

Democratic Process and Social Media: A Study of Us Presidential Election 2012

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Abstract

Social media offers innovative opportunities for political actors, political institutions and the public to interact with one another. Drawing on examples from United States and the United Kingdom, this paper outlines how social media are currently being used in the political arena.

In America, many parliamentarians have created accounts on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, MySpace and Flickr. The content posted on these sites may relate to policy issues and the official work of politicians or to aspects of their personal lives. All four political parties represented in American Senate have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Flickr. Each party also has its own YouTube channel on which news clips, advertisements, and other video recordings related to the party and its officials are shared with the public. Links to these accounts are included on the official websites of each party, along with features that allow users to "bookmark" and share elements of the party's websites with their online networks. Each party website also has unique social media features.

Social media has become vital campaign medimum; connecting candidates with followers Barack Obama Dubbed 'The First Internet President' created an effective campaign on the Web. In 2008 22% Americans were using social networking sites, 03% signed up as a 'friend' of a candidate and 07% received campaign information from websites. In 2008, Obama reached out to a younger audience and used free advertising of internet and in 2011 Obama organized the first 'Twitter town hall meeting' answering questions from public on Twitter and Mitt Romney's presidential campaign is the first to buy a trending; #RomneyRyan2012 is the official hashing of the campaign. Social networks have emerged as a key tools in the month's long US presidential campaign, with both Obama and Romney staging major pushes on popular social networks like Facebook and Twitter to draw in supporters and get them to go out and vote. Barack Obama brought his sophisticated social media campaign to an emotional climax, proclaiming his victory on Twitter and Facebook just as TV networks were breaking the news

Democratic Obama overcome the burden of a slow economic recovery and high unemployment to beat Republican foe Mitt Romney after a relentless get-out-the-vote push on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit and other platforms. After his victory he tweeted to his 22 million followers 'This happened because of you, Thank you,' An election victory tweet from President Barack Obama -- "Four more years " with a picture of him hugging his wife -- was the most retweeted ever,¹² but the US election was topped by the Olympics as the most tweeted event this year. Obama's tweet was rewetted (repeated) more than 810,000 times, Twitter said as it published a list of the most tweeted events in 2012.

Within hours, that Tweet simultaneously became the most retweeted of 2012, and the most retweeted ever. In fact, retweets of that simple message came from people in more than 200 countries around the world," Twitter spokeswoman Rachael Horwitz said.

Twitter users were busiest during the final vote count for the presidential elections, sending 327,452 tweets per minute on election night on their way to a tally of 31 million election tweets for the day. The 2012 Olympic Games in London had the most overall tweets of any event, with 150 million sent over the 16 days. Usain Bolt's golden win in the 200 meters topped 80,000 tweets per minute but he did not achieve the highest Olympic peak on Twitter.¹⁵ That was seen during the closing ceremony when 115,000 tweets per minute were sent as 1990s British pop band the Spice Girls performed. Syria, where a bloody civil war still plays out, was the most talked about country in 2012 but sports and pop culture dominated the tally of tweets. According to Twitter, the election has become the most tweeted about event in US political history, with some 31 million Pool-related posts fired out throughout the day.

At its core, the debate surrounding the political uses of social media centers on the question of what effect, if any, these new technologies have on our system of representative democracy. Proponents argue that these technologies promote accountability, transparency and public engagement with political institutions and figures. Taken together, the evidence from our analyses provides a compelling case that Social media played important role in the US presidential election 2012 races and that social networking sites have the capability of affecting the electoral process.

Social media offers innovative opportunities for political actors, political institutions and the public to interact with one another.¹ Drawing on examples from United States and the United Kingdom, this paper outlines how social media are currently being used in the political arena.

‘Tools made available by social media have encouraged alternative voices to enter the political arena, voices that in previous years have been muted. As a result of technology, participation in the political process is accessible and direct engagement is feasible. Through social sharing, social media users have the opportunity to broadcast political messages. By sharing a campaign or candidates’ message, users are becoming advocates of that message. Passing political messages along to friends can have revolutionary effects in enhancing the democratic processes.²

Social media are becoming increasingly popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages, learn about the interests and needs of constituents and the broader public, raise funds, and build networks of support. These activities often take place on privately run social networking sites that allow political figures and institutions to communicate with the public in unmediated, high-profile fora. In America, many parliamentarians have created accounts on popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, MySpace and Flickr. The content posted on these sites may relate to policy issues and the official work of politicians or to aspects of their personal lives. All four political parties represented in American Senate have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Flickr. Each party also has its own YouTube channel on which news clips, advertisements, and other video recordings related to the party and its officials are shared with the public. Links to these accounts are included on the official websites of each party, along with features that allow users to “bookmark” and share elements of the party’s websites with their online networks. Each party website also has unique social media features.³

Social media are also used as campaign tools. For example, in 2012, the US presidency campaign Obama For America (OFA) drew on a database of approximately 13 million e-mail addresses, an active community blog, and a digital net work of volunteers to raise money, encourage voter turnout and support a grassroots approach to election campaigning.⁴

According to on media strategist who worked on the campaign, social media served as the foundation of an overarching plan that attempted to connect online networking with offline campaign participation.⁵ For example, those registered on the OFA website were encouraged to plan fundraising parties and canvassing activities with fellow supporters in their area. Similarly, the “get out the vote” campaigns run by both Barack Obama and Republican Party presidential candidate John McCain relied heavily on social media.

In the age of social media, Facebook and Twitter played a transformative role in the US presidential election 2012 and provided the lens through which we view it. Facebook and Twitter provides platform for politicians, candidates, voters, journalists, and spectators to find and spread information. For politicians and candidates, it provides a space to directly interact and engage with voters. For voters across the nation, it provides a wealth of information on state, local, and the nationwide election that yields the power to mobilize voters to get out the vote. For journalists and spectators, it opens up the dialogue surrounding the election, allowing journalists to use its vast user-base to crowd source, fact-check, and gain insight into what Americans are talking about online.⁶

A social network is a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships. When a computer network connects people, it is a social network. It can include and accommodate all types of individuals, in large numbers, who may not have known one another previously. On the other hand, online communities tend to be loosely structured networks with weak identity ties that are difficult to control and have difficulty making decisions. Online communities increasing fragmentation in the political system, political elites, institutions and organized groups.⁷

Facebook and Twitter were aware that their site was growing in popularity as a space where candidates and voters could interact and recognized its potential as a vehicle for enriching the democratic process. In response, Social media created a complementary section within the main site called Election Pulse. This feature provided generic profiles to candidates running for a congressional or gubernatorial seat, with the candidate's name, office, state, and party affiliation already posted to the profile. A listing of candidate profiles grouped by states and congressional districts was provided so that specific candidates could be easily located by members.⁸

Us Presidential Election 2012 and the Role of Social Media

Social media has become vital campaign medium, connecting candidates with followers Barack Obama Dubbed ‘The First Internet President’.⁹ Created an effective campaign on the Web. In 2008 22% Americans were using social networking sites, 03% signed up as a ‘friend’ of a candidate and 07% received campaign information from websites.¹⁰ In 2008, Obama reached out to a younger audience and used free advertising of internet and in 2011 Obama organized the first ‘Twitter town hall meeting’ answering questions from public on Twitter and Mitt Romney’s presidential campaign is the first to buy a trending; #RomneyRyan2012 is the official hashing of the campaign.¹¹ Social networks have emerged as a key tools in the month’s long US presidential campaign, with both Obama and Romney staging major pushes on popular social networks like Facebook and Twitter to draw in supporters and get them to go out and vote.

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YEAR OF ELECTION	NAME OF CANDIDATE	FOLLOWERS ON WEB
2008	McCain	0.6%
2008	Obama	2.8%
2012	Romney	8.2%
2012	Obama	48.8%

(Comparisons of explosion of followers on social sites)

150 million sent over the 16 days. Usain Bolt's golden win in the 200 meters topped 80,000 tweets per minute but he did not achieve the highest Olympic peak on Twitter.¹⁵ That was seen during the closing ceremony when 115,000 tweets per minute were sent as 1990s British pop band the Spice Girls performed.¹⁶ Syria, where a bloody civil war still plays out, was the most talked about country in 2012 but sports and pop culture dominated the tally of tweets. According to Twitter, the election has become the most tweeted about event in US political history, with some 31 million Pool-related posts fired out throughout the day.¹⁷

Conclusion

At its core, the debate surrounding the political uses of social media centers on the question of what effect, if any, these new technologies have on our system of representative democracy. Proponents argue that these technologies promote accountability, transparency and public engagement with political institutions and figures.¹⁸ Sceptics argue that these technologies are too time-consuming and transform Politics into a marketing game dominated by special interests and well-resourced political actors.¹⁹ It is too early to determine whether these potential benefits and risks are being, or will be, realized. What is clear, however, is that social media are quickly becoming standard communications tools for political figures and institutions and the citizens they serve. Only further experience and analysis will resolve the current uncertainty about their benefits and harms for representative democracy.

Taken together, the evidence from our analyses provides a compelling case that Social media played important role in the US presidential election 2012 races and that social networking sites have the capability of affecting the electoral process.

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