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ORANGE CHINOOK: Politics in the New Alberta

Edited by Duane Bratt, Keith Brownsey, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras

ISBN 978-1-77385-026-9

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press.ucalgary.ca

Alberta Politics Online: Digital Retail Politics and Grassroots Growth, 2006–16

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Canadians' discussions of the potential political benefits of using online social media tools for democratic purposes have become predominantly critical after the 2016 US presidential election, with several parliamentary committees being called to deal with social media privacy and election issues in light of Canadians' concerns, specifically because of the Cambridge Analytica Facebook scandal, alongside the rise of Internet trolls, fake news, and automated software robots ("bots" for short). These relatively new and worrisome online trends demonstrate Internet users' power to shape and disrupt electoral attitudes and beliefs, and in so doing, challenge the conceptions of a dominant liberal democratic media.[1] The 2015 Alberta provincial election did not see the level of online disruption demonstrated by Hillary Clinton's private email server scandal, nor the Trump presidential campaign's use of Twitter, which as this book goes to press includes communications that are viewed by many experts as possible evidence of impeachable obstruction of justice surrounding his campaign team's alleged collusion with Russian hackers to create fake news to sway voters, and his suspected legal perils around porn star Stormy Daniels' non-disclosure agreement right before the election.

This chapter traces social media over ten years of Alberta provincial elections to show that the emergence of online trolling and the development of fake partisan news groups were prefigured at the provincial level by the viral online promotion of Alberta's "gotcha" political moments and

sophisticated "trial balloon" wedge issues; in hindsight, examples of such tactics allow us to extrapolate the growing seeds of online campaign disruption into the emerging fake news era. The rise of digital politics is surely a sign of a new, tech-savvy electorate challenging and changing the "horse race" narrative propagated by the traditional media, in which political discussions occurred while sitting in front of the television or over the fence with neighbours. Political parties have to adapt to the changing demands of digitally attuned voters, which as this chapter identifies, the then governing Alberta Progressive Conservative Party did not effectively achieve in the 2015 election. This factor, along with economic uncertainty in the province, Premier Prentice's distanced, elite leadership style, and the changing electoral climate, led to the end of the PC dynasty.

Perhaps the top viral social media moment to help decide the 2015 Alberta election occurred during the televised leadership debate of 23 April. Ahead of the debate, the media had developed the narrative of a horse race between the elite, corporate-beholden Alberta Progressive Conservatives under new leader Jim Prentice, and the folksy, grassroots NDP leader Rachel Notley, who was described as being as comfortable on camera as she was knocking on doors in rural trailer parks.[2] The NDP campaigned on equity, fairness, and trust, which was highlighted by Notley's performance in the televised leadership debate when she casually parried Prentice's ill-phrased "math is difficult" quip, affixing to it the tropes of the condescending elitist versus the friendlier grassroots NDP in the eyes of many Albertans, both online and off. Twitter in particular exploded right at 7:24 p.m. with the hashtag "#mathishard" trending to mock Prentice.[3]

With this context in mind, how have Alberta's political parties used and adapted their websites and selected social media channels during provincial election campaigns over the past decade to attract voter support?

To answer this question, this chapter first identifies and summarizes the early and developing strategic party trends in online political campaigns for the 2008, 2012, and 2015 Alberta elections. The research presented here documents how a leader's mediated image is as important as her or his in-person grassroots efforts, which are also now captured in their representative digital shadows online over time. Interactive and integrated social media use thereby returns elements of what American academics in the 1990s defined as door-to-door community "retail politics," which were developed to

counteract mass mediated broadcast leadership-centred politics. Like retail politics, social media use similarly allows for two-way discussions, mimicking face-to-face communications, and savvy online political marketing strategists can entice users to support one party over another by aligning their communications with the candidate's believed in-person authenticity.

To begin this analysis, a common content analysis study of the provincial parties' election websites provides readers with an aerial overview of the website features and social media channels selected over time by party strategists. Next, the chapter documents which social media were and were not used during the shift from the Alberta PCs' almost forty-four-year reign to the NDP's "Orange Chinook" in 2015. The analysis focuses on the developing uses of the four top social media selected by the parties, specifically Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006), and Instagram (2010), in the order of each tool's release. Those four key social media channels are examined to broadly identify how successful each party was in their use of these online tools during each election campaign.

Overall, the analysis reveals how the American retail politics strategies of the 1990s have been translated for the new century into "digital retail politics" that require the lived persona of the politician to match the expectations cast by, and framed in, their digital shadows. We have seen a similar trend over the past ten years of Alberta politics, where the parties are on a similar trajectory to that of the national Canadian parties in terms of their development of coordinated online strategies that use what contemporary social media researchers describe as "market intelligence" (i.e., analyzing publically available social media discussions and information to inform a campaign), and active "market surveillance" (i.e., creating partisan digital tools or "apps" that allow the parties to monitor and track users across online platforms, in terms of events, donations, and other metrics).[4]

The evidence revealed by the following content analysis supports a critical interpretation that in the 2015 election the NDP's grassroots efforts aligned well with Rachel Notley's brand and digital "market intelligence" strategy to attract a coalition of disgruntled PC supporters and a new generation of Albertans (see Melanee Thomas's chapter in this volume). In contrast, Prentice struggled in the 2015 election to project a successful vision for the future of Alberta, as delivered through traditional media channels like newspaper, radio, and television, and a very limited online campaign,

which missed attracting younger voters. The rise of the Wildrose Party as the Official Opposition is another key social media story from 2015, as similar to the NDP it started from a grassroots effort that was then aligned with a maturing online political marketing strategy.

Trends in Provincial Politics Online: From Information Politics to Digital Retail Politics

One party's campaign disruption can obviously become a competitor's advantage. Table 5.1 below provides a quick timeline of a few key party attempts to use the Internet in an open democratic capacity, compared to some of the online disruptions in the Alberta elections from 2006 to 2016. Many of the examples in Table 5.1 may be familiar to those interested in Alberta politics, and some are taken up throughout this chapter to situate changes online during the decade in question.

It is difficult to discern if the rise of experienced online party strategists could have stopped the impact of these foibles, missteps, scandals, and "gotcha" viral social media moments in Alberta, as compared to traditional media. However, the Internet has certainly accelerated the spread of both real news and misinformation, which can put a party into crisis-communication mode with one single, ill-fated Tweet or Facebook post.

Contemporary political social media research describes how information politics has impacted election campaigning and strategies both positively and negatively. Political theorist Pippa Norris described this shift as follows:

> In the post-war era, direct communications between citizens and their representatives—which we might term "retail politics"—have been eroded by the decline of traditional mass membership party organizations. At the same time mediated communications have substantially increased in the modern campaign. . . . As a result many believe that national elections in most industrialized societies have become contests revolving around leadership-centered media campaigns.[5]

Table 5.1. Major Party Uses of the Internet and Online Disruptions in Alberta 2006–16

TIMELINE	ONLINE EVENT OR ISSUE	CAMPAIGNS DISRUPTED
3 March 2008: Election Day		
2010	**Oil Sands Action Group:** This online social media group was created by a non-profit organization to promote facts and media frames about the oil industry. Little is known about the group's donors or sponsors, though they frequently target narratives espoused by the political left.	NDP
19 November 2010	**"Cookie exchange"**: Alberta Health Services president and chief executive officer Stephen Duckett refused to respond to the media about the costly provincial health-care merger, stating he was eating a cookie. It cost him his job, Albertans $680,000 in his severance pay, and painted the PCs as a party of elites.	PC
4 April 2012	**Conscience rights:** Wildrose Party support for religious conscience rights were targeted by the Redford PCs as discriminatory, frightening, and dangerous; the story went viral online through social media.	Wildrose
16 April 2012	**"Eternity in the lake of fire":** A year-old homophobic blog post by preacher and Wildrose Party candidate Allan Hunsperger went viral online as opposition parties charged the Wildrose Party with being too extreme.	Wildrose
18 April 2012	**YouTube:** "Wildrose Momentum" YouTube video crests 100,000 views, among the most views in Canadian political history to date, and some polls have the Wildrose tied or ahead of the PCs.	PC
23 April 2012: Election Day		
13 February 2013	**Blog:** The blog called "MadamPremier: A Blog Documenting Sexism Against Premiers" highlights, identifies, and critiques Wildrose MLAs' use of sexist and misogynist language in the legislature and media over time.	Wildrose
28 October 2013	**PressProgress:** This online news and analysis group was created by the Broadbent Institute on this date; the group is modelled on the left-wing Think Progress website in the United States.	PC/Wildrose
February 2015	**The Rebel Media:** The Canadian far-right political commentary website is founded by former Sun News Network host and Albertan Ezra Levant.	PC/Liberal/ NDP
5 February 2015	**Online survey:** The Prentice-led PCs use an online survey to ask Albertans how the government should deal with the 2015 budgetary deficit, then ignore parts of the results that included Albertans support for increasing corporate taxes.	PC
21 February 2014	**Economic dashboard:** The PCs release an online economic dashboard to aggregate information about the government metrics, in an effort to be open and transparent (http://economicdashboard.alberta.ca).	None: The dashboard is still in use as of this publication.
5 May 2015: Election Day		

Sources: Data compiled from online sources as indicated over the course of the 2015 Alberta Provincial Election, and summarized by the author.

Overall, the localized, pre-Internet retail politics of the early 1990s, where political candidates stumped in each neighbourhood in their riding to sell their party platform at the grassroots level, have been dramatically changed by the hyper-mediated, permanent campaigns of the twenty-first century.[6] To date, political marketing strategies in Canada have developed in concert with, and are greatly influenced by, the billion-dollar, professionalized, leadership-focused election campaigns in the United States, but they also must be contextualized within the regionalized British Westminster tradition as it is interpreted in Canada.

Provincial elections have demonstrably been a smaller-scale refinement of federal tactics rather than a test of new tools to use in the next federal election through any connected political party allegiances. This trend is mainly due to the decreased amount of financial and skilled labour resources at the provincial level, but the following analysis identifies several times that provincial tactics have led the way prior to federal elections, particularly in holding the parties to account on provincial social and policy issues (e.g., the online misogynist attacks against Premier Alison Redford in 2013, when Wildrose leader Brian Jean apologized after a 2015 viral video leak the numerous discussions of the NDP's carbon tax implementation in 2016). In this way, there is movement back and forth from the provincial to national campaigns, and from federal to provincial, in terms of strategies and use of social media, at different scales of practice.

The academic research into online provincial politics since the release of the public Web in 1992 can at this point be segmented into four distinct periods, which are outlined here to help situate the following study.

The first era, "information politics" (1992–2004), began with descriptive research studies, which used traditional content analyses or critical discourse analysis to help us better understand the early uses of the Internet.[7] In the lead-up to the 2008 Alberta provincial election, few Canadian researchers had specifically focused on online party politics. The Canadian Communication Association's first full panel on Internet politics happened in 2006, and the Canadian Political Science Association followed in 2009. Early studies mainly documented which candidates and parties could afford Web pages, or how they utilized email or early Web 2.0 tools to attract voters.[8] Generally, their theoretical responses fell within the limited dichotomies of technological determinists and cyber optimists, which would be

challenged by the developing media-ecologies perspectives when social media arrived.[9]

The immediate forms of twenty-four-hour-a-day Web 2.0 social media interactions paved the way for the second era, that of the "permanent campaign" (2004–8). Researchers began creating new methods and digital tracking tools in order to reveal how politics was unfolding online when the early Web tools moved beyond simply broadcasting descriptive politician contact information, and started replacing bricks-and-mortar businesses entirely.[10] Online political communication became accelerated at this point, so researchers developed numerous ways to track online discourse, or "scrape" information, from blogs and proprietary applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.[11] Key patterns in the research started to emerge in terms of how social media were allowing users to do more collaboratively and democratically, outside the traditional, hierarchically dominant corporate or government structures.[12]

The third era, that of political marketing and market intelligence (2008–15) saw the power of algorithmic online tracking methods become firmly established in business and political communication as market intelligence techniques were used in the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Obama's coordinated online campaign raised $403 million from 3.95 million donors at a time when mobile phones created a revolution in immediate donations at live events. In 2008, Apple launched its App Store to help iPhone users to select from over 35,000 downloadable mobile software applications within one year of its launch; these "apps" included the now ubiquitous Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. As of 2016, there were more than 2 million apps available, with the top three earliest innovators still remaining dominant.[13] Online analytics and apps helped professional campaigns to determine and evaluate the success of their political advertising. Canadian political communication researchers started to build off American research into political marketing strategies during this period, identifying how data could be used to align a leader's image with the party's brand and online campaign.[14]

It is during the fourth and current era, that of market surveillance and digital retail politics (2015–present), that parties' marketing abilities began to mature, balancing broadcasting techniques, digital two-way communication, and local grassroots interactions. The 2015 Alberta provincial election did not reach the level of market surveillance found in the federal election of

four months later, when the Trudeau Liberals were able to uniquely couple their party donor database and their Liberalist voter-management database using two new apps: first, their innovative myPlatform app, and second, their Events app.[15] Those two apps allowed for interoperability with their other systems, and allowed the party to create an ongoing means for monitoring supporter interest on key issues, alongside attendance and interests in local events, making these the first two apps made available online to Canadian voters at the federal level. These new partisan apps allowed the Liberals to have a direct, ongoing feedback of users' support of key platform issues and events, which were not previously available in a closed partisan format (previously, public Facebook groups could operate similarly, but the apps allowed the Liberals internal control of the user data to surveil which events might have enough interest for a candidate to attend, or to send out the leader, in a battleground riding).

The Liberals' data-management efforts contrasted with the Conservatives' Constituent Information Management System (CIMS, or C2G), and the NDP's Populus, which, at their most basic, provided data on traditional door-to-door, mail, and telephone campaigns, while missing further ongoing tracking of voter intentions over time through direct online interactions.[16] The updated edition of Susan Delacourt's *Shopping for Votes* (2016) describes the Console software that the federal Liberals used to amalgamate all data for their 2015 campaign. Previously, Liberalist was the main competitor to C2G, but only the latter software included GPS tracking capabilities. With the Console, the Liberals' online dominance matched the image and persona of Justin Trudeau, the "selfie king," aiding the party's efforts to get online users to hit the donation button, or become a Liberal member, while using market surveillance of user preferences on the two apps to tailor their key messaging both locally and to the masses.

Overall, these academic accounts can help contextualize how the NDP developed their grassroots efforts alongside their online political marketing to build a mature digital retail politics strategy in the 2015 campaign, as evidenced by the following content analysis.

The Case Study: A Content Analysis of Alberta Elections Online, 2006–16

As a limitation, the following analysis mainly focuses on the top three seat-winning parties in each Alberta election since 2008, though data has been collected for the other parties and is available upon request. In plain terms, the content-analysis methods employed below include counting the Web tools, social media followers, and views or uses of pertinent social media channels for each of the top parties. For those interested, more information about the research methods can be found through Ryerson University's Infoscape Research Lab website and their publications.[17]

In the following three sections, the analyses presented here explore and contextualize each of the following three Alberta elections:

1. The 3 March 2008 Alberta Election Online: Information Politics

2. The 23 April 2012 Alberta Election Online: Political Marketing to Market Intelligence

3. The 5 May 2015 Alberta Election Online: Digital Retail Politics and Grassroots Growth

The overall findings for this research reveal the growth of social media users in the political arena from the mere hundreds in 2008, to the thousands in 2012, and the tens of thousands in 2015. These trends align with the developing sophistication of the political marketing strategies described in the academic research outlined above.

The 3 March 2008 Alberta Election Online: Information Politics

Before 2006, the websites of Alberta's provincial parties focused largely on email and online profiles of candidates, with some using blogs and "RSS" feeds.[18] Proprietary social media like Facebook were just starting to be used in federal politics, but had not yet reached the provincial level. By 2008, 73 per cent of voting-age Canadians (19.2 million people) were online, up from

Figure 5.1a. Alberta NDP Website, http://www.albertandp.ca, 3 March 2008

Figure 5.1b. Alberta Liberal Party Website, http://albertaliberal. com, 3 March 2008
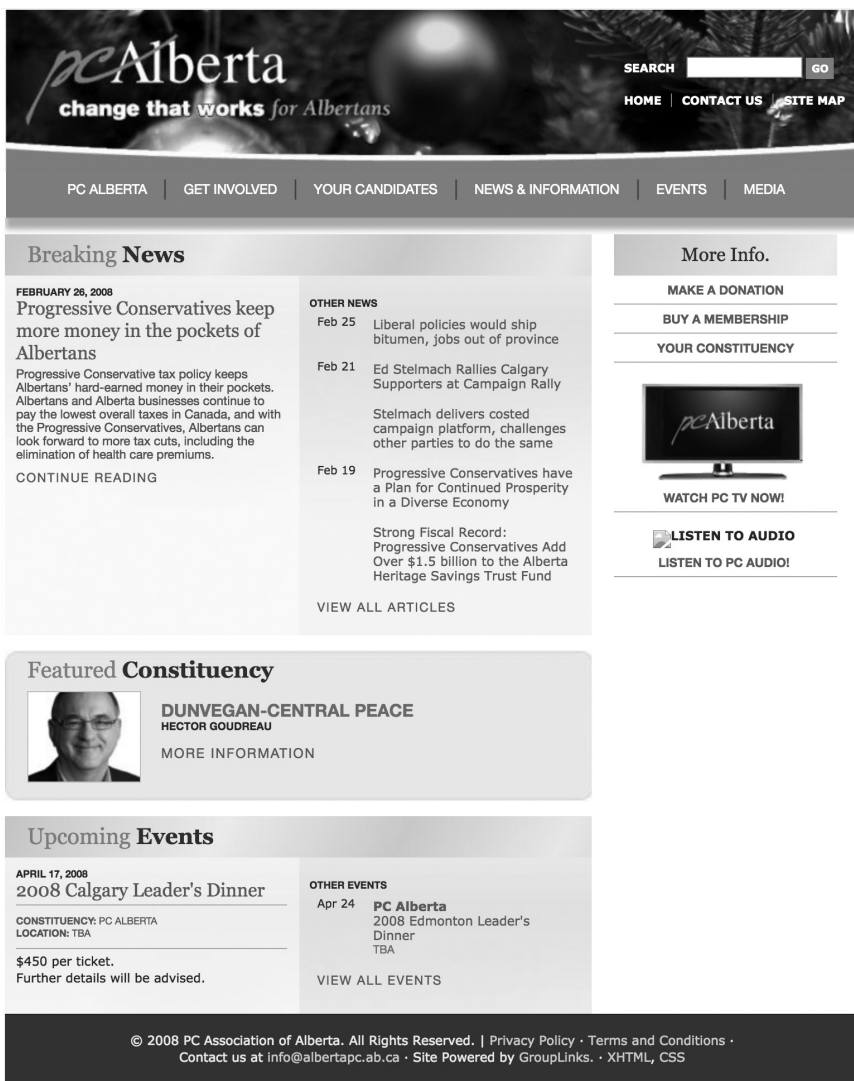
Figure 5.1c. Alberta PC Party Website, http://www.albertapc.ab.ca, 3 March 2008

Table 5.2. 3 March 2008: Alberta Partisan Election Campaign Websites

PARTY	NDP	LIBERAL	PC
Leader	Brian Mason	Kevin Taft	Ed Stelmach
Polls Week Prior	7%	24%	55%
Final Seat Totals	2 (lost 2)	9 (lost 7)	72 (gained 12)
Splash Page	See Figure 5.1a	See Figure 5.1b	See Figure 5.1c
Source URL	http://www.albertandp.ca	http://albertaliberal.com	http://www.albertapc.ab.ca
Donation link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newsletter link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Email link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue summary:	Yes (on front page)	Yes (linked)	Yes (linked)
Candidate links:	Yes	Yes	Yes
*RSS link:	No	Yes	Yes
*Facebook link:	No	No	Yes
*Flickr link:	No	No	Yes
*Podcasts link:	No	No	Yes
*YouTube link:	No	No	Yes
*Twitter link:	No	No	Yes

Note: *denotes a variation in use in this election. The party website information in this table is organized from left to right on the partisan political spectrum. The social media links are organized in order of the technology's introduction or company's founding (e.g., email, 1972; RSS feeds, 1995; Facebook, 2004; Flickr, 2004; podcasts, 2005; YouTube, 2005; Twitter, 2006). The poll numbers are taken from Leger Marketing on 25 February 2008, and the website images are taken from the Internet Archive. The Wildrose Alliance Party was not included in this example as they won no seats in the election; their leader Paul Hinman lost his seat, despite the party having 8 per cent of popular support in the week prior to the election.

68 per cent in 2005. Globally, there were 1.5 billion Internet users and 172 million websites. Despite these high numbers, the 2008 Alberta provincial election was not a watershed moment in terms of online engagement for the nearly 3.5 million Albertans, and with a turnout rate of 40.59 per cent, it was definitely the lowest point for voter turnout in an Alberta provincial election, and significantly, in all of Canadian history.[19]

Alberta's provincial online campaigns can be placed in a historical context knowing that the publicly available Web was launched in 1992, but it was not until the 2004 Canadian federal election that the federal NDP created a professionally competitive party campaign website.[20] That 2004 website received 60,000 hits per week and 6,000 emails, which influenced the party to create its first donation page after party organizers recognized the power of the Internet to attract voter support. This timeline provides some context as to why the 2008 provincial Alberta election, as shown in Table 5.2 below, clearly lagged in terms of being an engaging online election campaign, with only the PCs having enough funding to create a full website and effectively attempt early uses of the common social media tools available at the time.

The online data captured for this election includes only a few pages still publicly saved and accessible through the Internet Archive (internetarchive. org), with many of the links to digital content unavailable even for the few pages it has archived. There is no other public backup of the party websites, and we have effectively lost parts of our provincial history as the parties commonly delete old pages so that they control the history of their brand and no past evidence can be used against them in future campaigns.

For example, a roundly criticized Flash application introduction to the 2008 PC website is no longer available in the Internet Archive, but a copy was scraped and captured by the research group at Ryerson University's Infoscape Research Lab. The Flash animation was of Ed Stelmach; it suffered from common Flash software update glitches and was rather poorly designed. For this reason, the analysis of the 2008 and 2012 elections online is based mainly on work myself and others at the Infoscape Research Lab helped to document.

The data captured in Table 5.2 was built using the content-analysis categories that political scientist Sandford Borins created in his initial analysis of each political party's website on the first day of the 2008 election. Borins argued that the Liberals had the best website at that time.[21] The PC website

did not come alive until the second-last week of the campaign, countering Borins' initial critique to become the top website upon its launch. Out of all of the parties, the PCs used the most media channels to keep in touch with the electorate.

Borins would later attribute the PCs' professionally designed website to the strong funding the party had built up over the years, money that definitely paid off in terms of votes, which in turn resulted in more party funding after Ed Stelmach's landslide victory. Notably, the Liberals and NDP have kept the same domain names since 2008, whereas the PCs have rebranded their URLs for each election since, to craft particular campaign branding and messaging.

Overall, Table 5.2 shows that all party websites were using YouTube in the campaign, but the Liberals and the NDP were not using some common professional political marketing practices, including linking from their websites directly to proprietary social media such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, or YouTube. Only the PCs had developed their Web presence to that level. However, some unique uses of online media in the 2008 election included the NDP's list of a "top priorities" window pane, and the Liberals' posting of all of Kevin Taft's speeches. The NDP's use of a priority list was reminiscent of the federal Conservatives' innovation of a "key issues" pane during the 2006 election to sell their five-point platform to voters.

Facebook Supporters in the 2008 Alberta Provincial Election

There were 100 million Facebook users globally in 2008, four short years after the platform's initial launch in 2004. Table 5.3 provides the final results of the provincial party leaders' Facebook friend totals during the 2008 provincial election, none of which broke the 1,000-friend mark.

In other words, Facebook did not play a major role in terms of influencing many Albertans, let alone party supporters, to engage through that medium. It is a similar story for the other social media campaigns as well.

YouTube in the 2008 Alberta Provincial Election

YouTube was launched in 2005, and in 2008 over ten hours of video were uploaded each minute. The first mobile phone YouTube app was also launched in 2008, but it would not play a significant role in the 2008 provincial election.

Table 5.3. Party Leader Facebook Supporters (2008 Election—Final Results)

PARTY LEADER	SUPPORTERS ("FRIENDS")
Kevin Taft Personal Profile (Alberta Liberals)	757 friends (up by 14 from last week)
Ed Stelmach Fan Club (PCs)	465 member (up by 4 from last week)
Re-Elect Brian Mason, Edmonton Highlands-Norwood (NDP)	280 members (down by 98 from last week)
George Read (Green Party of Alberta)	233 members (up by 6 from last week)
Paul Hinman (Wildrose Alliance Party of Alberta)	128 members (down by 34 from last week)

Source: Infoscape Research Lab data scrape in 2008, available via the Internet Archive: http://web.archive.org/web/20081120212329/http://www.infoscapelab.ca/taxonomy/term/39

Similar to the party websites, the parties control their YouTube channels. The parties have removed all their previous videos from YouTube at this point; they are either lost to history or only available on some partisan's archive. Table 5.4 provides a content analysis of the top YouTube videos in the 2008 campaign. The weekly viewership was only in the hundreds of views. One week after the election, the top YouTube videos all returned to the usual coverage. In Table 5.4, the top video was Stelmach's victory speech, but after that many of the dominant issues in Alberta politics, rather than partisan posts, were being viewed. These top issues included discussions of the oil sands, conspiracy theory videos about North American possibly consolidating into one economic zone, and videos focusing on the environment and infrastructure. In other words, it was as if the election hadn't happened, and in this sense, the 2008 election did not include a major YouTube event.

Table 5.4. Party Leader YouTube Video Views and Tone—Final Week 2008

ED STELMACH (LEADER OF THE ALBERTA PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY)

Video Title	Upload Date	Views Last Week	Affiliation	Tone
1. Ed Stelmach Uncut - Chateau Louis Victory Speech Part 2	3 March 2008	613	Vlogger	Positive
2. Alberta - Fortis et liber (strong and free)	5 March 2008	598	Lobby Group: CanadaPetitions	Negative
3. Ed Stelmach says Myth - Crude Awakening Part 1 of 3	24 December 2007	594	Vlogger: Streaming CBC Media	Negative
4. Ed Stelmach says Myth - Crude Awakening Part 2 of 3	24 December 2007	585	Vlogger: Streaming CBC Media	Negative
5. Alberta PC - AGM 2007 (Part 1 of 2)	5 May 2007	576	Alberta PC Party	Positive

KEVIN TAFT (LEADER OF THE ALBERTA LIBERAL PARTY)

Video Title	Upload Date	Views Last Week	Affiliation	Tone
1. CFIB Interview with Alberta Liberal Leader Kevin Taft	29 February 2008	574	Interest Group	Positive
2. PART 2/6 : ALBERTA ELECTION ON CPAC : TAFT	28 February 2008	541	AlbertaVotes2008	Positive
3. Kevin Taft and Hugh MacDonald on the Royalty Review Report	5 February 2008	391	Alberta Liberal Caucus	Positive
4. The Heart of a Western Tiger, Part III	28 February 2008	381	Alberta Liberal Caucus	Positive
5. Meet Kevin Taft	5 February 2008	368	Alberta Liberal Party	Positive

Table 5.4. Party Leader YouTube Video Views and Tone—Final
Week 2008 (con't)

BRIAN MASON (LEADER OF THE ALBERTA NDP)

Video Title	Upload Date	Views Last Week	Affiliation	Tone
1. NDP Affordable Housing Rally - Brian Mason	18 May 2007	320	Vlogger	Positive
2. National Day of Action - Brian Mason	28 November 2007	282	Vlogger	Positive
3. Deron Bilous and Brian Mason call Election '08	4 February 2008	227	NDP	Positive
4. PART 4/6 : ALBERTA ELECTION ON CPAC : BABCOCK	26 February 2008	200	AlbertaVotes2008	Neutral
5. AUPE Labour Rally - Brian Mason	28 October 2007	195	Vlogger	Positive

Sources: Infoscape Research Lab data scrape in 2008, available via the Internet Archive:
http://web.archive.org/web/20081120212329/http://www.infoscapelab.ca/taxonomy/
term/39.

Twitter in the 2008 Alberta Provincial Election

Twitter was founded in 2006, and it had 6 million users in 2008. Tamara
Small's research tracked political leaders' uses of Twitter during this period,
and Table 5.5 demonstrates how little the tool was being used at the provin-
cial level during the 2008 election.

The 2008 Alberta election results were definitely a shock for many who
predicted Ed Stelmach losing some seats to Kevin Taft's Liberals in Calgary
based on a disconnect between the online media and the mainstream me-
dia. As identified above, the online media was highly dominated by the oth-
er parties' criticisms of Stelmach; many media analysts commented that the
mainstream media and polls in Alberta provided a more balanced account
of the campaign, with up to 30 per cent of voters undecided heading into
election day. Those same 30 per cent did not show up to vote, along with

Table 5.5. Use of Twitter by MPs, MLAs, and Political Parties as of July 2009

NAME	FOLLOWERS	FOLLOWING	TOTAL TWEETS	TWEETS PER DAY
pmharper	16,802	13,410	175	0.9
premierstelmach	1,386	1,210	138	0.7
davidswann	683	1,519	105	0.5
albertaliberals	253	182	191	1.3
mypcmla	250	132	156	0.9

Sources: Tamara Small, "Canadian Politics in 140 Characters: Party Politics in the Twitterverse," *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 33, no. 3 (2010): 42.

some of their friends. Because of the voter turnout, the negative online media campaign was not emblematic of any major new political movements that were transformed into representative political power in Alberta.

In other words, Stelmach's landslide victory was not built from social media, but was instead formed on the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history. The poor voter turnout was read in many different ways in the media, including some of the following: people do not turn out to vote when they're happy with the government; people do not vote when they believe pre-election polls are going to be true; the media and the oil lobby did not sway people to vote for the Wildrose Party, and Ed Stelmach was therefore chosen as Alberta's resounding choice; or people do not vote when they do not like their options.

From this analysis, the Alberta online election of 2008 clearly falls into the "information politics" era, as the use of certain partisan digital strategies were just being developed and aimed at broadcasting party messages, not two-way communication. The campaign did not invite any major online "gotcha" moments, or sway voters' intentions. Pippa Norris's description of the leader-centric, mass-mediated election campaign are quite apt for this election, as it did not include open town halls (either online or off), or successful grassroots strategies from the PCs' competitors.

The 23 April 2012 Alberta Election Online: Political Marketing to Market Intelligence

As Duane Bratt shows in chapter 2, the oil industry's dissatisfaction with the PCs' royalty review, its rising support for the right-wing Wildrose Alliance Party (as it was branded at the time), and the increasing level of internal PC struggles, led to Premier Stelmach's resignation on 25 January 2011. Alison Redford's more liberal faction of the party supported her ascendance to the leadership on 2 October 2011, after a divided convention.

Federally, Harper's first majority government was built off of the Conservatives' social media political marketing tactics, which came to maturity during the 2011 election. Their coordinated "He's Just Visiting" online campaign against the Michael Ignatieff–led Liberals decimated the Liberal Party, and the NDP became the Official Opposition for the first time in Canadian history. Similar social media tactics affected the Alberta provincial election campaign one month earlier, as each party by then had a fully functional Web strategy, with the Wildrose in particular gaining support from the federal Conservatives' machine.[22]

In 2012, the top three provincial parties all had social media links available on their websites for this period; it was an equal playing field in terms of technology (as Table 5.6 documents). The party war rooms were also getting better at mining social media data to target possible voters, and creatively control their brand messages.

In the Alberta election of 2012, voter turnout improved to 54.37 per cent. Over 80 per cent of Canadians were online at this point, and the social media ecosystem was already being honed to focus on the common platforms of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter; however, Flickr and podcasting were no longer being uniformly used in this election. For example, there were no direct links to podcasts on any of the party web pages, and the PCs were the only party to have a link to Flickr, though the actual account had very few pictures posted. Notably, there were no links to Instagram on the party websites for this election, despite the platform being launched in 2010.

Figure 5.2a. Alberta NDP Website, http://www.albertandp.ca, 23 April 2012

Figure 5.2b. Alberta PC Party Website, http://www.albertapc.ab.ca, 23 April 2012

Figure 5.2c. Wildrose Party Website, http://www.wildrose.ca, 23 April 2012

Table 5.6. 23 April 2012: Alberta Partisan Election Campaign Websites

PARTY	NDP	PC	WILDROSE
Leader	Brian Mason	Alison Redford	Danielle Smith
Polls Week Prior	13%	34%	35%
Final Seat Totals	4 (gained 2)	61 (lost 5)	17 (gained 13)
Splash Page	See Figure 5.2a	See Figure 5.2b	See Figure 5.2c
Source URL	http://www.albertandp.ca	http://votepc.ca	http://www.wildrose.ca
Donation link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newsletter link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue summary:	Yes (on front page)	Yes (on front page)	Yes (on front page)
Candidate links:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Email link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
RSS link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
YouTube link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitter link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instagram:	No	No	No

Note: The party website information in this table is organized from left to right on the partisan political spectrum. The social media links are organized in order of the technology's introduction or a company's founding. The poll numbers are taken from Leger Marketing on 10 April 2010 (with the Liberal Party having 13 per cent and the Alberta Party 3 per cent of the vote at that time), and the website images are taken from the Internet Archive. After Danielle Smith became leader of the Wildrose Alliance in 2009, the party gained four seats from the PCs from floor-crossings in 2010, to earn official party status. The Liberal Party under leader Raj Sherman lost three seats, ending up with five, while the Alberta Party led by Glen Taylor did not win any seats.

Facebook Supporters in the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election

In 2012, Danielle Smith counted nearly 30,000 supporters on Facebook as the rise of the controversial Wildrose Party in the polls threatened to end the PC dynasty (see Table 5.7). This surge gave a clearer picture of the limited Facebook numbers in the 2008 race, which was simply too early in the diffusion of innovations cycle for Facebook uptake provincially. By 2012, however, there were 1.056 billion Facebook users worldwide, which translated into a heightened scale of active users in the 2012 provincial race.

Table 5.7. Party Leader Facebook Supporters (2012 Election—Final Results)

RANK	WEEK THREE: 9 APRIL 2012		WEEK FOUR: 16 APRIL 2012		WEEK FIVE: 23 APRIL 2012	
1	**Danielle Smith** (Politician, Wildrose Party leader)	20,503 likes (+4,736 *from prior week*)	**Danielle Smith** (Politician, Wildrose Party leader)	26,252 likes (+5,746 *from prior week*) 11,591 talking about	**Danielle Smith** (Politician, Wildrose Party leader)	29,559 likes (+3,307 *from prior week*) 8,872 talking about
2	**Brian Mason** (Personal profile, NDP leader)	4,741 friends (+45)	**Brian Mason** (Personal profile, NDP leader)	4,794 friends (+53)	**Brian Mason** (Personal profile, NDP leader)	4,836 friends (+42)
3	**Brian Mason** (Places page, NDP leader) *NOTE: He is using his office address as unique page on Facebook to attract supporters.	1,819 likes (+110) 181 talking about	**Brian Mason** (Places page, NDP leader) *NOTE: He is using his office address as unique page on Facebook to attract supporters.	2,147 likes (+328) 507 talking about	**Brian Mason** (Places page, NDP leader) *NOTE: He is using his office address as unique page on Facebook to attract supporters.	2,206 likes (+59) 258 talking about
4	**Alison Redford** (Public figure, PC leader) *NOTE: Her personal page does not list the number of friends.	1,064 likes (+101) 112 talking about	**Alison Redford** (Public figure, PC leader) *NOTE: Her personal page does not list the number of friends.	1,217 likes (+153) 171 talking about	**Alison Redford** (Public figure, PC leader) *NOTE: Her personal page does not list the number of friends.	1,320 likes (+103) 124 talking about

Sources: Data compiled from Facebook pages as indicated over the course of the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election, and summarized by the author.

However, no party leader changed their rank in terms of social media supporters as compared to the previous weeks over the entire course of the election (as Table 5.7 illustrates). Danielle Smith ranked first out of all the leaders on Facebook, increasing her "likes" for her politician Facebook page from 9,955 to 29,559 over the campaign, which represented a true explosion of social media activity in Canada as compared to previous campaigns (for example, Prime Minister Stephen Harper had 2,796 "likes" for his politician Facebook page at the time). Smith's online support and the polls would not come to fruition on election day, when Alison Redford earned a majority. This would be, however, one example where provincial politics outpaced the federal level in terms of online social media campaigning numbers.

Facebook at this time had just created the new public figure page option that supporters commonly follow now, instead of "friending" a leader (which is capped at 5,000 friends), as the company was trying to simplify the multiple options of groups, place pages, and party pages for supporters (see Table 5.7). The options were quite confusing in this race (the simplification became common practice shortly after the election). Markedly, the leader pages all had far more supporters than the political party pages, which only reached around 2,000 followers at most.

YouTube in the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election

By 2012, YouTube users globally were uploading thirty-five hours of video each minute, with 2 billion views a day. Among the parties, Smith and the Wildrose used YouTube to the greatest effect in the lead-up to the election. The top video of the election was a Wildrose advertisement presenting the polls moving in favour of a possible Wildrose win, which was released one week before election day (see Table 5.8); it received more than 100,000 views. As with the 2008 videos, none of these videos are publically available online anymore, as the parties have taken them down.

Smith's social media support did not translate into the kind of support pollsters were predicting (see Janet Brown and John Santos's chapter in this volume), especially when compared to the results of the election.[23] Pundits were left pondering what forces and tactics drove Smith's large gains on social media without translating to victory on election day, with some arguing that the loss in support at the polls was based on the homophobic and climate-change-denying comments made by her Wildrose colleagues.

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Table 5.8. Top YouTube Videos in the 2012 Election Campaign (Final Results)

RANK	TITLE	UPLOAD DATE	TAG	AFFILIA-TION	VIEWS TO DATE	VIEWS WEEK 3	IN-CREASE
1	Wildrose Momentum	18 April 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	112,569	*	112,569
2	Wildrose Balanced Budget Ad	28 March 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	16,054	3,970	12,084
*	Alberta Energy Dividend Ad	2 April 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	14,862	*	*
*	Wildrose Family Pack Ad	31 March 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	14,293	*	*
*	Alberta Accountabili-ty Act Ad	10 April 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	13,136	*	*
3	Meet Danielle Smith	5 July 2011	WildroseTV	Wildrose	7,241	3,558	3,683
4	Trailer—"It's time, Alberta!"	22 March 2012	WildroseTV	Wildrose	10,431	8,349	2,082
5	Family Care Clinics	3 April 2012	PCAlberta	PC	3,069	1,314	1,755

Sources: Data compiled from YousTube channels as indicated over the course of the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election, and summarized by the author.

To place the dominant Wildrose YouTube video in context, Canadian political watchers credit the "Culture in Danger" YouTube video launched in Quebec on 19 September 2008, four weeks before the 2008 federal election, as the first impactful social media election moment in Canadian history. The video crested 200,000 views before the election, and arguably lost Stephen Harper Quebec's support and his first possible majority government, as backlash arose after Quebec voters became aware of a controversial plan from the Conservatives to drop provincial arts funding.[24] The video was the centerpiece of a grassroots public-awareness campaign that targeted the Conservatives' policies, and it was effective particularly because it was not created by an opposition party.

Twitter in the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election

The sole common social media tool on which Smith did not surpass Redford was her Twitter base of 13,054 followers (see Table 5.9). In 2012, Twitter had 185 million users globally, which was the smallest user base of the three tools commonly promoted on the party websites. Only the Alberta Party changed their rank on Twitter during the 2012 race. In other words, social media did not have one uniform leader across all channels in the race, which reinforced the more complex market intelligence understanding of social media during this period. Researchers began to understand that the culture and context for each social media tool's "user affordances"[25] created unique social practices online that could only be described as dynamic.

Partisan practices developed beyond the use of one-way communication broadcasting techniques to include localized responses, particularly if a user base raised enough of a focalized theme for a party to build upon (e.g., criticisms were taken up by bloggers, then on Facebook and Twitter, and then by the PCs, directed at Danielle Smith's tour bus design, and her later support for conscience rights, which would allow health-care workers and other professionals to deny individual services based on religious beliefs).[26] In other words, market intelligence techniques were being used to help grow the user base of party supporters.[27] In terms of lagging technologies, the 2012 election would see the peak of blogging in Alberta, as the Infoscape Research Lab's blogometer recorded an average of about 4,500 blog posts in total, for each of the last two weeks leading up to the election. Those numbers would be the highest, as compared to the low hundreds in the 2012 election, and also higher than the 2015 election. Notably, after the election, on 13 February 2013, the blog "MadamPremier: A Blog Documenting Sexism Against Premiers" made a major critical contribution to online discourse by recording the vitriolic misogynist language that female politicians were subjected in Alberta and across Canada. This would be another example of provincial online social media leading the way in Canada; however, blogs and RSS feeds would no longer be a supported Web tool on the party websites come the 2015 election.

Table 5.9. Top Leader Twitter Accounts in the 2012 Election Campaign

RANK	WEEK THREE: 9 APRIL 2012		WEEK FOUR: 16 APRIL 2012		WEEK FIVE: 23 APRIL 2012	
1	**Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta** (@Premier_Redford)	10,928 Followers (+692) 673 Tweets 808 Following	**Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta** (@Premier_Redford)	10,928 Followers (+692) 673 Tweets 808 Following	**Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta** (@Premier_Redford)	13,054 Followers (+2,126) 808 Tweets 815 Following
2	**Wildrose Party of Alberta** (@ElectDanielle)	9,102 Followers (+1,208) 6,199 Tweets 1,733 Following	**Wildrose Party of Alberta** (@ElectDanielle)	9,102 Followers (+1,208) 6,199 Tweets 1,733 Following	**Wildrose Party of Alberta** (@ElectDanielle)	11,985 Followers (+2,883) 6,704 Tweets 1,739 Following
3	**Alberta Liberal Party** (@AlbertaLiberals)	3,764 Followers (+68) 3,124 Tweets 2,609 Following	**Alberta Liberal Party** (@AlbertaLiberals)	3,764 Followers (+68) 3,124 Tweets 2,609 Following	**The Alberta Party** (@AlbertaParty)	4,169 Followers (+405) 3,808 Tweets 2,203 Following
4	**The Alberta Party** (@AlbertaParty)	3,632 Followers (+112) 3,410 Tweets 2,185 Following	**The Alberta Party** (@AlbertaParty)	3,632 Followers (+112) 3,410 Tweets 2,185 Following	**Alberta Liberal Party** (@AlbertaLiberals)	4,084 Followers (+452) 320 Tweets 2,604 Following
5	**Alberta's NDP** (@AlbertaNDP)	2,416 Followers (+138) 2,022 Tweets 938 Following	**Alberta's NDP** (@AlbertaNDP)	2,416 Followers (+138) 2,022 Tweets 938 Following	**Alberta's NDP** (@AlbertaNDP)	2,893 Followers (+477) 2,542 Tweets 940 Following

Note: The shaded area identifies the only change in rank through the last three weeks of the campaign, with the Alberta Party's followers rising above the Alberta Liberal Party.

Sources: Data compiled from Twitter accounts as indicated over the course of the 2012 Alberta Provincial Election, and summarized by the author.

The 5 May 2015 Alberta Election Online: Digital Retail Politics and Grassroots Growth

It is important to mention here the mayoral campaigns of Naheed Nenshi in Calgary 2010 and 2013 and Don Iveson in Edmonton in 2013, which used social media prominently, thereby paving the way for the 2015 Alberta provincial election in several ways. Sharpe and Braid describe both mayors' Twitter strategies in *Notley Nation* (2016) as follows:

> By March 12, 2016, Iveson, (@doniveson) had 77,100 followers and had posted 15,100 tweets, while Nenshi (@nenshi) had 286,000 followers and 45,400 tweets. Both Iveson and Nenshi stress that social media are simply one facet of a campaign, and that talking with citizens face to face is far more important during the election and afterwards. The ground game is crucial in reaching out to voters, having a conversation, and laying the foundation of the campaign.[28]

The approach to social media described here balances broadcasting, localized online interactions, and in-person campaigning, which is an apt example of the trend that built towards the digital retail politics era described throughout this chapter.

The online strategies adopted by Nenshi and Iveson continued to mature during the 2015 Alberta provincial election, but they did not reach the level of "market surveillance" used by the Liberals in the lead-up to the 2015 federal election. In 2015, the provincial NDP's grassroots campaign was very strong,[29] as the party aimed to get candidates or one of its team members to knock on every door in a riding at least twice in the election, so that voters had a clear idea that the candidate was actively participating in their community. Interested potential voters would then be directed online to find more information with which to evaluate whether the party leader's online profile matched this lived impression and aligned with the voters' interests. In contrast, the other professional parties were commonly reported to limit door visits to only friendly or targeted battleground neighbourhoods based on their voter database intelligence.

It is important to emphasize, however, that we did not see the level of market surveillance in Alberta's 2015 provincial election as compared to the use of apps in the federal election.

In 2015, provincial voter turnout, at 58.25 per cent, was the highest in twenty-two years, as frustrated Albertans turned out in response to the highly contested campaign against the PC dynasty. In the 2015 campaign, like the 2012 campaign, all the parties had professionally developed websites utilizing similar social media tools (as demonstrated in Table 5.10). However, the era of listing the RSS icon on party websites was over, mainly due to the parties' attempts to attract voters using other aggregating social media feeds available through the accepted proprietary tools of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, with each providing more data analytics than simple RSS feeds. Notably, Instagram was not linked on the party websites, despite the fact that this relatively new tool was being used by the leaders. In this election, Instagram was still viewed as a younger generation's social media tool; it was not a mature technology as the social media numbers bear out below (see Figure 5.10 below).

Figure 5.3a. Alberta NDP Website, http://www.albertandp.ca, 5 May 2015
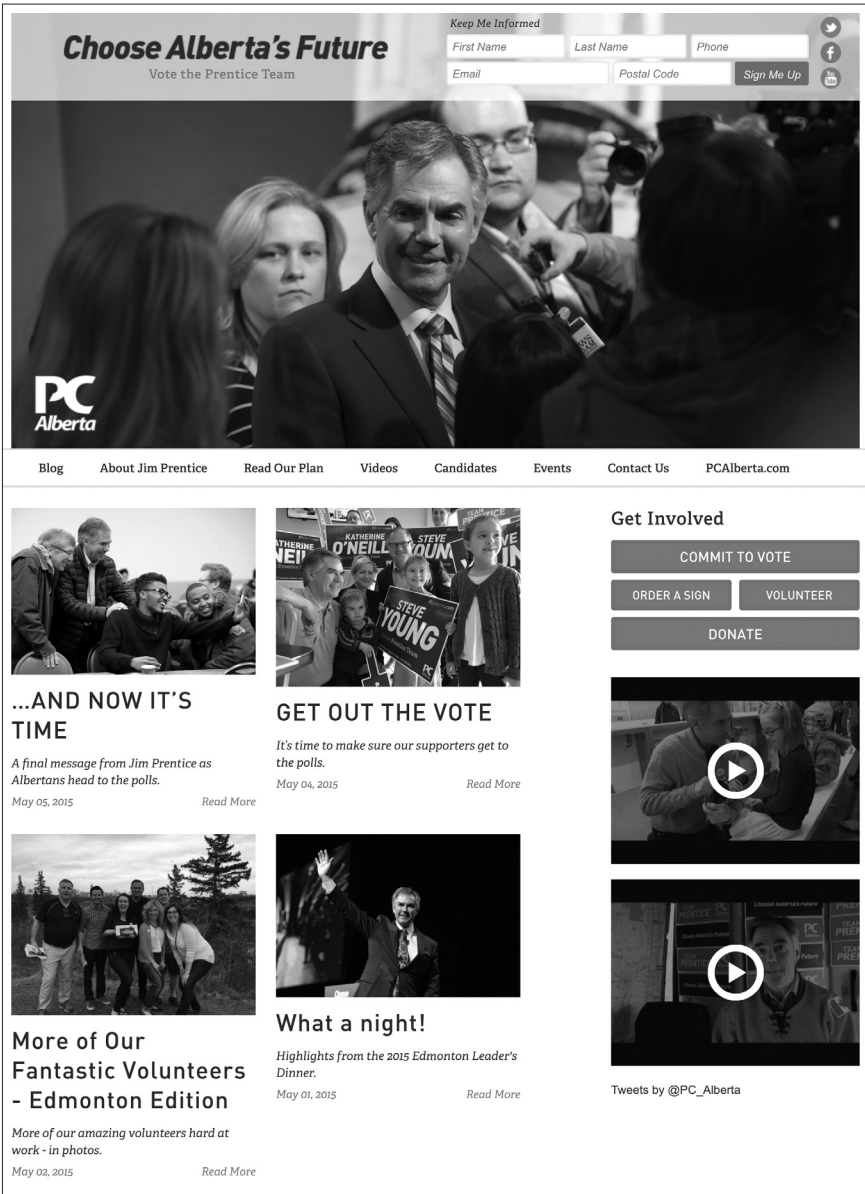
Figure 5.3b. Alberta PC Party Website, http://www.albertapc. ab.ca, 5 May 2015

Figure 5.3c. Wildrose Party Website, http://www.wildrose.ca, 5 May 2015

Table 5.10. 5 May 2015: Alberta Partisan Election Campaign Websites

Party	NDP	PC	WR
Leader	Rachel Notley	Jim Prentice	Brian Jean
Polls Week Prior	44.5%	23.7%	25.9%
Final Seat Totals	54 (gained 50)	10 (lost 60)	21 (gained 16)
Splash Page	See Figure 5.3a	See Figure 5.3b	See Figure 5.3c
Source URL	http://www.albertandp.ca	http://www.pcalberta.ca	http://www.wildrose.ca
Donation link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Newsletter link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue summary:	Yes (on front page)	Yes (on front page)	Yes (on front page)
Candidate links:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Email link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
*RSS link:	No	No	No
Facebook link	Yes	Yes	Yes
YouTube link	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitter link:	Yes	Yes	Yes
*Instagram Link	No	No	No

Note: * denotes a variation in use in this election. The party website information in this table is organized from left to right on the partisan political spectrum. The social media links are organized in order of the technology's introduction or a company's founding. The poll numbers are taken from ThreeHundredEight.com on 4 May 2015, and the website images are taken from the Internet Archive.

Social Media in the 2015 Election Campaign: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram

In 2015, the news media began using the proprietary analytics available through social media tools such as Twitter Analytics, Buffer, Hootsuite, and many other proprietary apps; their data helped to create infographics (as in Figure 5.10). The academic research methods of the early twenty-first century had now become formalized into algorithmic apps used for market intelligence and surveillance, available online to everyone. This professionalized political marketing shift has contributed to the emergence of the new era of

PARTY LEADERS' SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT

Figure 5.10. Party Leaders' Social Media Footprint in the early Weeks of the 2015 Provincial Election

Sources: "Alberta Election 2015: Party leaders on social media," Calgary Sun, 9 April 2015 http://www.calgarysun.com/2015/04/09/alberta-election-2015-party-leaders-on-social-media-graphic.

market surveillance, along with the changes in polling technologies, such as ThreeHundredEight.com's aggregating techniques, which Janet Brown and John B. Santos discuss in chapter 4.

In 2015, Facebook had 1.591 billion users globally, while Twitter had 305 million users. Despite the lower user base, Twitter had become the go-to social media tool for people interested in political communication and online journalism. This difference is illustrated by the fact that Jim Prentice's and Rachel Notley's Twitter followers numbered in the tens of thousands (18,652 and 12,883, respectively), but their Facebook followers only numbered in the thousands (see Figure 5.1). Tracking online media had become more complex at this point, as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram could all be linked together to post materials to any users' favoured accounts on their mobile phone apps, with iPhone and Galaxy users—nearly ubiquitous by this point—now downloading social media platforms to their phones to check them instantaneously and frequently.

For this reason, the limited numbers identified by the media for the YouTube subscriber information in 2015 are potentially misleading (see

Figure 1, where it is listed in the low tens), because simply following or tracking the party's officially sanctioned YouTube channels misses the wider network of back-channel groups posting and sharing videos on other social media during the election. In 2015, YouTube was receiving four hundred hours of uploaded video each minute globally, and the company recorded 3 billion users each month; users were now linking and posting videos in multiple different ways, separate from the party-sanctioned channels.

After the election, Twitter's dominance continued, with each political leaders' numbers in Alberta exploding in 2016 (see Table 5.11).

It should be noted that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had 2.1 million Twitter followers at this time, while Stephen Harper had 1 million, Alison Redford 29,200, Danielle Smith 25,800, and Ed Stelmach 5,619. At the time of writing, new PC leadership hopeful Jason Kenney had 97,700 followers, built off the profile he built as a federal cabinet minister (it will be interesting to follow the dynamics of using such a follower base at the provincial level).

Instagram, the photo-sharing tool, was launched in 2010, and by 2012 it had 40 million users globally; by 2015, the company saw a ten-fold increase to 400 million users. As we saw in Figure 5.1, no provincial leader used Instagram effectively during the Alberta provincial election campaigns; in contrast, Justin Trudeau's 2015 federal campaign would become a model for its use. Similarly, Brian Jean, with 2,464 followers, and Rachel Notley, with 1,542, had the lead in terms of their Instagram followers in the 2015 election (see Table 5.12).

However, there were only a limited number of posts on the leaders' Instagram pages with which voters could engage.

Two other notable social media events happened after the 2015 Alberta provincial election. First, on 10 December 2015, online death threats against Premier Notley from right-wing critics came to a point where Wildrose Party leader Brian Jean was forced to denounce them publically as not representative of his party's membership. Later, on 31 August 2016, Jean apologized for a comment he had made about beating the premier, which was recorded and circulated virally on social media.

As of October 2016, the global social media ecology included Facebook's 1.71 billion users, YouTube's 3.25 billion monthly viewers, Twitter's 313 million users, and Instagram's 500 million users. The content analysis outlined broadly in this chapter situates Alberta's 2015 election as a key turning point

Table 5.11. Alberta Political Party Leader Twitter Followers in October 2016

@RachelNotley	@JimPrentice	@BrianJean
Followers: 68.9K	Followers: 16.8K	Followers: 16.4K
Following: 10.1K	Following: 300	Following: 3,145
Posts: 5,697	Posts: 1,392	Posts: 2,233

Sources: Data compiled from Twitter accounts as indicated in 2016, and summarized by the author.

Table 5.12. Party Leader Use of Instagram 2015 Election

premierrachelnotley	jimprentice_ab	brianjeanwrp
Followers: 1,542	Followers: 111	Followers: 2,464
Following: 52	Following: 15	Following: 144
Posts: 18	Posts: 21	Posts: 206

Note: The above user names were current as of time of publication; prior to the 2015 election the "premierrachelnotley" was "rachelnotley" in keeping with the NDP's campaign format.

Sources: Data compiled from Instagram accounts as indicated over the course of the 2015 Alberta Provincial Election, and summarized by the author.

in social media political marketing, shifting towards online market intelligence concerning the increasing number of active online voters in the tens of thousands in 2012, and as of 2016 into the hundreds of thousands, with new methods clearly available to track and analyze pubic users of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As partisan apps were not used during this period, the shift to full mobile "market surveillance" was not reached provincially, as it was with the federal Liberals' creation of two apps in 2015, and during the American presidential election of 2016. Analytic tools used to surveil the electorate were democratized for public use in some instances in 2015, with media organizations creating new user-friendly applications like party election-promise trackers,[30] and the CBC Vote Compass app, which helps voters assess their political leanings against the party platforms.[31]

Overall, after the 2015 elections, it remains for researchers to investigate how political parties are using their voter databases and protecting the private user information obtained through apps, particularly in the areas of market surveillance, gender and identity participation online, algorithmic platform politics, research methods, and research tools for tracking and understanding online behaviour and media effects.

Conclusion: What Types of Technology Can be Used to Support the Master Party Brand?

> Social media is critical as a good broadcast tool, but not as a listening tool. . . . It's still evolving as a listening tool.
>
> —Edmonton mayor Don Iveson in 2013[32]

The above content analysis of the various Web technologies used during the 2008, 2012, and 2015 Alberta provincial elections provides strong evidence that parties have shifted away from using technologies to win a deterministic war of who has the best online broadcasting tools, to that of using social media consciously and strategically to align with their brand and leader image based on evidence-based market intelligence. In other words, social media tools are being used to listen to voters, but are also being used to monitor, influence, and shape their political intentions. By way of a concluding example, most political watchers would agree that the Trudeau campaign used the visual medium of Instagram masterfully in the 2015 federal election, while a few months prior, Alberta NDP leader Rachel Notley did not use it at all.

Similarly, little evidence was found provincially for the new political marketing trend of developing market surveillance strategies via apps to ensure messages target and reinforce the digital shadow of the leader as it aligns their face-to-face lived persona. Deviation between the two can lead to cognitive dissonance within a voter's mind concerning the abilities of a leader, or candidate, to be trustworthy and follow through on what she or he proposes to accomplish, as depicted in the representative advertising, debates, media appearances, party documents, and town halls conducted during the campaign. The authentic image and persona of the leader are, therefore, constructed in a coordinated online network, and just one part of that network can shape the electorate's views of the leader and party if it is maligned (e.g., in 2015, Danielle Smith crossing the floor, or Jim Prentice supporting a gas tax over a sales tax when most Albertans requested the latter according to the PCs' own provincial survey).

As others have similarly argued in this book, the 2015 election saw the reinforcement of the NDP's grassroots campaign by the presentation of Notley's lived persona through traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television, and as identified in this chapter, her progressive image aligned well with the master brand also captured in her digital shadow.

The content analysis also demonstrated how the opposing parties in Alberta have professionalized their online image over time to compete with the PC dynasty, as the tools used increased in sophistication with each election since 2008. The NDP's rise coincided with an increase in the critical online discussion of provincial politics, as more Albertans chose to participate on social media, reflecting the new generation of progressive voters and thinkers described in other chapters in this book. The developing online debates have held all parties to account across the province, though more research is required to see if social media users are primarily active in the major urban centres of Calgary and Edmonton, where technologies are commonly adopted earlier, or if rural voters are similarly being changed by online social media as the province's demographics change.

Notes

1   See, for example, Fenwick McKelvey, "Battling political machines: Coming to a riding near you!," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 19 August 2015, https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/battling-political-machines-coming-riding-near-you (accessed 1 July 2018).

2   See, for example, Rick Bell, "NDP boss Rachel Notley blasts Prentice and gains political traction," *Calgary Sun*, 2 April 2015, and "How 'math is difficult' (or #mathishard) blew up on social media," *Calgary Herald*, 24 April 2015, http://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/how-math-is-difficult-or-mathishard-blew-up-on-social-media (accessed 1 July 2018).

3   "How 'math is difficult' (or #mathishard) blew up on social media," *Calgary Herald*, 24 April 2015, http://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/how-math-is-difficult-or-mathishard-blew-up-on-social-media.

4   For more on political marketing intelligence and surveillance strategies see the following: Alex Marland, Thierry Giasson, and Jennifer Lees-Marshment, eds., *Political Marketing in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); Alex Marland, *Brand Command: Canadian Politics and Democracy in the Age of Message Control* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015); Alex Marland and Thierry Giasson, eds., *Canadian Election Analysis 2015: Communication, Strategy, and Democracy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

5   Pippa Norris, "Political Communication," *Developments in British Politics* 5 (1997): 76.

6   Greg Elmer, Ganaele Langlois, and Fenwick McKelvey, *The Permanent Campaign* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

7   See, for example, Richard Rogers, *Information politics on the Web* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

8   See, for example, Harold Jansen, "Is the Internet politics as usual or democracy's future? Candidate campaign web sites in the 2001 Alberta and British Columbia provincial elections," *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal* 9, no. 2 (2004): 1–20; Harold Jansen and Royce Koop, "Pundits, ideologues, and the ranters: The British Columbia election online," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (2005), https://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1483/1601 (accessed 1 July 2018).

9   See, for example, the critique of this dichotomy in Peter J. Smith and Peter J. Chen, "A Canadian E-lection 2008? Online Media and Political Competition," Paper presented at the annual meeting of Canadian Political Science Association Conference, University of Ottawa, 27 May 2009.

10   See, for example, Richard Rogers, *The End of the Virtual: Digital Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), and Richard Nadeau, Neil Nevitte, Elisabeth Gidengil, and André Blais, "Election Campaigns as Information Campaigns: Who Learns What and Does it Matter?" *Political Communication* 25, no. 3 (2008): 229–48.

11   See, for example, Elmer et al., "Election Bloggers," and Elmer et al., "Blogs I read."

12   For example, see Yochai Benker's freely available *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), which describes the three top online-behaviour patterns, including the "skewed-long tail" trend that we now call "going viral."

13   All global Internet user data and social media numbers summarized throughout this chapter are freely sourced and searchable at https://www.statista.com/, and the Canadian national Internet user numbers are from the "Canadian Internet Use Survey" documents available from Statistics Canada for the following years: 2009 (http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getInstanceList&Id=130941); 2012 (http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getInstanceList&Id=130941); and 2016 (https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/survey/household/4432b).

14   Marland, Giasson, and Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing in Canada*; Marland, *Brand Command*; Marland and Giasson, *Canadian Election Analysis 2015*.

15   For more on these market surveillance strategies, see Peter M. Ryan, "Mobile Platforms: The Medium and Rhetoric of the 2015 Canadian Federal Election Manifestos," Paper presented at the annual meeting of Canadian Political Science Association Conference, University of Calgary, 2 June 2016; André Turcotte, "Under New Management: Market Intelligence and the Conservative Party's Resurrection," in *Political Marketing in Canada*, ed. Marland, Giasson, and Lees-Marshment, 76–90 (Vancouver: UBC Press), 2012.

16   For more on the federal parties' use of technology in the 2015 election, see Steve Patten, "Data-Driven Microtargeting in the 2015 General Election," in *Canadian Election Analysis: Communication, Strategy, and Democracy*, ed. Thierry Giasson and Alex Marland (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 14–15; Paul G. Thomas, "Political Parties, Campaigns, Data, and Privacy," in Giasson and Marland, eds., *Canadian Election Analysis*, 18–19.

17   See, for example, Elmer et al., "Election Bloggers," and Elmer et al., "Blogs I Read"; see also Infoscape Research Lab, "Publications," http://infoscapelab.ca/publications/.

18   In 2008, "RSS" stood for "Rich Site Summary," but was originally "RDF Site Summary"; it is now commonly known as "Really Simple Syndication."

19   "Low voter turnout in Alberta election being questioned," *CBC News*, 5 March 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/low-voter-turnout-in-alberta-election-being-questioned-1.761174 (accessed 1 July 2018).

20   Jon H. Pammett and Christopher Dornan, eds., *The Canadian General Election of 2004* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2004), 125.

21   Sandford Borins, "Alberta's election online: Off to a slow start," *IT World Canada*, 6 February 2008, http://www.itworldcanada.com/blog/albertas-election-online-off-to-a-slow-start/50054 (accessed 1 July 2018).

22   Thomas Walkom, "Wildrose, NDP defections good news for Harper, but not Mulcair," *Toronto Star*, 17 December 2014.

23   See, for example, "Wildrose, Tories neck and neck in race to lead Alberta government: poll," *National Post* (Toronto), 10 April 2012.

24   Jon H. Pammett and Christopher Dornan, eds., *The Canadian General Election of 2008* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008).

25   "Affordances" are the tools and settings each social network such as Facebook or Twitter offers users as options they can use for interaction, such as likes, shares, emojis, 140 character limits, etc.

26   See, for example, Jen Gerson, "Alberta Election is One of the Meanest Ever," *Financial Post* (Toronto), 4 April 2012, and Mack D. Male, "Alberta Social Media Highlights," *Mastermaq's Blog*, 28 April 2012, http://blog.mastermaq.ca/2012/04/28/alberta-election-social-media-highlights/ (accessed 1 July 2018).

27   Similar market intelligence strategies were described at the federal level in Marland, Giasson, and Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing in Canada*, 2012; Marland, *Brand Command*, 2015; Marland and Giasson, eds., *Canadian Election Analysis 2015*.

28   Sydney Sharpe and Don Braid, *Notley Nation: How Alberta's Political Upheaval Swept the Country* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2016), 114.

29   Darcy Henton, "NDP led Alberta in fundraising in days before election call," *Calgary Herald*, 21 July 2015, http://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/union-cash-helped-ndp-lead-province-in-fundraising-before-election (accessed 1 July 2018).

30   See, for example, "Alberta Election 2015: The Promise Tracker," *Calgary Sun*, 9 April 2015, http://www.calgarysun.com/2015/04/09/alberta-election-2015-the-promise-tracker (accessed 1 July 2018).

31   See "Vote Compass," https://votecompass.cbc.ca/federal/ (accessed 1 July 2018).

32   Sharpe and Braid, *Notley Nation*, 115.