

Political Campaigns and Social networking

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Abstract:

Media and politics go hand in hand. The history of media and politics goes back to the early 1900's with printed newspapers. Throughout history the way Politicians use media or in some cases don't utilize media can affect outcomes of Presidential elections and sway voters one way or the other. During the times of JFK the media only reported the facts of the story from a nonbiased stand point. JFK's personal life was often times not reported on. Today's media is extremely different. The creation of the Internet in the 1990's changed the way people receive news. Today the news is updated constantly and can even be read on your phone. This also opened up a new phenomenon known as bloggers. Bloggers can write whatever they want which proves to be a problem in the political world. Bloggers are not trained journalist which is not always a good thing because sources aren't verified and stories lose their credibility. During the 2008 Presidential election the Obama Campaign utilized social networking to their benefit reaching a younger voting demographic and was ultimately the deciding factor in the 2008 Presidential election.

I started my research paper with questions about media and politics. I wanted to know how Politics and media work together and in some cases don't work together. Through my research I have found that media has been a large part of Politics dating back to 1930's with Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign. Roosevelt used radio to reach the American people and to bond with them like no one had done up to that point. Other Presidents effectively used Media to win their campaigns including John F. Kennedy and in the 2008 election Barack Obama.

The first question I want to explore is how technology has changed politics and the Presidential race?

The Presidential race has changed dramatically in terms of media and reaching the people over the last 60 or so years. The Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt proved to be a media focused term. Roosevelt held over a thousand press conferences from 1933 to 1945. Roosevelt was very popular among the press because he was accessible and personable among reporters. Roosevelt also found a new way to reach the public by utilizing the radio. He is famous for his "Fire Side Chats" where the people got a sense of sitting with a friend and discussing issues. This technique was effective because he reached the people directly. (Baldasty, 1998) The public responded to FDR's fireside chats by sending 50,000 letters per week to the white house compared to Hoover receiving 5,000 letters per week while in office. FDR understood that he had to maintain a relationship with his audience, the American People, so while in office he held two press conferences a week totaling 997 while he was in office. FDR used the media to his advantage because his administration was creating the headlines that hit the news.

FDR was always one step ahead of the media because he understood the people and could gauge their moods. (Woolner, 2010)

After World War II the television played a major role in politics. John F. Kennedy was the first President to use this new Technology to his advantage. His good looks coupled with his personality made TV an effective tool for his Presidency. Kennedy had phenomenal stage presence and media skills that haven't been matched by many other Presidents. (Baldasty, 1998) During his run for President in 1960 against Richard Nixon TV was cited as one of the major factors to decide the election. "With the election ending in such a close finish, the power of Kennedy's media presence was immeasurable." (1960: The Road To Camelot) After JFK was elected President his fame took off. He was one of the first celebrity presidents. There were many scandals during JFK's time in office that didn't get mentioned or weren't publicized. "The potential embarrassments, such as the state of his health, and his sexual philandering, were kept out of the public eye, and beneath the glittering surface, the doses of fakery and falsehood that helped shape the new president's image were abundant." Said Louis Gould. The media knew about JFK's infidelity but at the time there was a known code of silence to protect Politicians. (Gould, 2011)

In 1948 President Harry S. Truman travelled 21, 928 miles in just four months to try and reach out to the American people. The "Whistle- Stop" tour as it was called was credited with his successful campaign. Truman travelled all across the country to campaign for the Presidential election by giving speeches and attending rallies in an effort to raise money. (Wattal, 2010)

How has Social Networking and internet changed Political campaigns?

While some aspects of the Presidential campaign will not change, many new technologies have helped with the effectiveness of campaigning. In 2008 Barack Obama's campaign utilized the internet as a way to raise campaign funds. Obama used web blogs and various social networking tools to reach a larger majority of the public at very little cost and in a short amount of time. Obama still participated in traditional Campaign activities such as fundraising dinners and TV and Billboard ad's but he also explored new media outlets and channels. Obama's team would release videos through sites like YouTube and Facebook which would go viral and reach millions of people. Obama still utilizes this technology with his Presidential addresses by releasing videos through [www. Whitehouse.gov](http://www.Whitehouse.gov). (Wattal, 2010)

According to Ryan Peddycord, "In January, Obama set a record for donations in one month by raising a total of \$32 million dollars, \$28 million of which was raised online. From these \$28 million in online contributions, 90% were under \$100, with over 250,000 contributors. In February, Obama didn't attend one single fundraiser and still managed to raise \$55 million online." (Peddycord, 2008) The use of social networking and the internet drove the Obama campaign and in the end helped him raise half a billion dollars. (Vargas, 2008)

Another aspect to the Obama campaign is his interaction with the people. When people sign up on social networking sites they give away their personal information. The Obama campaign used this to their advantage by sending out text messages or emails to their contributors. This helped his supporters feel like they were part of the campaign and to feel like he was working directly for them. "People will continue to expect a conversation, a two-way relationship that is a give and take," said Thomas Gensemer, managing partner of Blue State

Digital, which helped conceive and put into effect Obama's digital outreach. "People who were part of the campaign will opt in to political or governing tracks and those relationships will continue in some form." (Carr, 2008) When Obama runs for reelection he will already have a data base full of supporters to call upon for support so sending them information about campaigns or rallies will be at no cost. This will allow him to focus his efforts elsewhere and to try and reach people that he hasn't already reached.

Web 2.0 has also changed the Presidential Campaign because people tweet, facebook, or post YouTube videos about their support for a particular party. This was very effective in the 2008 election because any time Obama posted something on his facebook fan page others would post the link on their pages and so on and so on. This new phenomenon known as going viral effectively helped the Obama campaign in spreading their messages to all. There are draw backs to web 2.0 from a political stand point as well. Anyone that has internet can create Youtube videos and that content is not regulated. This could potentially be bad during a campaign because there is no gatekeeper on the internet. Bloggers can post whatever they want even if they don't have accurate sources. Although social networking was an effective tool during the Obama campaign it has proven to be negative for other politicians.

Despite being a relatively unknown product the campaign used twitter as a method of campaigning in hopes that it would reach a previously untapped voter base. According to Scott Goodstein "During the campaign, I had to convince folks that it (Twitter) was not just another funny name ... that it actually had some value, we can actually push out real-time broadcasts.", "So we used Twitter a lot for our live feeds (and) connected Twitter to Barack Obama doing something ... Turn on your TV now, watch this, check out what Barack is doing right now." (How Obama used social networking to win , 2009) The use of twitter really helped Obama's

campaign because anytime they had a message or wanted people to tune in to a particular program that Obama was appearing on all they had to do was send out a tweet or a facebook post and people would tune in. This is just one of the many ways Obama's campaign used social networking.

How did the 2008 election attract younger Voters?

This question can be answered in one word... technology but more specifically Social networking. The best example of the power of social networking is on the night of the elections. Obama was joined by 250,000 supporters in Chicago one of the largest audiences for a newly elected President. Only 70,000 people had tickets to this event but another 180,000 people spontaneously gathered on the lawn for this historical night. The majority of the citizens at the celebration were youth. What made this gathering different was the use of social networking. People would post that they were at the gathering on facebook which attracted more and more people to the event. Many young voters came out to watch history in the making. This is also a factor as to why so many young voters participated in this election. It also didn't hurt that the Obama campaign understood what the young voters wanted and how to communicate with them. (Kathy Jackson, 2010) Obama appealed to the youth by using social networking but not only did he use social networking he understood the value it created and understood the importance of the youth vote. Obama became a rock start type figure to the youth of the nation and the 2008 election helped create a lot of future voters. (Shabazz, 2008)

In conclusion, I have found that media is a key factor in Politics and that media trends change throughout time. The key to success and to reaching the young voter is to stay up with current trends. The candidates that understand media and technology seem to be favorable in

elections. One thing that I am certain of is that the 2008 election changed political strategies forever and opened up a new door for campaigning strategist. The 2012 election will be interesting to say the very least. I think that whoever appeals to the youth voters will have the best shot at winning the 2012 election. I also think that social networking will remain a large part of campaigning for years to come or until some other new form of communication and networking hits the market.

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