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A Think Tank for Politics

MOBILE MEDIA

In 21st Century Politics

Prepared for NPI by
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Preface

The impact of new Internet tools on politics is getting all the attention in the fall of 2006, but a whole new terrain is opening up that will also have big political consequences in the year or two ahead. The mobile phone has evolved from simply a voice communicator to a hub for mobile media. That small screen on your phone is beginning to take its place alongside the personal computer and television as an important way to connect to Americans.

Each of these screens has unique capabilities that can be used in politics. Mobile phone media, unlike media channeled through TV and PCs, allow people to connect anytime, anywhere. Today 80 percent of voting age Americans have mobile phones and an increasing number are becoming savvy at using them to create and consume media.

Some constituencies are more savvy or dependent on mobile phones than others. Two key groups in are of special concern to progressives. Any majority political movement of the early 21st century will need to connect to the massive young generation of Millennials, and the booming population of Hispanics. Both groups are among the top users of mobile phone media.

The development of mobile media is not going to take place in the distant future. As this report points out, mobile media has already proven to have big political impacts in other countries, and it played a key role in the immigration demonstrations all over the United States this spring. Now is the time for progressive political practitioners to start to engage this new technology and media. The report ends with seven concrete steps to begin mastering this new world.

The very first step, though, is to get an overview of the whole booming field by reading this comprehensive paper. It is filled with startling facts and figures that will help even those who think they understand what is going on:

Did you know that mobile video services already reach more users than the 8th largest cable operator in the country? That by 2008 as many as 30 percent of wireless phone users will not own a land line? (What will political pollsters do?) That last year U2's Bono got 800,000 people to sign up for the *One Campaign* to eradicate poverty by sending a text message through their mobile phones at his concerts?

Much is already happening, but much more is to come. The New Politics Institute wants to help progressives figure this out. This report was done by one of the New Politics Institute's new fellows, Tim Chambers, and his business partner Rob Sebastian who are co-founders in a new wireless company. They are generously passing on what they know to up the game of the progressive movement as a whole.

Peter Leyden

Director of the *New Politics Institute*

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Author Biographies

Rob Sebastian is a veteran entertainment media executive with over 15 years of experience in the fields of entertainment and new technology. Mr. Sebastian recently was the Managing Director of The Endeavor Agency's Games and New Media division working with clients such as Vin Diesel, Matt Damon, *Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia*, *WWE* and many others. Prior to *Endeavor* he headed up the interactive entertainment division of *Warner Bros.* (an *AOL-Time Warner* Company). While at *WB*, he negotiated videogame/PC/Internet/mobile deals based on some of the today's most coveted entertainment properties.

Tim Chambers has a 12 year track record in the entertainment and technology industries. Recently, he served *Sony Corp of America* as the technologist coordinating with Sony's global technology efforts in next generation mobile, game, home network, new media formats and software development. In his previous position as Senior Vice President and GM for Advanced Platforms for *Sony Pictures Digital*, Mr. Chambers established and managed the worldwide mobile entertainment publishing and licensing division of *Sony Pictures Entertainment*.

Chambers is a *New Politics Institute* Fellow.

Both Rob Sebastian and Tim Chambers have recently co-founded a new company, *Media 50 Group*, aimed at helping political practitioners understand and master new media – focusing on mobile media initially - and to evolve and help create next generation political content-based businesses.

Introduction

Photo by Gaetan Lee CC Atribution

"**M**obile phones once wanted only your ears; now they're after your eyes, too. By delivering a variety of viewing options - video games, music videos, clever ads, news, weather, and sports - the littlest screen may have the biggest of futures," wrote Greg Lamb of the *Christian Science Monitor.*[1]

Analysts have rightly begun calling the mobile phone a new "third screen" that has suddenly appeared to accompany the other two screens of our daily lives: television and computer screens.[2] This paper is an introduction to this new third screen that promises to make a dramatic impact on the general media world – along with an equally powerful impact on the political world. We lay out many of the key points that you need to know about the ever-changing mobile media landscape, and we offer practical ways for political practitioners to begin engaging in the mobile media space today.

Mobile Media Defined

We describe "mobile media" as anything you consume on a phone that isn't voice…this includes messaging, gaming, imaging and mobile applications. Mobile media is a new medium unto itself, with its own rules. Just as cinema became more than filmed stage plays, TV was more than radio with pictures, and the Internet more than electronic print publishing. Some mistakenly consider the mobile space to be a shrunken twin of the Internet. It isn't. *At best it is a cousin.* And this new medium is a part of sweeping change across traditional communications and entertainment industries.

Ask anyone in the U.S. music companies... that made $600 million last year selling digital music "ringtones", a new category of music sales that sprung into existence before most music executives knew what they technically were. With ringtone revenue doubling over the last year, internationally it now far surpasses revenue labels saw from singles and it even surpassed what they get from *iTunes* through digital downloads.[3]

Ask anyone in the U.S. video games business…whose previous focus on high-end console games for *Playstation 2*, *X-box* and *Game Cube*, was disrupted by the unexpected rise of mobile "casual games" – a new, rapidly-growing $500 million category that is likely to be a billion dollar industry next year. [4]
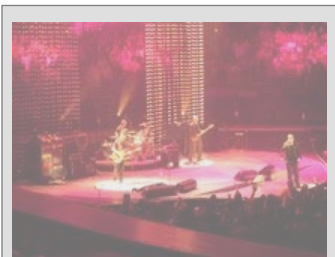
"Is this a 21st Century moment or what? …Time to do a magic trick…These little devices - these cell phones - they can do all sorts of things…."

-- U2 lead singer Bono, before leading 10,000 of his audience that night to join the One Campaign using SMS messaging

Ask anyone in the U.S. Major Media Business…where every major TV Network and Film Studio (and Google, Yahoo!, AOL and others) now has a significant mobile licensing or production business unit. US Wireless data service revenues exceeded $7 Billion in the first half of 2006 and the figures are likely to exceed $15 Billion for the year 2006.[5]

Already Beyond the Initial Obstacles

Many people consider mobile media to be hampered by things like screen size, device capabilities, speed of mobile networks, and difficult text input. Where these have been significant issues in the past, *they are all by now substantially solved issues for most users,* the majority of whom use phones created within the last 18 months, and have access to the latest roll-outs of higher speed networks nationally.

There are *actual* encumbrances and challenges in the mobile space for political action: the need to work with multiple mobile carriers; mobile user interfaces need to be simpler still for everyday people to use; and the higher cost and longer production time for some mobile application development –although the costs and time needed are analogous to what web work was in the late 1990's. And perhaps for some a greater issue exists, which is that mobile politics is still a largely new, unproven space. *It is not a safe, well lit path.*

A Four-year-old Medium

Mobile media today in the US is analogous to where the web was in 1998, where television was roughly in 1946, where cinema was at 1915… about 4 years old, and like most four year olds, just beginning to show signs of its full potential, showing early signs of what is just around the corner. But the benefits of being competent and effective in using mobile media early will be crucial for smart politicians and interest groups.

As Howard Rheingold, Kathi Vian, and Andrea Saveri warned in their report on the *Technologies of Co-operation:*

"Social mobile computing is poised to become an important organizational strategy for communities, governments, and businesses alike… From daily activities as mundane as shopping and as important as obtaining health care and participating in civic life, smart-mob skills will play an important role in how people interact on a daily basis. Those who are not equipped to manage this sort of group action will be at a disadvantage — *a new class of digital have-nots.*"

Chapter 1

Understanding the Mobile Media Landscape

Photo by Tim Collins CC: Attribution

"Applications need to look for the true heartbeat of mobile. Hollywood thinks it's a tiny TV. Silicon Valley thinks it's a PC in your pocket. The video game industry thinks it's a wimpy GameBoy. Mobile does not need to be the stepchild of another medium. Surely the heartbeat of mobile is elsewhere. It's a new medium."

-- Silicon Valley Entrepreneur and Founder of Electronic Arts, Trip Hawkins

Many Europeans (who along with the Japanese, seem perpetually 2 years ahead of the U.S. in mobile technology) no longer commonly use the term "cellular phone." Rather, they call their handsets simply "mobiles," turning the word "mobile" into a noun, as in, "I'm going out, just text me on my mobile."

This makes sense, for in those regions the mobile phone has long since become more than just a platform for voice.

Phones have taken the same upward ride that other computing devices have, and high end phones today in the U.S. have the same computational power that a top-of-the-line Desktop PC had in 2000.[6]

The fastest growing category in phones is the "Smart Phone" category that blends features that used to be found only in Personal Digital Assistants like the stand alone "*Palm Pilot*" devices.[7] Most recently, multimedia capable phones supporting music and video playback have begun to become commonplace in U.S. Forty-five percent of all phones sold in the U.S. last year were camera-phones.[8] In fact, the largest manufacturer of cameras in the world is no longer a company like *Canon*, *Nikon*, *Kodak*, or *Sony*...it's *Nokia*.[9] And by the 2008 election, over 90 of the mobile phones used in the U.S. will be internet-enabled.[10]

And a recent *NPD Group* study has shown the sales of phones that are "music enabled" -- allowing them to play full mp3 or other digital music files -- has doubled this year to 10% of all phones sold in the US.[11]

A Typical Month of Mobile Media Use

To further illustrate the state of mobile media, the CEO of *Sprint Nextel*, Gary Forsee, recently described typical activity on his network where subscribers "share 30 million photos, play 2 million games and access 1 billion Web pages every month. In addition, users of *Sprint's*

full-track music download service have downloaded 4 million songs since the service was launched in October." [12]

Forsee's comment shows the breadth of what mobile media encompasses:

- **Short text messaging** (SMS messages) and other multimedia and instant messaging

- **Personalizers** such as ring tones, ringbacks, wallpaper, screensavers, games, digital imaging and software applications

- New media types such as **full track music**, **podcasts** and **audio**

- And, increasingly, **TV and video content**.

The following chart is a guide to the current adoption rate of these various new media types across today's mobile users.

TEXT MESSAGING, GAMES & PHOTOS
Percent of cellphone users who in past month...

	TOTAL POPULATION	AGE 13-17

	0%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

Sent text message to another phone
Played games on cellphone
Took photos with camera phone
Purchased ringtone
Used cellphone to vote in TV or radio poll

More info: mmetrics.com
Source: M:Metrics, average for 3 months ended Jan. '06
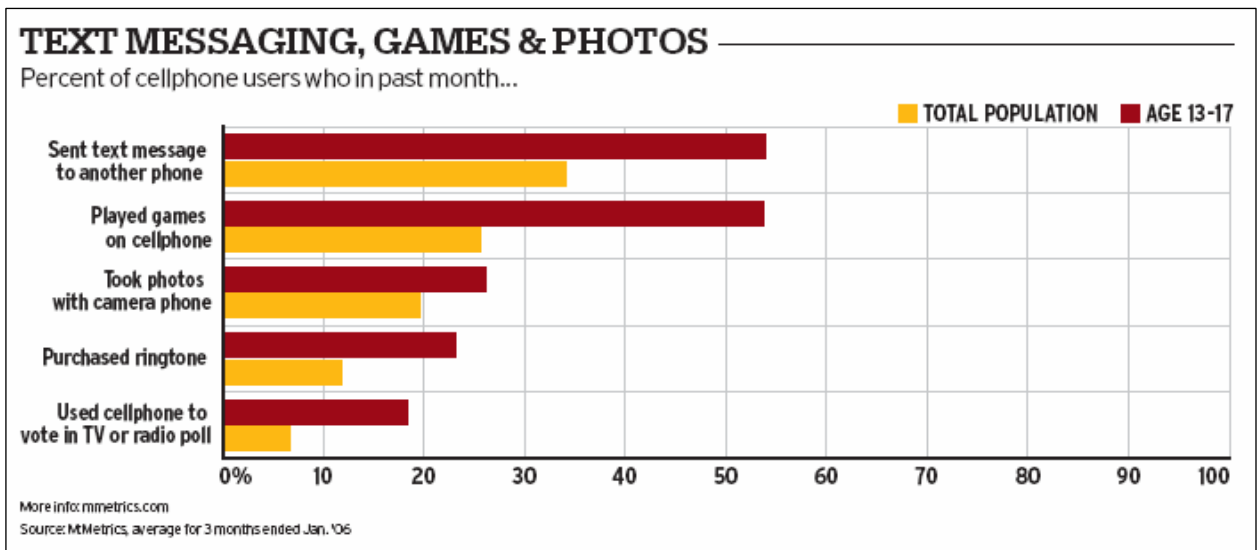
The varied media types and services used on mobile phones represent hundreds of millions of human experiences, generating $8.6 billion of revenue in 2005, up more than 86 percent from 2004. [13]

Mobile Video Reaching Numbers of Sizable Cable Networks

New mobile media types and applications are being invented or ported to the mobile platform on a regular basis. Look, for instance, at mobile video. About 28% of all phones in the U.S. market are currently capable of displaying mobile digital video.[14]

In the first quarter of 2006, more than 2 million users (1.4% of the entire U.S. wireless base) subscribed to a mobile video service.[15] Even in these very early days in the roll out of mobile video to cell phones in the U.S., it already reaches more people than the 8th largest cable operator in the country.[16]

The anticipated launches of major new video services supported by *Nokia* and *Qualcomm*, holds promise for even greater acceptance and improvements for mobile video.[17] We believe that mobile video will gain in adoption faster than most expect. *IDC Research* predicts that by 2011, "24 million U.S. cellular subscribers and customers will be paying for some form of TV/video content and services on their mobile devices."[18] At which point mobile video services combined would have more than 3 million *more users* than the largest cable operator in the U.S. does today.

If Mobile Media Didn't Exist...

Back around 2002, well before almost anyone knew what the term *"blog"* meant, a few forward-thinking politicos had the same intuition about the power of weblogs and the Internet for the 2004 election as we do for mobile media in today's political ecosystem.[19]

Mobile media has matured to the point of being a rich media communications platform and profitable business. It is a personal, nomadic, and above all, social invention – a power tool for informing voters and motivating political action. To paraphrase Voltaire broadly, we believe that if the mobile platform didn't exist, sooner or later political practitioners would have to invent it. In the following sections we'll explain why.

Video Capable Samsung A970

Chapter 2

Mobile Users and American Voters

Mobile services have now grown to a point where they are relevant across almost every key political demographic. In this section we'll cover in broad strokes where the mobile community and the voting community overlap. But as we look at wireless subscribers and demographics, we'd benefit from a very short bit of history.

Luggable Cell phone Circa 1980's from

Spectrum Cellular Corporation
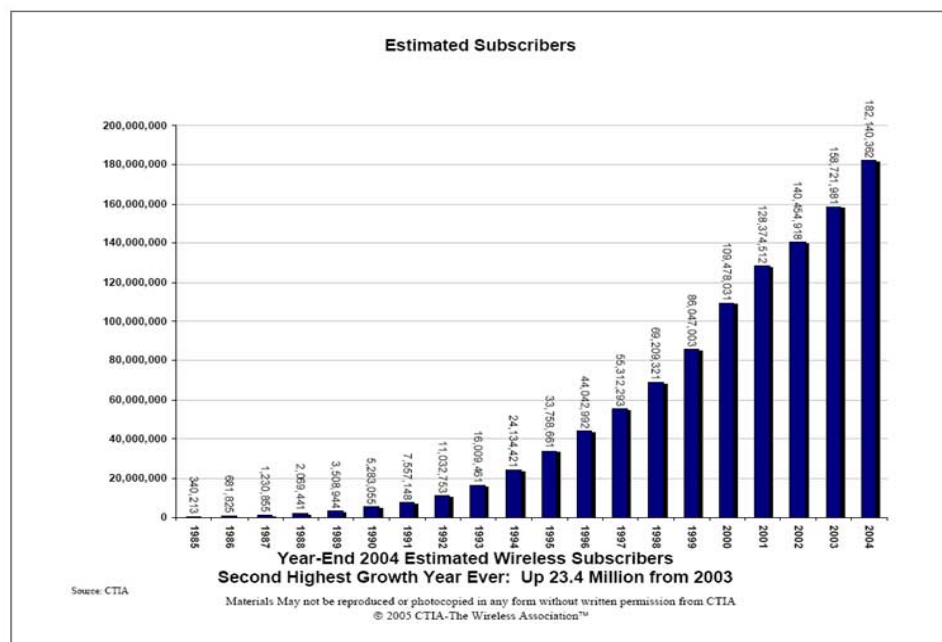
Early Days of Mobile Networks

The growth in mobile subscribers is one of the great success stories in the history of technology and consumer electronics. It started from humble beginnings in commercial trials in the 1970's, where brick-sized, car-mounted mobile phones were used in a network covering parts of neighborhoods in Chicago.

By 1983, true mobile voice services were ready for commercial roll-out. The first portable phones could hardly be called portable. The marketing terms used were "transportables" or "luggables."

As wireless carriers offered more robust networks that moved from analog to digital and smaller and sleeker phones with more affordable subscription rates, the mobile user base in the U.S. rose dramatically.[20]

> Approximately *8 out of 10 American residents that are of voting age are mobile subscribers.*
>
> More than 36 percent of them used text messaging last month.

Estimated Subscribers

Source: CTIA

**Year-End 2004 Estimated Wireless Subscribers
Second Highest Growth Year Ever: Up 23.4 Million from 2003**

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Mobile Subscribers Today

Today U.S. mobile subscribers number more than 207 million, or about 70% of the entire nation.[21] Last year was the first year calls from mobile phones surpassed those made from land line phones. [22]

Most households with a mobile subscription own *multiple* mobile phones and, for about 8% of the nation, *their mobile connection is their only phone.*[23] This number of wireless-only households almost doubled last year, and is expected to grow dramatically. By 2008, some researchers predict that almost 30% of all wireless phone users will not own a land line connection. (This will be a serious issue for pollsters as almost all national polls currently exclude mobile phone users.)[24] When you focus only on mobile subscribers today *who are of voting age,* things become even more interesting:
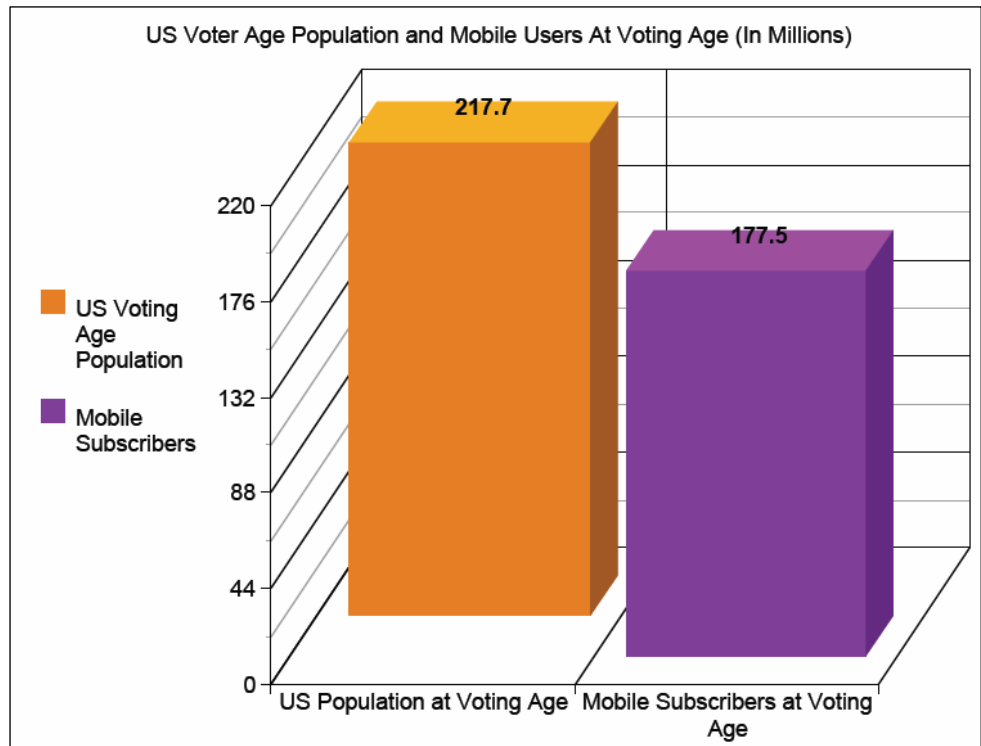
The most recent estimate of the U.S. voting age population is roughly 217.7 million.[25] Now compare that to the 177.5 million U.S. mobile subscribers who are at or above voting age. This means that approximately *8 out of 10 American residents who are voting age are mobile subscribers.*[26]

Mobile Media Users

Many of these users have already moved from being just voice customers into using data services on their phones in meaningful ways, for example, with text messaging.
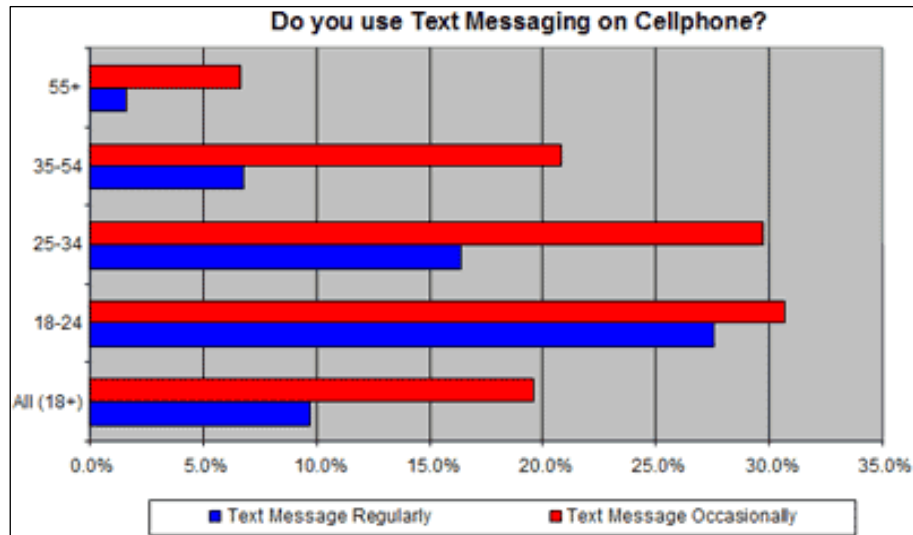
mKids World Study March 2005

A March 2005 study showed that 58% of 18-24 year olds use mobile text messaging **"regularly or occasionally"** as do 56% of 25-34 year olds and as do 21% of 35-54 year olds…[27]   Note that although this shows a clear spike at 18-24 year olds, the older 25-34 year old demographic is not far behind.

This spread of different mobile users is so pervasive that you can connect with various demographics simply by targeting specific applications. For instance, if you are trying to reach women mobile users, recent studies show that women comprise about 60% of all mobile gamers.[28] If you were trying to reach an African American audience, you could look at text messaging where the black community texts almost at a rate double that of the white audience. [29]

And a recent consumer study showed that "A higher percentage of African Americans and Hispanics than Whites say new media, such as picture phones have an influence on their purchase decisions." It goes on to say "The mobility of many new media options appears to suit the multitasking lifestyles of African Americans and Hispanics more than Whites," said Joe Pilotta, PhD… "These media represent an extension of word of mouth and pose a serious challenge that marketers will have to deal with," said Pilotta. [30] This also will seriously affect how political practitioners reach out to them.

But given the limited scope of this paper, we'll focus on two key groups that are both up for grabs politically, and particularly strong mobile media users.

Chapter 3

A Bridge to Key Political Constituencies

Mobile media can be a key factor in persuading, reaching and empowering any number of groups to join in political action themselves. Let's focus on two. First, the "Millennial Generation."

The "Millennial Generation" is comprised of roughly 75 million children and young people, many of them children of the Baby Boom. They are sometimes called the "Echo Boom" or "Generation I" -- for the Internet they've known since birth – or "Generation Text" for their using of mobile messaging and IM. They are between 6 and 26 years old today.

Though they tend to lean progressive in political terms, they are very much up for grabs as voters. [31] And with this group there are positive signs that the political aphorism that "youth don't vote" is incorrect. [32]

Millenials and Mobility

Advertising Age described the relationship between millenials and their cell phones today as "nearly bionic." [33]

Researchers found that in 2005 mobile phone ownership for 18-year-olds -- who have just crossed into voting age -- is at 73%, up 40% from 2004. For younger voters-to-be, the study found mobile phone ownership at 75% for 15-17 year olds and 40% for 12-14 year olds. Even 14% of 10-to-11-year-olds now own cell phones [34]

Responding to this, such major toy manufacturers as Disney and Mattel, as well as traditional cell phone companies and wireless carriers, are marketing specifically designed prepaid cell phones for early and pre-teen users. [35] Technology analyst Rob Enderle: "We're seeing cell phone growth from ages 8 and 9 on." [36]

Advertising Age described the relationship between Millenials and their cell phones today as "nearly bionic."

The Next Generation of Voters and Mobile Users

The younger Millenials already expect *as a matter of course* that their phones be inherently multimedia devices. About 70 percent of teens and "tweens" want wireless phones that can play digital music and that also include digital camera features. Another study showed that *more than one-third* of Millennial mobile users *acquired their phones in the first place mainly to use text messaging.* [37]

That is the wave that is coming.

Most Millenials can't remember a time when everyone around them didn't have a mobile phone. For a good number of them, they can't remember a time when they themselves personally didn't own one.

Next we'll focus on a equally key group that is also deeply effected by mobile media.

Cellphone targeting pre-teen marketplace

Image Courtesy of Firefly, Inc.

Hispanics and Mobile

There are 40 million Hispanics in the United States, 13 million of whom are eligible to vote today. In the four years after the 2000 election, the Latino population in the U.S. grew by 5.7 million people – which accounted for about half the total population increase in the entire nation. This surge increased the Latino share of the voting population from 5.5 to 6 percent of the nation last year alone.[38] By 2020, the number of U.S. Hispanic voters will grow to an expected 20 million people.[39] And Latinos live in key political states such as Colorado, California, Texas and Florida.

Studies from *Telephia* in 2005 showed that African American, Hispanic and mixed Asian groups make up the top three groups both in scope and in percentage of growth in using mobile.[40]

Hispanic users had the 2nd highest use of mobile minutes, and the growth in use quarterly was rising at higher than any other ethnographic group.

> Hispanic Americans are more likely to own a mobile phone as compared to the white community and they are over twice as likely to only own a mobile phone with no land line.

Table 1: Historical Trending for Total Voice Minutes by Ethnic Group (U.S.)

Ethnic Group	Total Voice Minutes Used (2005)			Percent Growth Q1-Q3 2005 (%)
	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Black/African American	1,105	1,190	1,220	10%
Hispanic Origin	868	924	979	13%
Mixed Racial Background	819	818	888	8%
Asian or Pacific Islander	794	779	845	6%
White/Caucasian	580	617	632	9%
Native American/Alaskan Native	595	600	623	5%

Source: Telephia Customer Value Metrics, Q3 2005

In the private sector, U.S. mobile carriers have seen the value of reaching out to the Hispanic community, *and collectively they spent*

more than $140 million on Latino outreach last year - more than on any other cultural group.[41] Hispanic Americans are 14% more likely to own a mobile phone as compared to the white community [42] and they are over twice as likely to only own a mobile phone, with no land line. [43]

Mobile Phone Features Used by US Mobile Phone Owners, by Ethnicity, March 2006 (% of respondents)	Whites (n=979)	Blacks (n=156)	English-speaking Hispanics (n=109)
Send and receive text messages	31%	42%	54%
Take still pictures	26%	23%	56%
Play games	20%	29%	40%
Use the Internet	12%	17%	29%
Play music	5%	11%	16%

Note: n=1,286
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Associated Press and AOL, April 2006

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A 2006 *AP-Pew-AOL* study showed the trends in how the English-speaking Hispanic community consumes mobile media. [44] In almost every case, Hispanic mobile phone owners doubled the rate of text messages, digital pictures, games and music consumed over mobile phones.

In the cases of both Millenials and the Hispanic communities you see a crucial wave of new Americans coming into the political process.

And in both cases, you see mobile technology being a key shared medium within both groups.

Any serious political engagement with this current and next wave of voters – any outreach or persuasion or attempts to tap into these communities as an activist volunteer base – will simply have to speak in this medium as well.

Chapter 4

A Bridge to a Person's Most Trusted Social Network

Photo by Jay Palm CC Attribution

After the 2004 Presidential election, a Pew study looked at the online campaign of both the Kerry and the Bush campaigns. A key takeaway from the report was that while Kerry's campaign did a better job at raising money over the web, that the Bush online campaign did a better job at putting everybody to work. Bush did better at calling people to reach out to their local social groups to talk about their political beliefs.[45]

Your "Friends and Family" Plan

If you've ever felt panicked by losing your mobile phone, you understand what it means to risk not just losing your personal information, but also *your closest friends and families contacts' information.*

Your mobile device is a gateway to your most valued relationships, the people you influence and care about most.

Another illustration of this: in 1997 there was an entire *Seinfeld* episode devoted to Jerry's struggle for top ranking on the speed dial on his girlfriend's home phone – "this speed-dial's like a relationship barometer…" Eventually the episode ended with Seinfeld doing battle with his girlfriend's mom for the top spot. The mother confronts him at the end of the show: *"It's taken me thirteen years to climb up to the top of that speed-dial, and I don't intend to lose my spot to you!"*

In some ways this anticipated the role of today's mobile phone address book as the gatekeeper of your most valued social network. The folks in

your phone's contact list are the ones who have passed the test of your "relationship barometer."

Social Networks and Mobile

Web-based social networks recognize the power of mobile phone address books, and have begun partnering with wireless services quickly. *MySpace*, for example, is teaming up with both *Cingluar Wireless* and *Helio. MySpace* plans to make its features available on all major U.S. carriers by 2007, hoping to make their incarnation of mobile networking as "integral a wireless handset feature as an alarm clock, calendar, or mobile email" is today. [46]

YouTube, the social video sharing service, now allows users to directly upload video captured on camera phones directly to the *YouTube* site. [47]

"We thought there was significant demand for this, and our initial thoughts were confirmed...

[Now] our advancement into mobile is one of the key initiatives on MySpace, extremely key to our growth. It's a huge opportunity."

-- Colin Digiaro, Senior Vice President of Sales for MySpace on the phone as a key target for their social networking service

Also when you look at the popular social photo sharing service *Flickr*, you can see the same mobile effect. *Flickr* allows people to query the top cameras used to take photos that were uploaded to the site. On the top ten list the 8th and 9th most popular "camera manufacturers" used where actually from phone companies: *Sony Ericsson* and *Nokia*.[48]

Political practitioners can take a cue from the successful social networks and begin to use mobile media to organize their communities of interest and stimulate discussion and action. This most trusted social network includes the people that you most influence and that most influence you.

Politics is about persuasion, about getting the word out, hashing out issues, and building a community committed to a cause. It is an inherently social activity. We should treat the mobile gateway to users core networks with the respect and value it deserves.

Chapter 5

A Bridge from "Virtual" into "Real World" Activism

Imagine this very realistic scenario: In the heat of the 2008 election, 1 million activists – all of them connected in a collaborative web both on their PC's and their mobiles – conspire in a collective act of mobile democracy.

(Exactly what this act might be is almost beside the point. You can imagine it being mass swing state outreach, collaborative research, some form of massive mobile meet up, or an en masse response to a key decisions that the campaign is about to make.)

Beyond calling them to just donating money at a push of a mobile keypad's button, let's say a candidate has emerged that "gets" the power of the Internet and its mobile cousin. All their traditional media and Internet action combines with a call to mobile action. No speech ends without a call for those listening to join the campaign on their mobile phones – then and there. And this candidate has inspired a small portion of his base - **1 million people** - to each devote *ten minutes* of their time to mobile action for the Presidential campaign.

This is easy to do on their mobile phones, in fact, it helps folks kill time while waiting in line, or while on a short bus ride they've done so often they'd scream for something meaningful to do to. Each of them is giving a small but active hand in the election. They are roused to do so by a candidate who understands that the act of becoming President requires a "campaign staff" of millions.

What would that act of mobile action generate?

After everybody put in their ten minutes of work, it would have generated nearly 4167 "person weeks" of labor, or *about 83 "person years" of labor.* It's all about putting everybody to work. It's about *decentralized activism.*

Being Decentralized

In a 1996 essay Nicholas Negroponte wrote about the emerging "information superhighway" as a fundamentally different, decentralized and decentralizing force. He used this analogy:

"The access, the mobility, and the ability to effect change are what will make the future so different from the present.

The information superhighway may be mostly hype today, but it is an understatement about tomorrow...Being digital is different. We are not waiting on any invention. It is here. It is now. It is almost genetic in its nature, in that each generation will become more digital than the preceding one."

-- *Nicholas Negroponte, Co-founder of the MIT Media Lab, Written in 1995*

"I am fond of quoting MIT professor Mitch Resnick's story about ducks flying south in a V formation. The front duck is not leading. Each duck is a stand-alone processor who behaves according to local rules and autonomous behavior.
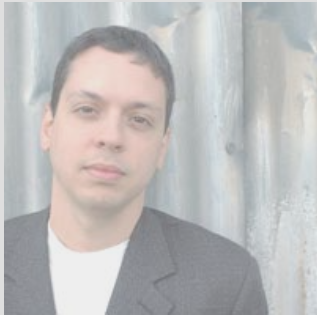
My variation of this story is that if you shoot the front duck, it will drop and the rest will scatter.

Eventually, the remaining ducks will regroup into a new V formation with a new front duck and continue on their way. No, the vice president duck did not become the president duck. That's not the way it works."

Photo by JessicaFM CC Attribution

Hackett for Congress

Now flash forward about a decade. Compare Negroponte's illustration to a post from *DailyKos* founder and NPI Fellow Markos Moulitsas, written right after Paul Hackett campaign for Congress in Iowa.

If you remember, Hackett's run was supported by a huge outpouring from "netroots" supporters who donated over a half million dollars to support his run in a fiercely Republican district. Blogs raised more cash than either the Republican or Democratic Congressional Committees put into the race.[49] And Hackett came remarkably close to winning.

Markos described his role in terms that sound almost identical to those of Negroponte describing decentralized systems 10 years earlier:

> "I'm not leading anything. I didn't lead the charge on Hackett, and I don't think I lead the charge on anything. What I have helped do is create a platform that allows situational leaders emerge outside the establishment class (be it media, political, or activist establishments). Did I play a role? Sure, a supporting role. A small role. But the beauty of this medium is that a lot of 'small roles' add up to something incredible. It's a collaborative medium, one in which no one person can make the definitive difference, but together we can shake things up. I'm not a gatekeeper. I can't turn people and activism on and off. I can ride the wave, and maybe direct it a bit here and there, but at the end, we're a collective entity. That's where the power lies, not in me and my laptop, in a tiny bungalow in Berkeley." [50]

"But the beauty of this medium is that a lot of 'small roles' add up to something incredible. It's a collaborative medium, one in which no one person can make the definitive difference, but together we can shake things up. I'm not a gatekeeper…I can ride the wave, and maybe direct it a bit here and there, but at the end, we're a collective entity. That's where the power lies…"

-- NPI Fellow Markos Moutisas

Mobile platforms, increasingly as powerful as PCs but more distributed and more personal, can take this effect of "peer production" working in concert with the blog and Internet space and *adrenalize it.*

Mobile Decentralized Action

The "edge" of the distributed network is pushed back dramatically -- not just to desktops but further out into the "real world." No longer is that edge of the network your PC in your side room, or even your laptop carried to a WI-FI hot spot at a coffee shop. Now, the "edge of the network" becomes wherever you are.

Time for political action becomes anytime you have. The 230 million PC's in the U.S. [51] could be buttressed by 190 million more networked mobile phones. [52]

"Instant response" on mobile can be in one sense *faster* than email, which is dependent in its last leg of its journey on you being somewhat near a computer.

Thomas L. Friedman saw this same trend, and wrote:

"The technological model coming next – which Howard Dean accidentally uncovered but never fully developed – will revolve around the power of networks…

The public official or candidate will no longer be the one who talks to the many or tries to listen to the many. Rather he or she will be a hub of connectivity for the many to work with the many – creating networks of public advocates to identify and solve problems and get behind politicians who get it…The party that stakes out this new frontier will be the majority party in the 21st century." [53]

Chapter 6

Various Proofs of Concept

Philippines Voters and Political SMS

Even in early 2006, the potential for mobile media to influence politics is becoming clear in numerous examples around the world. Significant mobile political events have occurred in the Philippines, India, Hong Kong, Korea…[54]

In the Philippines, mobile action around political campaigns is common. In fact, an entire election was deeply affected by a political zinger of a "ringtone" [55] implying that the incumbent was guilty of vote rigging. It was downloaded by more than 1 million people. [56]

The Spanish national election in March 2004 that followed the tragic Al Qaeda Madrid train bombings was affected by mobile action. The governing Popular Party initially indicated that the bombing may have been done not by Islamic terrorists but rather by Spanish separatists. Then, despite an official ban on political demonstrations in the 24 hours prior to the election, massive protests nonetheless materialized due to the unique, spontaneous organizing power of text messaging and email. Millions of text messages and emails were sent, some pro and some anti the government. On the day before the elections, text messaging was at 20% higher than it would be normally. On Election Day, 40% higher.

And, in a surge of voting that went up to 77% voter turnout, the Popular Party which was widely expected to win the election – lost decisively, after which the *International Herald Tribune* headlines wrote "Cell phones may have tipped the scales in Spanish election." [57] The following political cartoon ran that next week:

Translation: The sign at left identifies the assembled group of suits as "experts in election strategies." The guy in the middle says, "Meetings, interviews, news articles, debates, banners, posters… nobody thought about SMS messages!"

"The text message represented a 'first kiss', establishing a link between the individual and the 'Make Poverty History' campaign."

- From a U2 and Sun Microsystems Press Release on the Mobilized Vertigo Tour

Even in authoritarian regimes like Iran, text messaging is one of the few forms of political expression to frustrate state control. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was particularly incensed when an anonymous widely distributed text message made it to his personal mobile phone suggesting he didn't bathe enough.[58]

When U2 performed at *Live8* and then in the United States on their Vertigo tour in 2005, lead singer Bono used text messaging as a means of instant, large scale recruitment for the anti-poverty and AIDS organization *ONE*, which he also chairs.

U2 Vertigo Tour CC: Attribution: Brande Jackson

As described by *Backstage Magazine*, "About an hour into a typical show on U2's Vertigo tour, Bono tells the crowd to hold up their mobile phones, in what has become the modern-day equivalent of flicking on a lighter. Instantly, thousands of blue-tinted screens illuminate the darkness as he marvels at the spectacle. 'Is that a 21st-century moment or what?' Bono asks.

Soon the video screen atop the stage flashes a five-digit number above the word 'UNITE.' 'Time to do a magic trick,' he says. 'These little devices - these cell phones - they can do all sorts of things.' Then the band launches into the song 'One,' and Bono encourages the audience to use their phones to send a text message (also known as an SMS) to the one.org Web site, a sort of digital petition voicing support for poverty relief in Africa. Later, during the encore, the names of all who did so are scrolled on the same screen, and each receive a message of thanks from Bono on their phones."[59]

U2 would generate about 10,000 mobile responses a night, and generated over 800,000 responses during the entire Vertigo tour,[60] and over 2.3 million US users subscribed to the *One Campaign* over 12 months through text messaging.[61]

Most recently, we could point to the recent announcements from possible 2008 presidential candidates launching their mobile efforts some 17 months before the first primary. [62]

As much as we feel that these events and others like them were meaningful foreshadowing of mobile democratic action's potential, we believe that recent history in the U.S. has given an even more direct illustration of mobile political and social action.

And it directly connects with *both* Millenials and Hispanic communities as well.

Chapter 7

Immigration Protests: A Specific Mobile Case Study

Immigration Reform Protest, Chicago 2006   Photo by Andy Theyer CC NRR

"The kids are inventing a new paradigm...

This is sort of like micro-grassroots organizing that was not ever foreseen."

- Rep. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas, describing the Teen Immigration Protests

"The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," which was also known by its technical bill number HR 4437, was sponsored by Wisconsin Republican Representative James Sensenbrenner. Among other things, the bill would require a 700 mile fence be built between Mexico and the United States, classify illegal aliens and anyone who helped them enter or remain in the U.S. as felons. It provoked an uprising of immigration protests in 2006 far beyond what anyone had predicted.

Crowds of thousands (sometimes hundreds of thousands) of people chanting "Today we march, tomorrow we vote" were seen in LA, Denver, Chicago, Dallas, Nevada and elsewhere.

Though the larger protests were organized in traditional fashion with unions, churches, Hispanic organizations, and Spanish language radio, there was a secondary theme to the protests that merits attention. Along with the massive protests, there were hundreds of smaller protest actions happening without the input of any centralized organization. They happened almost simultaneously across the nation and involved hundreds of cities and tens of thousands of mostly high school students, driven by Internet social networks and mobile text messaging.

Let's look at some snippets from various local newspapers across the nation that describes this remarkable and portentous story of mobile democracy.

- **From Houston, Texas** -- "From cell phones to the Internet, students from different schools were able to communicate...It's a very, very potent form of communication...In a matter of minutes, literally, they can get a crowd to assemble some place within half an hour, of tens of thousands of people, simply by everybody text messaging five people." [63]

- **From Wichita, Kansas** -- "If nothing else, the march in Wichita—like those elsewhere—signaled the dawn of social

> "The revolution might not be televised, but it is definitely being digitized...The students are getting organized through text messaging, blogs, and Web sites like MySpace.com. They know exactly what's going on."
>
> *--Jay Pugao, Teacher at East Oakland Community High School*

activism in the age of cell-phones and unending wireless connectivity… "It started," he explained, "with a text message. Everyone text messages everyone else. Most of us found out yesterday [Thursday, March 30]."[64]

- **From Chino, California** -- "Cell phones were also instrumental, helping groups locate one another to form a larger presence…."I think MySpace and cell phones played 95 percent in protest organizing all over California," Young said."[65]

- **From Virginia and Maryland** -- " …As with protests earlier this week, students learned of the action by word of mouth, fliers, text messages, and the Web site MySpace.com."[66]

- **From Phoenix, Arizona** -- "[The school protests] likely marked the first appearance of a new generation of activists savvy about using electronic gadgets, text messaging and the Internet to organize… "Text messaging is a way of life for us…for us, it's not a big deal to use cell phones to communicate. That's what kids do." [67]

- **From Las Vegas, Nevada** – "In Las Vegas, police and school officials said at least 3,000 students, drawn together by text messages and cell phone calls, left high schools, middle schools and a community college after the morning bell." [68]

- **San Jose, California** -- "When I asked Joel, a 16-year-old junior at Silver Creek high school, how the word spread about the walkouts, he showed me his phone."[69]

A Beta Test and a Milestone

Call the events of 2006's student protests a "mobile swarm,"[70] call them an example of a new "smart mob," [71] or an example of "distributed peer production" put to work in a political cause…but however you describe them, something new and remarkable happened during those months. Student immigration protests were both a "beta test" of what is coming and as well as a key milestone of what is already here.

Chapter 8

Things to Do Starting Today

So, what can you practically start doing in the mobile media space today? A good deal. Here is a check list of seven initial recommendations.

1. Get personally conversant with mobile media

Try text messaging, buy a new ring tone, get new wallpaper for your phone's background. Play a game. If you are a Verizon customer, try watching a video on V-Cast, if you are a Sprint customer, try out their Powervision TV service.

The mobile phone you own right now likely supports most of these mobile media formats, so give it a try. Consider it as a lab. Be forgiving of the parts of the process that are still too difficult. It will progress.

There are some good, informative, fun, and genuinely useful services to try. Here are some good starters. You can browse to these on a desktop web browser to get more details on how to connect to these services over your mobile phone.

Google Mobile http://www.google.com/sms

Or, Reuters Mobile http://reuters.m-qube.com/reuters/

Or, sign up for the ONE campaign, by sending a text message to UNITE (86483).

2. Do not treat text messaging as simply bulk email - or bulk direct mail - to a phone. It isn't.

As we've said often in this paper, mobile media like text messaging is its own medium with its own rules. And a text message saying in essence, "My candidate is on 'Meet the Press' in one hour, pass this message on…" is far better and truer to the medium than a typical political email canned into an SMS message would be. Short, timely, and with a specific call to action. Much better than trying to force your latest press release into a 160 character text message, which wouldn't work.

3. Polling: Ask about everyone's mobile media use

You or your group may already do polling where you ask some technology questions, such as whether or not users have email or use it.

You should add mobile questions, such as if they have recently sent or received a text message on their phone. See how mobile media friendly your constituency already is. The numbers may surprise you.

4. Web sign-ups: Get mobile numbers today

On your campaign or political web site, if you already ask users to register with your site for things like email, or other services, be sure to ask for their mobile phone number and mobile info specifically. You should tell them that this is for future opt-in based mobile use and will not be sold or passed to other groups.

5. Start early: Plan mobile into beginning

Mobile takes more time to set up than Internet applications do. It often takes a two or three month's running start to set up even a relatively simple text messaging application. Don't wait until the last minute. Also, mobile marketing efforts to date have been successful over longer terms – several months - rather than shorter bursts. With this sort of time frame in mind, the 2006 elections are perhaps available for groups that started *today*. On the other hand, even for "permanent campaigns" from interest groups, voter outreach organizations, and for local, State and Federal efforts around 2008, you can't start planning too early.

6. Be systemic in your planning the mobile campaign

Plan for mobile to be integrated with everything in your overall media and public outreach campaign. This is similar to how more effective campaigns treat the integration of the Internet. Mobile contact points should be featured in every commercial, every campaign letter, and every email.

7. Partner with technology companies who get this

The mobile media space is a very different beast than almost any other, so guides for early action are acutely needed. Requisite carriage and billing deals across multiple carriers, specialized technology knowledge, as well as mobile production skills make the mobile media space a hard one to do on one's own at the present time.

The good news is that there are many very capable mobile technology consultants, and developers and a number of these are already conversant in the political space as well.

In fact, we have founded our company – named the *Media 50 Group* – to be specifically devoted to being that kind of help to candidates and political groups who see this same potential we do in the mobile space.

But regardless of whom, find a good guide, and then roll up your sleeves and help invent the rules for this new media.

For More Information:

For the New Politics Institute

Web: **www.newpolitics.net**

Washington DC office: 202-544-9200

San Francisco office: 415-358-6547

For Media 50 Group

Los Angeles and Washington DC Offices can be reached at:

email: info@media50group.com

telephone: 800-705-9107

web: http://www.media50group.com

Appendix Mobile Resources

Industry Sites:

- CTIA
  http://www.ctia.org/

- Mobile Industry News
  http://www.mobileindustry.biz/

- Wireless World Wireless Forum
  http://www.w2forum.com

Mobile Marketing Sites

- Mobile Marketing Association
  http://www.mmaglobal.com

- Mobile Marketing Association Best Practices
  http://www.mmaglobal.com/bestpractices.pdf

Technology Sites

- W3C Mobile Web Initiative:
  http://www.w3.org/Mobile

- W3C Best Practices on Mobile web:
  http://www.w3.org/TR/2006/CR-mobile-bp-20060627/

- Open Mobile Alliance
  http://www.wapforum.com/

Blogs:

- Smart Mobs Blog
  http://www.smartmobs.com/

- Mobile Democracy Blog
  http://blog.media50group.com/

- Personal Democracy Forum
  http://www.personaldemocracy.com

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