between patients will enhance the health of all. All four practices upon which we have focused in regard to web campaigning could be useful lenses through which to analyze web-mediated relations in many other domains. A practice-based approach to analyzing web production holds interesting implications for understanding relationships between structure and practice across the online/offline boundaries in areas of interest to scholars of politics and technology, and others as well.

References

- [1] A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structure*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.

- [2] W.J. Orlikowski, The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations, *Organization Science* **3** (1992), 398–427.