

# Social media and presidential campaigns

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The just concluded United States of America elections featuring President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney was one of a kind and is one of the first election in the globe where both the presidential candidates utilized the media during their campaigns. The rapid technological advancements and changes in the web fueled this campaign and both the candidates tried as much as possible to lure many voters using the now common social media network. The social media operates in a manner that the person who is able to create a good relationship with people by sharing their interests in related fields and establish a strong presence gets the acceptance of the people. This is what the two presidential candidates were aiming at as they focused on social media during most of their campaigns. The use of digital media networks to campaign was most common with president Obama's campaign because it has a strong and powerful influence on the public that knows how to utilize and embrace it.

The presidential campaigns got support from different social media in different forms and the most common of them were the social media support, celebrity support and branding (Hendricks & Denton, 2010). Social Media Support There are many social media networks where people interact and share ideas. This is the same with political campaigns where the aspirants create their own pages and share links, ideas and promote their strategies. This is one of the things that made the 2012 presidential campaigns and elections unique. The two presidential candidates utilized the social media in different ways. Obama and the Social Media Obama's campaigns focused on digital social networking where he used different social media to reach the American citizens.

This is evident in how he appealed to the voters using Facebook and Twitter where he shared different ideas and links and even, at times, photos of him and his wife hugging. This is quite similar to the previous campaigns where the candidates reached the common people by going to the grounds and interacting with them. The only difference is that they now do this using social media where the majority of people connect with their preferred candidates and evaluate them. The Obama presidential campaign utilized these features and interacted with the people.

The Facebook account of Barack Obama has over 33 million likes and this is where he got to appeal to most of his followers by sharing his ideas and aspirations for the next four years (Harfoush, 2009). The effect of the social media in any presidential campaign is evident in how people like a status or a post and this can act as a reflection of how people feel about the presidential candidate. A good example is the picture shared by President Obama in his Twitter account where he is hugging his wife Michele. This photo received most tweets. His message was short and precise saying “Four more years”.

This is one of the ways which Obama used in the social media to pass on his desire to lead the country for another term. The Facebook account was not an exception as the president has many likes with a difference of almost 21 million likes over Romney. The Obama Facebook app utilized the friend-matching feature by making it a central feature in their account, making it easy to reach its followers and link to their friends. This gave them the chance to reach millions of people at a time without relying on the notification features of Facebook (Hendricks, Denton, 2010). President <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-and-presidential-campaigns/>

Barack Obama made use of underutilized social media sites, like the Reddit, where he initiated a page called Ask Me Anything (AMA) where people could ask him any questions they had and he would answer.

This had a great impact on people, they left over 3.8 million views and 22,000 comments. By answering over 10 comments personally, he appealed to the followers by showing that he could be responsible and answer the questions himself. The questions asked in the block were tough, while others were jokes. He answered questions on the decisions he made during his first term as the president clearing the air on controversial issues.

Romney and Social Media Support Romney had his moments in the digital and social media campaigns, but most of the time he lagged behind in his moves and updates always updating issues months after the Obama team did so. The republican candidate did not focus much on including the digital social media campaigns in his budget and this might be the cause for his late updates and proper use of the much-utilized technology. The Romney campaign team tried to adapt to the new wave of campaigns using the digital media by introducing the external service where volunteers could send money through an online phone and utilized the Sales force where he got a wind of what the figures were as far as the campaigns were concerned. This was not like in campaigns used by Obama's team who knew how to utilize the digital network. The Obama team was always the first to update many online features and beat Romney's team on it (Harfoush, 2009).

However, towards the election time Romney's team seemed to catch up with the trend and created online links and addresses meant to lure their

supporters and reach more people. The mobile application where Romney announced his vice president was a success as people got to their website to see the details of the story. The data management platform was one of the features used to maintain its voters by persuading and motivating them through the online services. The team only applied for a Facebook account as the campaigns drew to a close something that the Obama team had done a long time ago. The campaigns used an app called “Commit to Mitt” where those who used it sent messages to their friends urging them to go and vote for Romney in the forth-coming elections. The similarity with the Obama Facebook apps was that it sent notifications directly to its followers and did not rely on news feed to do this for them.

The Romney campaign in its last days was able to keep up with Obama; s track of using the digital social media to do his campaigns. He deployed messages, apps, photos and graphics in Twitter and Facebook and, at times, used Tumblr. Romney’s team tried their best to use the social media to the advantage, but this was the last minute of rush with no proper plans or the right personnel to help them integrate the new technology to their campaigns. His team tried to do this by conducting online surveys using the panels of online ad-viewers. They did this to see if their ads were effective in reaching the target audience.

They tried to analyze the results of fundraising done online and adapted a feature where donors could donate funds more than once if they wanted to. Digital, social media has done a lot to bring the campaigns of both candidates to the people and they created platforms where each candidate could interact with his followers. The use of internet connection and the <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-and-presidential-campaigns/>

availability of laptops, computers and internet-enabled phones among the citizens made the process easier. People got the chance to get firsthand information about the presidential campaigns and the manifestos of each presidential aspirant. The social digital media did a lot to make the campaigns a success and it did this in many ways.

Discussions The social digital media used their influence and popularity among the youths and the elderly to conduct discussions on whom and what they want in their next president. The social media played a vital role in making this possible. Several platforms were created in Facebook, Twitter, where the followers of the presidential candidates would share their ideas and views, and discuss the latest issues. Such a platform is the interactive map in Facebook where the people got the chance to interact anonymously and share that they had gone the polls and voted and state who they voted for. This application maintained the identity of its followers as anonymous and created a platform where people could look at what was happening in the presidential race (Benenson, 2013). The other application by Facebook to help keep the people updated about the ongoing presidential campaigns was the Election Insights platform that provided an insight on what the people were talking about regarding the two presidential aspirants.

This platform worked in collaboration with CNN. It was an effort to reflect how many people in the different parts of the world and in the United States were talking about the elections and what their view was on the two candidates and their teams. The people in these sites discussed their views and what they thought was right or wrong depending on how they felt. This provided a good chance for the two candidates to evaluate their actions

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based on what the followers were saying on these sites. Another feature of this application was a one on one discussing where people voiced their concerns. People made comments on the posts of the two candidates either on their pages in Facebook or in Twitter.

This feature helped the presidential candidates to gauge their effects on people and get to know how people reacted to them at the grassroots levels. The comments reflected the feelings of the people and if a post got many likes and positive comments then they knew that they were on the right track (Buell & Sigelman, 2008). Youtube also had a role in the presidential race as, being a video service, it provided a good platform where the presidential candidates could reach people in different paths with the live streaming from You Tube. People who missed a live coverage on TV would look for it in You Tube.

It had a special program called the YouTube Elections Hub where the presidential and other political aspirants held debates before the elections. This served as a good platform where President Obama and Governor Romney could reach their audience and pass a message to them live. This is better than Facebook where people get to read the posts and see pictures. Here people get to see the presidential aspirant live on stage and later on comment what they think about the debate. The other feature of social media where the aspirants made use of the audience in the online sectors was the Google+ where both the contestants reached their followers in the hangouts.

Sharing Opinions Twitter was one of the social media networks where the presidential aspirants shared their opinions with their followers. Twitter was, however, the greatest platform where the two political campaign teams used it for an exit-poll survey. This is where they predicted the outcomes of the elections with the comments and feedbacks from their followers. Twitter provided a good platform where they used their followers to predict who was going to win just the same way they do in predicting the box office outcomes. This was the same case for Instagram where the aspirant's campaign managers posted images of their candidates tagged with their names and a few quotes of their agenda.

This digital media posted over 250, 000 photos of election related matters and Obama had the most shared links with 1. 27 million hash tags under his name. Romney, on the other hand, had only 260, 700 times hash tags which were a small number when compared to Obama's hash tags on the same media (Knickerbocker, 2012). Election-Themed Apps The digital social media also served as a good platform where the candidates posted different election-themed apps in the different web pages. This was a campaign strategy meant to reach those people who interact through the internet more and have less time to go to campaigns.

This is a new technology where the candidates use different social media blogs to post their apps and appeal to their voters to view their manifestos. This feature was seen in most of Facebook accounts and websites where the candidates posted latest application with a different message appealing to the public to vote for them. This was a tactic by the campaign managers to stage their presence in the social media. Raising Funds The presidential <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-and-presidential-campaigns/>



candidates in the US campaigns used the social media to raise money for their campaigns. This was done through accounts like Facebook. They made sure that they gave a platform for the followers willing to give donations and funds for their campaigns chance to contribute in different ways.

The social media changed the previous perception that donors would only give funds once, as it became clear that there are some supporters who were willing to donate to the campaigns more than once (Mansfield, 2012).

The two presidential aspirants reached the masses using the platforms provided by different social media networks. This is evident in how the Twitter and Facebook accounts were created purposely for the elections. These platforms served as a feature where the presidential aspirants would interact with the people by sharing photos, election theme apps, ideas, manifestos and their campaign locations in the next few days. The other way they reached people in the social media was through interactive sites where they posted and gave the followers a chance to ask them any questions and then they later answered them. This made it easier for the candidates to reach masses of people - something that might not be possible through other campaign medium.

This is because people are shifting their attention from radios, televisions, and focusing on the social media networks like Facebook and Twitter for the latest updates on many political, social and economic issues. The campaigns got their messages to the public with photos and video clips of them doing different activities, which they believed would appeal to the voters. Barack Obama was keen on using this as a way to reach his voters. Most of the time he would post photos on different social media sites where he was giving

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high five to children or photos of him and his daughters doing different activities together. This was in an effort to appeal to people and show them his human side and his role as a father and husband.

The use of slogans was also seen in the campaigns with the presidential aspirants posting their slogans and messages on social network sites for their followers to view and evaluate (Miller, 2012). SponsorshipsThe presidential candidates needed money and funds for their campaigns and they used different means to get people to fund them. One of the ways they got their funds was through the celebrity branding and businesses faces. This is a kind of promotion where the celebrities, especially musicians and famous actors, get to feature in promotional ads of a certain product. The same case was with the presidential campaigns where the two candidates utilized the services of famous singers and other celebrities to help them raise funds to use during the campaigns. This is a feature businesses used to promote their products by using familiar faces that people know and can relate to.

The use of Hollywood celebrities by Obama appealed to many people who watch Hollywood movies. The campaign trail by both parties tried as much as possible to invite celebrities to attend their rallies and the Obama team even used Tom Hanks to narrate a documentary titled “ The Road We’ve Travelled.” All this was in an effort to reach as many people as possible using the faces they are familiar with (Shade, Campbell & Coenen, 2003). The use of celebrities by both parties gave them financial backing from the millionaire celebrities and actors who pledged their support to either of the presidential aspirants. This is the same case with branding where they use <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-and-presidential-campaigns/>

the presidential candidate's initial or portrait to sell their products and, eventually, using most preferred candidate. This was used in different brands like coffee branding where mugs with the names of the two candidates were sold and the person taking coffee with a cup with Romney's initials was campaigning for him at that particular moment.

The use of celebrities in campaigns is not a new thing and most of the past election candidates have benefited from major faces backing them up during the campaigns. The use of the prominent people in the campaigns acts as an incentive that attracts the fans of such a person towards the candidate they are supporting. The 2012 elections were full of musicians and actors each campaigning for their preferred candidate in their own way. The candidates themselves are also brands and they have to do everything in their power to make sure they market themselves. This is why they must use their talents to their advantage. The businesses focus on creating a positive image of their products in the face of their target customers and this was the same case with the candidates.

They had to make sure that they leave a positive mark on the hearts of their followers and in the process attract more people to join their side. Conclusion In the past years, social media was just a site where friends and family would connect and share their lives. However, this has changed in the past few years with businesses utilizing the large number of people at these sites to market their products and services. The 2008 campaigns tried to use the internet pages to do their campaigns, but they were not as huge as those in the just concluded elections. The 2012 elections saw both candidates turn to social digital media networks to conduct their campaigns. This was driven by <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-and-presidential-campaigns/>

the fact that many people, especially the young people, are now much involved into social media, as compared to other kinds of media.

The reason for the preference may be due to technological advancements where the youths prefer reading news updates on their phones rather than sitting down and watching TV. The difference in utilizing social media had a great impact on the outcome of the elections. The Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram formed platforms where the candidates aired their views and shared their campaign issues with their followers. The same platforms acted as a discussion site where the candidates and their follower engaged on different topics.