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How Social Media Can be Used to Gain a Competitive Advantage in Political Campaigns

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to understand what is needed to successfully use social media to gain a competitive advantage in a political campaign. Social media on the Internet is a relatively young topic and therefore research has just recently begun to make observations. The underlying factor, however, is the need to develop a marketing strategy that embraces new technology. This paper reviews Erik Qualman's "Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business" and its in depth coverage of today's social media world. Furthermore, this paper examines the precedent set by President Obama during his 2008 Presidential -Social Media- Campaign, how social media then progressed through the 2010 Mid-Term Elections and why social media is a necessary component of any political campaign today. I argue that there are seven requirements for a successful social media campaign: utilize multiple platforms of social media, use social media to fundraise, go viral, establish a two-way conversation, make it personable, be transparent and keep it simple.

Keywords: social media, political campaigns, marketing

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BE USED TO GAIN A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

By

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Introduction

Social media is the culmination of the Web 2.0 revolution. Social media is as much about establishing a community as it is about communicating within that community. It includes micro-blogs such as Twitter, social network sites such as Facebook, wikis such as Wikipedia and sharing websites such as YouTube. The Web 2.0 revolution has introduced us with the ability to collect much more information than we originally assumed. With a constantly connected society, we begin to rely on those connections to the extent that they become a part of our daily lives, completed without much thought. Erik Qualman, author of "Socialnomics", examines the statement "It's the economy, stupid" coined by James Carville in 1992 and explains that social media transforms that to "It's a people-driven economy, stupid" (2009, p. xvii). The notion that we as consumers do in fact generate the ideas behind products and services based on our needs may not be a new one, but the realization that it is the only option is in fact very young. Social media introduces the world to a newfound trust and value in the consumer opinion and how companies and organizations address those will foretell their inevitable demise or conquer. "Social media is creating something that I think eventually is going to be very healthy for our economy, and that is institutional brand integrity," John Gerzema, Chief Insights Officer at Young & Rubicam (2009, Interview).

Social media has already transformed the news industry, with many young Americans receiving their news from social networks or blog sites. One of the most famous of these sites is the Huffington Post, founded by Arianna Huffington. Called the Internet Newspaper, the Huffington Post is built on social media and its mass

presence on the online community. The Huffington Post gathers blogs from across the Internet and posts them on their site, with a number of staff that contribute to actual post-written articles. The Huffington Post's approach to social media garnered such a following that media giant AOL purchased the post for a reported \$315 million, further proving that social media is today's standard. Arianna Huffington (2011, San Antonio Post) spoke on social media, stating "There's a real convergence between old media and new media...Newspapers are doing a lot of great things online. And sites, like the Huffington Post, are doing a lot of things that old media identify with: original reporting and a reverence for fact checking, accuracy and fairness." She believes that using social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook will help create a better online presence for journalists. It is because of sites like the Huffington Post and social networking that social media, as a whole, has been built into a mass empire that is not controlled by any single organization, but by the people who use it.

Social media puts the power back into the hands of consumers through the most believable form of advertisement: word of mouth. People value what other people, especially those they trust, have to say. Social networks, one of the most primary forms of social media, have the indisputable ability to even replace search engines on the Internet. Search engines, like Google, need to be aware of the power of social media and the risks that come with dismissing it. People are beginning to search for products and read reviews of those products on social media sites such as Facebook, simply because of how much weight they place on the opinions of their social community. The undeniable power that comes with social media is not always

a positive one. As many brands have been hailed with success through their utilization of social media, others have been crucified by it. Stride Gum and United Airlines have enjoyed success and failure, respectfully, because of social media. However, social media is not solely built for businesses and can, and should, be used by political hopefuls. Perhaps the most successful social media campaign did not come from a business, but a political candidate: President Obama.

President Obama, for various reasons, began using social media early in his campaign and built a weapon that was strong enough to defeat the “Clinton Political Machine” in the Democratic Primaries. The 2008 General Election captured the highest voter turnout in generations, with approximately 64 percent of those eligible, over 130 million people casting ballots, setting a record for the overall number. President Obama used social media for its relatively inexpensive cost, when compared to traditional marketing tools, and campaigned to such a large number of people that he was able to raise enough money, with donations ranging from under five dollars to thousands, to fund a political arsenal. Obama’s strengths lied with younger voters, as they were the heaviest users of social media at the time of the 2008 election. In particular, Facebook played a vital role in developing the Obama brand. By some counts, Obama had an astonishing 5.1 million fans on Facebook, with 3.1 million coming from his official page. President Obama merely introduced the political world to the enormous power that lies with social media. We have yet to actually trust it completely, but if elections since are to be a foretelling of where we’re headed, social media campaigns will become the political standard.

Literary Review

Social Media on the Internet

Cameron Chapman, of Webdesigner Depot argues that there are countless variations of social media on the Internet, from general social networking sites such as Facebook to niche sites for “virtually every special interest”. He introduces the concept that social media has developed as social solutions to just about every need. He claims that the first of our modern social networking sites was a site called Six Degrees, which launched in 1997. It introduced the concept of a profile that one could share with their friends on the site. A site called LiveJournal took a different approach to social networking. They created pages that were only blog updates that a user would create on the site and the post it when completed. Chapman exclaims that a major advance took place when Friendster was created in 2002. Friendster is still active today, and has over 90 million registered users, with the majority coming from Asian markets. Friendster introduced the concept of meeting friends of friends, instead of complete strangers to expand your own personal network. Sites continued to develop, with Hi5, LinkedIn, Facebook and MySpace joining the crowd. All of these precursors and current trending social sites developed the concept of live updates and blog posts, allowing users to be constantly connected to their network of friends. Chapman claims that just as social media has evolved over the past decade, it will continue to grow until something better comes along.

Social media has been gradually increasing its presence in the political sphere, with 2008 being the greatest single increase and perhaps the bubble burst for future campaigning. Greg Gaskill, President of Mr-Seo.com, questions exactly

how President Obama used social media, and if in fact it did win him the election. He looks at the campaign's official posts and videos, and also examined how popular un-official videos were. One of the un-official videos that garnered a large online following was known as "Obama's Girl". "Obama's Girl's" videos were viewed over a million times, generating free and credible word of mouth advertising. What's more, other videos were created in response to "Obama's Girl" and finding their way onto late night shows. Greg Gaskill also mentions that blogs played a significant role in the election. He points out that after the Democratic and Republican Conventions, Obama and McCain had 500 million and 150 million, respectively, blog posts across the Internet. Social media encompasses so many different activities online, that it is necessary to embrace it and allow the people the opportunity to contribute.

A great advantage for President Obama was his Internet presence, and David Plouffe, his campaign manager, gave his thoughts in an interview with the Washington Post, a year after the historic election. When asked the question why he believed their social media presence did better than others, he was quoted saying "I think we had technology at the heart of our campaign, twinned with the grassroots. We built a web site that became a "home" for millions of Americans. And due to great staff work and suggestions from our volunteers who were using the site and MyBO, our social networking site, it improved in functionality, speed and content over the two years...We set out to have a site that would rival people's other digital experiences every day - amazon.com, espn.com etc." It is evident that his campaign stressed the need for a digital footprint and they followed through on that need, constantly evolving with the social and political world.

Keith Reinhard, Chairman of DDB Worldwide, said, "Barack Obama is three things you want in a brand. He is new, different, and attractive. That's as good as it gets." Social media is more about the consumer than the overarching brand, and the Obama campaign was aware of that. They trusted social media and exploited social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Valeria Maltoni of Conversation Agent examined Obama's social media presence. She notes that the numbers were astonishing in and of themselves. She states that the Obama Campaign had over 13 million people on their email list; 3 million online donors; 5 million "friends" on social networking sites; 8.5 million monthly visitors to MyBarackObama.com, with over 2 million profiles; just shy of 2,000 YouTube videos, watched a record-shattering 80 million times; almost a half a million (442,000) unofficial user generated videos; 3 million people signed up for the text messaging service; and 3 million phone calls placed in the last four days of the campaign. Valeria Maltoni says, "All of the online activities generated many stories, regardless of where you were or chose to be during the campaign, you had a voice. Social media was orchestrated to integrate with traditional media and campaign activities. Many media - one story. Yet it adapted to the medium so that everyone felt they were invited to the conversation." She claims that this was Obama's strength, aside from the sheer numbers of his online operation.

“Socialnomics”

Social media is a phenomenon that has occurred during the Web 2.0 revolution, bringing people closer together in a virtual world full of blogs, wikis, social networks and the like. Recently, many scholars have tried to understand the “who, what, when, where and why’s” that make up social media. Perhaps one of the more recent, “Socialnomics” goes a step further in examining social media to explain its substantial benefits. Erik Qualman (2009, p. 32), the author of “Socialnomics” describes how “Despite niche fragmentation caused by the Internet, people still desire an understanding of what the majority is doing. Social media is that mechanism.” Qualman continues to argue that social media makes people more productive than if they were not in use of it. One of the first examples that he uses to describe this idea involves a woman standing in line at a grocery store on the fourth of July. Qualman illustrates how someone can stay up to date with social media during their time waiting in line to pay, in turn becoming more productive. Although that particular example may be a stretch, Qualman explains that it is not far off and the power of social media has not reached its full potential.

Throughout “Socialnomics,” Qualman maintains that social media will remain constant over the coming years, and that businesses need to understand this model. He argues that newspapers and magazines, for example, cannot afford to use the same subscription-based business model that they have traditionally used when expanding online. The reason is that the Internet offers countless resources, including blogs, who Qualman claims are a direct competitor to traditional news sites. He explains that most bloggers write for the “sheer joy if it” and how they are a

free service provided to the consumer with relative ease. Qualman describes this phenomenon as user generated news and provides the example of when micro-blog posts broke the story of the 2009 US Airways water crash landing in New York and the 2008 California forest fires. He claims that these sites will play an important role in the future. As with most scholars, Qualman asserts that social media has opened the door to the news finding us, or being pushed, rather than we, as consumers, looking for it.

Social media brings with it the power and reach of the Internet, while creating the ability to catalog data through the process of “tagging.” Most people understand tagging from social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, where you have the capacity to mention, or “tag”, a friend (or topic) in a post or uploaded video/picture content. Qualman likens this process to how you would label a manila folder in a cabinet. In addition to tagging, social media introduces us to the concept of viral marketing. Viral marketing can best be defined as “marketing designed to disseminate information (as about a new product) very rapidly by making it likely to be passed from person to person especially via electronic means” (Merriam-Webster). It is because of viral marketing that many marketing campaigns are based solely on the Internet, in hopes that it will spread like wildfire and draw mass attention. Because of the enormous power of viral marketing campaigns, agencies that specialize solely in creating viral campaigns have been established. Thinkmodo and Mindcomet are two such agencies, whose services extend only to that of viral marketing. Even though they share aspirations of creating viral marketing campaigns, their approaches differ to such an extent that it proves how

diverse this area of marketing already has become.

In the beginning of “Socialnomics”, Qualman mentions the advantages and disadvantages of viral marketing. Viral marketing can be detrimental to a company when the talk is negative. A situation at American Airlines provides an example of what not to do. During April 2008, American Airlines had to ground over 3,000 flights across four days because of equipment not meeting standards. American Airlines did not realize that social media was the tool to help ease the pain, and missed their opportunity to address concerns. One of the benefits of viral marketing is that not all great ideas need to be generated within the marketing department. An interesting example of this would be the social media phenomenon of “Dancing Matt.” Matt Harding was a video game developer who realized that he did not want to continue that as his profession. After quitting his job, he traveled the world and filmed himself doing this “dance” that he had created. What makes this interesting is that Stride Gum, owned by Cadbury, realized the potential his videos had and offered their assistance. Stride Gum was willing to help cover the transportation costs of the travel while Matt simply continued to do what he did. Stride did suggest getting others to dance with Matt but, other than that, they allowed Matt to keep control of his project. As Qualman puts it, Stride succeeded because they left well enough alone. “Dancing Matt” currently has over 32 million views on YouTube alone, and is arguably one of the most successful viral marketing campaigns.

A continuation on viral marketing throughout social media is the idea that all of this “mass transparency” may not be a good thing. Qualman discusses how businesses, and even people, may not want to be so vulnerable and open to critics.

This is exactly why the most common tip about your, say, Facebook profile is to not have anything you would not want a potential employer to see on your page.

Businesses react in a similar way, by wanting to defend their brand. Qualman says that one of the best ways is through technological advances in micro-blogging tools such as Twitter, FriendFeed, and Six Apart. Corporations can monitor any chatter about their brand by simply searching for it within these websites. An incredible example of this is Comcast. Comcast, as Qualman mentions, monitors sites like Twitter for any tweets about their brand. If anything is mentioned they have their technical department provide a response within minutes. He uses an example of how someone tweeted about the lack of quality in the Comcast HD signal. Moments later, Comcast replied to the post and the following day called this person to schedule a technician to come out later that day to fix the problem. After all of that, this person then tweeted positively about Comcast, providing free and credible PR for the brand. Qualman (2009, p. 42) contends that corporations and individuals are willing to use social media, and cooperate with its openness, because social media is “a way to stay connected...their ultimate desire is to feel a part of something larger than themselves.” However, this openness is not short of responsibility, as aforementioned with Facebook profile pages.

Qualman continues with his approach towards social media, claiming that the invention of social media has focused our society on a more “me” centered focus. He believes that even though we are more self-centered, it is more beneficial to society as a whole. He (2009, p. 10) uses the example that “what once happened around the water cooler...is now happening in real time” to explain that we are constantly

bragging. Qualman (2009, p. 59) believes that this is beneficial to society because it “encourages more people to engage in productive or charitable activities.” Social media allows people to essentially inventory their daily lives, creating an online diary of sorts for others to read and enjoy. It also provides the ultimate discussion, as Qualman argues, because the current generation is past e-mail and would rather use social media sites such as Facebook to deliver messages for them. Qualman does mention that there is a disadvantage that has developed with social media, and that is that “interpersonal communication skills have been retarded.” He claims that, because of our reliance on these tools through social media, we no longer stress the need, or importance, of face-to-face or verbal communications.

In “Socialnomics”, Qualman introduces the term socialommerce, which he defines as the “term that encompasses the transactional, search and marketing components of social media” (2009, p.89). Simply put, people value the opinion of other people. He argues that we will one day not search for products and services, but they will find us, and we will trust the opinion of our peers. A prime example of this is Angieslist.com, a website that harnesses the power of word of mouth advertising to recommend products and services in your local area. Qualman argues that with social networks, this sharing of information and opinions will be even easier. The notion that social networks could replace even search engines for products and services is based on the principle that we, as people, value what everyone else is doing. Qualman (2009, p.91) provides an example of how this could be beneficial. If you were in the market for a baby seat and you went to search for one on a search engine, you may find some irrelevant links along with some paid

ads, and perhaps a few useful links that required research. If you performed the same search on one of your social networking sites, you could find that some of your friends may have bought them recently and posted their own reviews, allowing you to see which babies seat your friends recommended. The practicality of socialommerce is growing and could potentially redefine how consumers do business.

Qualman continues his overview of socialnomics by discussing how social media drove President Obama's success in the 2008 election. He likens this process to how President John F. Kennedy won over Americans in the 1960 Election, with a relatively new media: television (2009, p.61). President Kennedy's opponent, Richard Nixon, did not use this up-and-coming media to his advantage, much like John McCain did not embrace social media in 2008. The power of social media may not have been truly recognized by the Obama Campaign until after the Democratic Primaries, when President Obama's real advantage over his opponent came largely into play. Qualman mentions that on Election Day, President Obama had over 3.1 million fans on his Facebook Page alone, contrasted to the 614,000 of John McCain (2009, p.62-63). He adds that their Official Twitter pages differed drastically as well, with 113,000 following President Obama and a mere 4,650 following John McCain (2009, p.63). Numbers aside, President Obama and John McCain had vastly different bases, with the younger, more technologically savvy favoring Obama and the older, more traditional favoring McCain. The differing bases led to differing approaches towards campaigning, neither right nor wrong, but one much more powerful than the other.

While social networks provided undeniable support to President Obama's campaign, Qualman introduces the concept that search engines could provide measurable data to, as he suggests, predict the outcome of an election (2009, p.72). Although this concept was not new for marketers, it developed into a useful tool for presidential campaigns. Thirty days prior to the election, Obama searches outperformed McCain searches almost 3:1 (2009, p.73). While Obama did not win the election on the same odds, he did win with by a considerable margin, thus fueling the debate of whether or not search engines could possible play a larger role than traditionally understood. During April of 2008, Google Insights data reported that for every Clinton search, there were 1.60 Obama searches and .48 McCain searches (2009, p.72). That trend continued to build up to the 3:1 ratio thirty days before the election. Although data like this is extremely hard to ultimately determine its effectiveness, it begins the discussion on what, and how social media can be used in today's world. Obama's campaign noticed this trend early and began to build up their search results based on what exactly people seeking (2009, p.73). The campaign also used this data for marketing research purposes, developing a powerful brand under the Obama name.

Qualman makes the bold statement that "Obama would not be president without the Internet" (2009, p.87). He explains that the threat of being left behind is too great to not utilize social media and expand your brand, whether a business or politician. Qualman argues that companies, especially the Fortune 500, should examine Obama's success with social media and expand their brands, similarly to how President Obama did throughout his campaign (2009, p.87). Part of how

Obama used social media was the faith he put in people to increase the power of his brand. He truly let people take ownership of his brand and they in turn grew it to unanticipated levels of success. Perhaps the largest benefit to President Obama's campaign from social media was the ability to raise funds through these websites. By allowing people to donate any amount of money they could, however low, Obama was able to grow a powerful arsenal of campaign funds that he used to effectively promote his brand across the country. Obama set numerous records for his ability to raise money at unprecedented levels.

2010 Mid-Term Elections

Throughout the 2010 Mid-Term Elections, social media played a vital role to the majority of political campaigns. Some campaigns merely had a presence, while others exploited that presence to a greater extent. There was also the introduction of even newer technology to complement social media. An example of this was Congressman Southerland's social media approach. Not only did Steve Southerland have a social media presence, but also he exploited it. He introduced new ways to do so, incorporating smartphones like never seen before. A feature of today's smartphones is the ability to scan a barcode utilizing a specifically designed application and the phone's camera, as long as the barcode is coded correctly. Steve Southerland's social media team integrated this into his campaign, and advertised this to younger voters. Southerland's barcode, when scanned, would send the phone to YouTube, with a personalized message from Steve asking for support and then

thanking them for taking the time for him. It was a step into the doorway of where social media political campaigns will be going.

Steve Southerland, a Republican, ran against a long time Democratic incumbent, Congressman Allen Boyd, in a heavily Democratic district. Boyd's Campaign was a much more traditional campaign and did not incorporate social media. It is because of that reason that Florida's 2nd District elected a Republican for the first time since the Civil War. Steve Southerland's Communications Director, Matt McCullough (2011), responded to a request on the campaign's focus on social media saying, "Social media was important to Congressman Southerland's campaign because it allowed us to cut through the clutter of the daily news cycle and communicate directly with voters. While TV time and direct mail will always play a huge part in campaign messaging, you are seeing an increase in social networking because of its immediate and direct impact on the grassroots."

McCullough further states "Facebook and Twitter, as we are witnessing now in Egypt, are powerful tools for mobilizing your base. While independent voters often play the deciding role in close elections, it was clear early that whichever party was better able to mobilize its base had the distinct advantage. Republicans had the wind at our backs this election, but I think it would have been less significant without social networking creating a consistent narrative with voters." The Southerland Campaign clearly understood the need for social media, and they capitalized on the technologies abilities to advertise their brand. He mentioned how they utilized Facebook and Twitter to not only build crowds at events, but also spread news about their opponent, particularly when it came down to his votes.

Social media allowed them the opportunity to mention how their opponent voted “within seconds” of the actual vote taking place, much faster than traditional media outlets of television and even newspapers. He closed with “As younger Americans gravitate away from traditional news sources, I think that that social media will continue to play a larger and larger part in campaigns.” Congressman Southerland’s campaign recognized the primary users of social media and exploited that advantage during the 2010 Mid-Term Elections, soundly defeating a favored incumbent.

Katie Boer of KVAL News, a CBS affiliate in Eugene, Oregon, reported on the day of the 2010 Mid-Term Elections that with the addition of “YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, voters can find themselves flooded with information.” This is true, and this is necessary because it gives people the power to support candidates that fit their needs and political beliefs. She interviewed Steve Candee, a Political Science professor at Lane Community College, who said, “We’re becoming so much more of a convenience oriented society...I can just go to the computer and get the information.” Many people gather all of the information they need to make a decision on whom to support politically, by searching the Internet. She mentions how the micro-blogging website Twitter, “had barely hit the national spotlight” in the last election, and now joins YouTube and Facebook as the necessary social media platforms.

Maggie Creamer of the Lodi News-Sentinel of Lodi, California, says, “Social media is no longer just for keeping up with friends or finding out about the latest celebrity gossip. Candidates from the national to the local level are using Facebook,

Twitter, YouTube and other social media sites to connect with potential voters. The 11th Congressional District in California was a contested seat in where both the incumbent and challenger utilized social media in their daily activities. The incumbent, Rep. Jerry McNerney, Democrat, had a background in engineering and felt that it was necessary to embrace new technology as a campaign tool. His spokeswoman, Sara Hersh, said, "It helps people stay in touch with us...People are busy working, taking kids to school, and this is an easy way to stay up-to-date." The Republican challenger, David Harmer, used social media to post real-time updates. Harmer spokeswoman Melissa Subbotin said, "It has really revolutionized how we campaign today, and allows us to connect to people in a way we never thought possible." She went on to explain that social media holds candidates accountable, and that that is a true advantage for voters.

The article gathered information from a Republican strategist in Washington, D.C. Steve Pearson, co-founder of ProjectVirginia, evaluated the sites of candidates for California's 11th Congressional district. The first thing that Pearson mentioned was that the campaigns could emphasize social media more, and that it would be beneficial to do so. Pearson explained "Facebook and Twitter accounts can hurt candidates if they are not used correctly." Additionally, he mentioned that the candidates needed to respond more to the voters that leave feedback on open forums and dialogues because it not only answers their questions, but also gives candidates a personable feel. The need for staying relevant has to be balanced with the need for staying up-to-date. Having YouTube videos from 2008 that may be relevant in 2010, but some users may realize the date and consider them to be out-

of-date. Pearson said, "You can't give the same stump speech. You have to come up with new stuff every day...that's the fundamental challenge of the new medium."

One of the biggest questions comes from equating social media followers to actual voters. In Arizona, Governor Jan Brewer had 318,000 more Facebook fans than her Democratic opponent, Terry Goddard, while also maintaining a wide lead in the polls, just days before the election. Candidates for the House of Representatives promptly embraced social media during the 2010 elections, with representatives like Michele Bachmann garnering approximately 3,184 Facebook followers the week leading up to the election, more than any other House candidate. While each of the aforementioned candidates won their respective campaigns, it is still relatively early to decide exactly how social media is impacting campaigns. Matthew Hindman, a media professor at George Washington University and an expert on online politics said, "Online campaigning is certainly important and the dynamics are shifting in a social media direction...at the same time, I think the jury is still out on how much this is going to matter."

FoxNews.com reported that Andrew Noyes, a Facebook spokesman, had said that the social networking site had identified a pattern. Noyes said, "We learned in most of those cases, the candidate most engaged on Facebook did, in fact, win."

Stephen Clark (2011) of FoxNews.com stated, "Social media experts agree that Facebook is a force to be reckoned with by political candidates." Social media was necessary for nearly three quarters of all campaigns during the 2010 Mid-Term Elections, as it was able to predict approximately 74% of the House of

Representative winners. Troy Rogers of TheDeadbolt.com reported that out of

“ninety-three contested seats, sixty-nine candidates that won had more Facebook followers than their competition.” In Florida, Democrat Alan Grayson lost to Republican challenger Daniel Webster, despite having nearly six times as many Facebook fans. Brian Womack of Bloomberg News also concluded that social media predicted 74% of House races, while also predicting 80% of Senate races. The largest fan base was that of Senator Marco Rubio, who, with over 132,000 fans on Facebook alone, soundly defeated Democrat Kendrick Meek and Independent Charlie Crist. Despite some shortfalls, social media will continue to grow and how well it does predicting the 2012 elections will influence its complete acceptance or not.

Seven Requirements for a Social Media Campaign

Based on research and observations, there are seven requirements necessary to effectively gain a competitive advantage over your opponent in a political campaign. These seven requirements are as follows: utilize multiple platforms of social media, use social media to fundraise, go viral, establish a two-way conversation, make it personable, be transparent and keep it simple. President Obama’s Campaign characterized each one of these seven requirements and was one of the most successful campaigns in history. An example of each requirement was that Obama used social networking via Facebook, micro-blogging via Twitter and video sharing via YouTube, effectively addressing the first requirement of using multiple platforms. President Obama went away from traditional metrics and used social media to procure funds from the common person, allowing any donation, no

matter how small. His campaign went viral, particularly with the video “Yes We Can.” Obama established a two-way conversation with his “Fireside Chats”, allowing people to comment and question him, responded when he could. Making the campaign personable was an interesting idea that the Obama campaign fashioned, giving President Obama a down-to-earth personality. Examples included facts that Obama sings in the shower, among others. A key characteristic of President Obama is his unwavering call for transparency, allowing people to see behind the scenes of his campaign. Lastly, Obama’s most captivating attribute was his willingness to keep it simple with the slogan “Change”. All of these in combination with one another provide the capacity to build a political juggernaut, capable of surpassing any opponent.

<u>Requirements</u>	<u>Description</u>
1. Utilize Multiple Platforms	Have a significant presence on social networks, micro-blogging, video sharing, and other social media sites.
2. Use Social Media to Fundraise	Use your social media sites to allow supporters the opportunity to donate to your campaign.
3. Go Viral	Develop a viral marketing strategy that grabs the attention of the public at large.
4. Establish a Two-Way Conversation	Establish a constant conversation between the candidate and supporters, addressing questions, comments and concerns across social media sites.
5. Make it Personable	Tailor social media to the individual; give everyone a personalized arena to support you.
6. Be Transparent	Be open on the campaign trail and leave nothing to chance; keep the issues open to your constituents.
7. Keep it Simple	Develop a simple campaign slogan that is both memorable and understandable.

Utilize Multiple Platforms

Social media may be short on years of existence, but it is not short on the number of opportunities within. The age old comment “don’t put all of your eggs in one basket” is undoubtedly true for social media campaigns, in order to be successful. There are countless variations of social media, whether social networks, micro-blogs or the like, and expanding your brand is necessary to stay relevant. Examples of social networking sites include Facebook, hi5, LinkedIn, and MySpace. Micro-blogs include Twitter, Tumblr, Google Buzz and Foursquare. Video sharing websites include YouTube, Vimeo, Vidley and Dailymotion. Micro-blogs, social networks and video sharing websites are just three of the numerous social media outlets available, but they are the three most popular. According to Facebook’s Press Room, they claim over 500 Million Active Users Worldwide. Twitter has long shied away from revealing the amount of active users they have, however they recently reported that there are over 140 million tweets per day (Twitter is estimated to have over 190 million users by some accounts). YouTube, according to Ad Planner by Google, has approximately 500 million unique visitors each month. With numbers like these, there is no wonder why they are some of the most popular social media sites on the Internet.

Because of the far-reaching, yet inexpensive, possibilities social media offers it is a viable alternative to traditional media when it comes to political campaigns. However, this should not be taken lightly as there are countless alternatives to choose from in social media, and choosing which ones to use can prove to be a difficult decision. The cliché “fish where the fish are” applies here, though. As

aforementioned, the largest amount of users exists between Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, making them the rational decisions for political campaigns. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have their niches that have to be exploited. Social networking is the most common and should have a great deal of focus in a campaign, as social networking online is integrating the world far more than ever imagined. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook, states “Social networking will become even more integrated with how we find music, discover books and movies and make decisions about where to go on vacation. People want to know what people they trust have to say.” This is exactly where political campaigns have to thrive: the power of word of mouth. People believe and value, what other people, especially those they trust and have relationships with, have to say. If you examine the fact that the over 500 million Facebook users have, on average, 130 friends, the possibilities of campaigning your brand grows exponentially.

Twitter, the micro-blogging tool has grown to where it is today in a mere 5 years. In half a decade, Twitter has grown to international fame with its “140 characters or less” form of socializing. President Obama utilized twitter when it was barely known, generating a lot of buzz. He attracted the younger crowd by way of his tweets, illustrating that Twitter was necessary for a successful campaign to take place. President Obama’s campaign set precedence that every politician, or at least those in the national spotlight, needed a Twitter account. Since then, every politician has one, from Congressman Steve Southerland from Florida’s 2nd District, to House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio, and all of those in between. Both Congressmen vary in how they use Twitter as well. Freshman Congressman Southerland used Twitter

on occasion during his campaign and has used it twice while in office, accumulating a mere 84 tweets. Speaker Boehner, on the other hand, is approaching 2,000 tweets and usually tweets about current happenings in Congress. I agree with Speaker John Boehner's view on Twitter and that it should be used throughout the campaign as well as congressional session because it allows you to build a larger following for future campaigns.

Video sharing, through sites such as YouTube, is also a necessary tool for political campaigns because it provides a first hand look into the candidate and possibly a look into the campaign. People like visuals and YouTube allows for this with great popularity. Barack Obama has truly embraced YouTube as the way to share videos on the Internet. As of March 2011, the BarackObamadotcom user, Obama's official campaign user has gotten over 158 million upload views. What's interesting is that on the day President Obama was sworn in, his staff created the Whitehouse username, allowing the Barack Obama, as the President of the United States, to upload videos as part of the Office of the President. The Obama Administration is the first administration to truly engage social media, making it the benchmark that other political candidates, opponents and allies alike, have to work to achieve. The requirement of utilizing multiple platforms of social media is based on the notion that the larger the audience, the better the campaign. Limiting it to a manageable number of three social media sites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, is almost necessary because it provides the necessary balance between effective and excessive marketing.

Use Social Media to Fundraise

Social media allows for cheaper ecommerce, while at the same time attracting attention to a larger audience. President Obama's campaign set numerous records for political fundraising, particularly though, with the amount of online donors. While his campaign fundraised to an astonishing amount of over 500 million dollars, majority of those funds came from the Internet. The 2008 Obama Campaign had over 3 million total donors, who donated over 6.5 million times. What's even more astonishing is that of the 6.5 million times they donated, 6 million were in increments of less than \$100. According to an interview with The Post, members of Obama's Online Operation stated that the average online donation was around \$80, with the average donor donating more than once. Creating fundraising power like this is truly a necessary component to any current and future political campaigns. Obama's campaign set the foundation for presidential campaign fundraising, and how future campaigns raise funds will be a telling of who received the message.

Social media sites, social networks in particular, allow donations of just about any amount, while charging only a small percentage of the total transaction. By allowing supporters to donate any amount they choose, they are not limited by the candidate but by what they have. Simply put, unlike traditional campaigns that require set amounts for donations, utilizing social media allows the common man that may not have \$100 dollars now, to give in amounts of his choice. During Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign, many supporters gave a mere dollar here, dollar there. This quickly added up, amassing any and all previous records. The concept behind social media fundraising is that even though the individual

donations may be small, the number of times a donation is received is large. By some measures, the “some is better than none” idea is the fundamental principle to utilizing social media in general, but most importantly for fundraising. Giving the average man the ability to donate puts the campaign in the hands of average Americans. With the middle class being the largest class of Americans, it is no wonder how much can be accomplished by fundraising through social media sites.

Additionally, a key component to having donations through social media is advertising where supporters can go. The Obama Campaign aggressively advertised online, through sites like Facebook and other social networks, using both traditional and unconventional online advertising approaches. The campaign drove people to the campaigns donor pages by placing banner ads on other websites and utilized Facebook ads. For someone on Facebook who expressed interest in Barack Obama, or who was friend’s with someone who did, the Obama Campaign placed an abundant amount of ads, trying to draw in as many donors as possible. The campaign tracked which ads were the most effective throughout the campaign, and would emphasize those that garnered the most “click throughs” (the rate at which an online ad is clicked on). Developing an effective strategy to not only implement fundraising on social media sites but also measure their effectiveness is necessary for any political campaign to win in today’s digital age.

Go Viral

Viral marketing has become a useful and beneficial tool for today’s marketers. It is for that reason that it is necessary for political campaigns,

particularly those running for president. The phrase “go viral” is simply the shortened version of using viral marketing strategies to promote your brand. A prime example of this is again from President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign. At the conclusion of the 2008 New Hampshire Primary, President Obama delivered his famous “Yes We Can” speech. His campaign uploaded the speech onto YouTube, and the full length, 13 minutes and 10 seconds video garnered over 4 million views. The slogan “Yes We Can” went viral. The media took hold of it, blasting it all over the Internet. One of the best variations of this speech was the Emmy-Award Winning “Yes We Can” produced by Black Eyed Peas member will.i.am. It transformed parts of Obama’s speech into a song that truly sent the “Yes We Can” slogan across the Internet, and with various celebrities delivering the message, it was believed as credible by the millions who viewed it. Perhaps the most beneficial part was that will.i.am introduced a series of videos in favor of President Obama, keeping his campaign viral as the months progressed.

Not all campaigns will achieve the same levels of success that President Obama received, but there is room for tremendous success. Viral videos have become more and more frequent, and that is no doubt due to the excess of 2 billion videos viewed daily on YouTube, according to the site’s Five Year Anniversary Video. With that amount of traffic, viral marketing has become easier to master and many campaigns have been tailored specifically for the Internet. Viral marketing has been used by just about every industry, ranging from the film industry to car manufactures. Political campaigns, after witnessing how successful President Obama was, began marketing online videos to promote candidates. President

Obama's opponent, John McCain introduced his official YouTube to no avail. His video's and speeches drew a mere fraction of the attention Obama did. Notable candidates for office in the state of Florida who tried to use a similar approach to viral marketing as Obama did were Governor Scott, Alex Sink, Senator Marco Rubio, Charlie Crist and Kendrick Meek. Lesser-known candidates, primarily for Congressional Seats, developed a less significant approach. Congressman Steve Southerland of Florida's 2nd District utilized such an approach, not focusing on the number of views per se but rather the sheer fact that he should maintain a presence.

With different approaches towards campaigning, there are varying degrees of integration and making the appropriate decision is key. A presidential candidate does not want to reach only part of the country, but rather generate viral buzz throughout the entire country. The same idea is true in that a congressional candidate for Florida's 1st District will not benefit directly by reaching someone in Alaska, for example. That is not to say that generating an Internet sensation is not important, but the key is to balance that decision with your target market.

Marketing is still the fundamental principle behind political campaigns and it is important to note that because campaigning is, simply put, the marketing of an individual brand. As aforementioned, campaigns need to develop a marketing strategy that incorporates their objectives and design a viral marketing strategy to promote in this Internet age.

Establish a Two-Way Conversation

Establishing a two-way conversation is not only beneficial, but also necessary in today's social media world. President Obama's Campaign understood the necessity and developed a series of "Fireside Chats". Each time the campaign uploaded a new installment in the series, they would focus on the comments and questions of the most previous one. They tailored their response to what issues were the most pressing for their followers. This allowed for the effect of a personal conversation between President Obama and those who asked the question or made the comment. In addition, this also gives the impression that the candidate, in this case President Obama, is not only aware of his constituents, but also interested in what they have to say. President Obama was able to address the concerns of his supporters and any people on the fence, by utilizing this method of social media interaction.

Establishing a two-way conversation is not limited to video sharing websites like YouTube, but can and should be continued on other social media platforms. Micro-blogging, using sites such as Twitter, also allows for a two-way conversation and therefore is a prime complement to video sharing on YouTube. Twitter allows you to receive and respond to personal messages from followers. Regrettably, a presidential candidate cannot respond to all of their thousands of followers, but for those that they do respond to, the two-way conversation will create lasting effects on the follower's view of the candidate. Even further, for every follower you respond to and establish a two-way conversation, they will then inform their social community of your actions, thus providing free, credible word of mouth advertising.

Twitter has given this ability to the countless amount of politicians who have recently embraced it as a method of campaigning.

The results from establishing a two-way conversation are incredible, and yet many campaigns have failed to embrace it. The 2008 Obama Campaign has been the only campaign thus far who truly established a two-way conversation. Obama's "Fireside Chats" garnered hundreds of thousands of views each time they were uploaded to YouTube. His Twitter account has reached over 7 million followers, with the recent surge in the use of Twitter by the mainstream. Establishing this two-way conversation gave supporters of Obama the "down-to-earth" feeling, making them more comfortable with him than any other candidate. This is truly the kind of competitive advantage that politicians need in order to win a political election. When voters feel that they have been taken care of and their questions have been answered, they throw their unwavering support behind that particular candidate. President Obama's social media presence on YouTube and Twitter is still the largest display of acceptance of social media and its importance by any political candidate to date.

Make It Personable

Numbers aside, the Obama Campaign also took a radical, yet undeniably successful approach towards their use of social media: they made what was directed to millions, personable. Many of his supporters said that they voted for him because he understood them and their needs. They spoke as if Obama was only there for them referring to him as a close personal friend. For many of those people, they

developed those feelings because of how Obama's Campaign utilized social media sites like Twitter and YouTube. On YouTube, Obama made videos that were directed to the viewer at a personable level. Even though millions of people would watch, the individual viewer felt that Obama was talking just at them. The ability to create one video that was then interpreted differently by just about every viewer was a key feature of Obama's social media strategy.

Micro-blogging, with the aforementioned site called Twitter, is extremely useful in making things personable. With posts being called "tweets", and having the characters limited to just 140, Obama's campaign got creative. During the 2008 election, they would "tweet" personable things about Obama, for example, how he sings in the shower. This would give his followers the impression that Obama was just like them, and he was a "normal" person. Twitter additionally allows you to use an exclusive feature called "retweet". When you "retweet" someone it shows up on your page, or feed, as well as mentions the original poster, sending him or her a notification that they have been "retweeted" by you. This is another form of making your campaign personable because followers feel that they are noticed and therefore are more inclined to continue their support regardless of any hiccups that may or may not occur in the campaign.

A key strategy that the Obama campaign utilized, and any presidential hopefuls should implement as well, was the creation of their own personal social networking site, MyBarackObama.com. Supporters could join the site for free and create a profile that would also serve the Obama campaign as contacts. With their own profile on the MyBarackObama website, supporters would see local events,

ways to organize, and what issues were important to them. It was customizable so each page could have been different. An interesting offering to those that created a profile was the chance to get trained as a Community Organizer. This was appealing to many because it gave them a free opportunity to get involved with the process, while also giving President Obama's campaign much more publicity and many more volunteers. The training was an intriguing offer for many as President Obama had started out as a community organizer in the 1980's, after finishing school. This gave active supporters the possibility of sharing something in common with the President, and the chance to develop new career aspirations. These tools are very easily transferrable to any campaign and those that do in fact implement these tools, with the appropriate strategy, will make their supporters feel a personal connection to their candidates. That personal connection gives voters the impression that they are in control of the election, and they are a part of the election process.

Be Transparent

Transparency in government has been an issue for many years, leading up to the 2008 Presidential Election. President Obama ran on an open platform, calling for Government to be open and transparent. Many supporters saw this as the most pressing issue, with the past Administration being criticized for its failed attempts at transparency. President Obama during the campaign trail stated that he was going to set a new standard for openness within government. He also kept his campaign very open, letting people know exactly what was going on. Maintaining

transparency means keeping the issues open to the public and allowing the people to understand what your doing. When Obama was elected President, he issued a letter to all of his staff in regards to transparency. He stated:

“Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset. My Administration will take appropriate action, consistent with law and policy, to disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use. Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public.”

President Obama kept true to his words, and began to work towards a more open government for the people. His commitment to transparency stayed true when he began his first term as president and it is necessary to do so in the political atmosphere today.

Keeping the campaign open and transparent is necessary because it proves to supporters that you have nothing to hide. By keeping a campaign transparent, you are proving that you can keep true to your word, whether they are about campaign promises or your stance on issues. It delves into the human psyche and our need for answers. When everything is out in the open, supporters are reassured

of the character of the candidate and his or her commitment to those supporters. After the 2008 Election's call for Transparency in Government, many states have started to issue their own campaigns for open governments, with political campaigns following suit in the 2010 Mid-Term Elections. The promise for transparency is easy to make, but exceedingly difficult to follow through on because of the inherent need for some privacy. However, it is necessary nonetheless to run a transparent campaign and bring a higher level of morally sound transparency to government.

Keep It Simple

Marketing strategies have been debated, but the idea of keeping it simple has stayed constant. The same is true with political campaigns, as most voters are attracted to simplicity. When Barack Obama was running for president, the nation was swept up in his campaign slogan, "Change". Whether you were a supporter or not, you were aware of this slogan. The Obama Campaign was well aware of the benefits that a simple campaign slogan would provide and took full advantage. "Change" was so simple that every age group could understand, even those that may not have been eligible to vote. Change was quickly a top trend across the Internet, especially on social media sites Facebook and Twitter. What's more, people began to adapt their own versions, further providing positive word of mouth advertising, free to the campaign.

Barack Obama's "Change" is still a popular trend in the political world, and many people still use it to define him, years past his campaign. To contrast this, John

McCain's slogan was not only not simple, but also not consistent. The campaign changed their slogan in the middle of the campaign from "The Original Maverick" to "Country First", neither of which achieved the fame and attention that Obama's "Change" did. Because the McCain campaign did not effectively develop a simple, consistent campaign and an appropriate marketing strategy, they were unsuccessful in their efforts of utilizing social media. The stark contrast between the campaign strategies of Barack Obama and John McCain during the 2008 Presidential Election and their success and failure, respectively, can be attributed to how well they marketed their brand in terms of the aforementioned concept of keeping it simple.

By keeping it simple, a political campaign has even easier time advertising across multiple platforms because simple also entails consistency. The ability to determine a simple slogan in turn develops a consistent message. Keeping the message simple and consistent is necessary because it gives the impression of a single professional campaign. Consistency is viewed as an important key to political campaigns because it gives the campaign a voice that in turn will establish itself as the credible source for all things involved with the campaign. Voters can get confused if a campaign is sending out multiple messages, regardless if they are contradictory or not. When voters see a single, consistent message they also believe that the campaign is unwavering and will stay true to promises. Keeping it simple requires keeping it consistent and following that approach will prove worthy for all political campaigns.

Conclusion

To conclude, social media is today, what television was throughout each of the past 5 decades: the supplemental medium necessary to run a political campaign. The concept of embracing new technology is how President Obama was able to come from behind to win the Democratic Nomination and soundly defeat Republican Candidate John McCain during the 2008 Presidential Election. The reasoning behind that is that there will always be newer technology that then evolves how people live and interact with one another. I argued that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the three necessary platforms of social media today, but just as they out-maneuvered their predecessors, newer technology will be developed that will succeed them. It is though, the simple recognition that social media is the new medium of communication for our world, and political campaigns need to embrace that.

Social media has caused businesses and organizations to re-develop their marketing strategies to keep pace with society. A prime example of how social media is changing our world is Google's introduction of Google Buzz. Google Buzz is the search engine's efforts to maintain its hold as the number one search engine on the Internet, while realizing the need for incorporating social media. Buzz is Google's term for trending topics that people are currently searching on their site. It is because of giants such as Google, embracing social media's influence over society, that social media will one day be the only form of communication on the Internet. The possibilities with social media are not quite infinite but until proven otherwise,

very much so endless. The importance that today's world has placed on social media makes it difficult to bypass as a medium for advertising for political campaigns.

Political campaigns have slowly begun to embrace social media, with the largest social media presence coming from President Obama's 2008 campaign. President Obama's campaign team not only used the three platforms that I argue are necessary, but numerous others including his own social networking site. This campaign has fundamentally changed political campaigning by defining exactly what a social media campaign is. After the 2010 Mid-Term Elections, it is evident that there are seven requirements for a successful social media campaign: utilize multiple platforms, use social media to fundraise, go viral, establish a two-way conversation, make it personable, be transparent and keep it simple. Political campaigns that meet each of these requirements will benefit from their social media presence and gain credible word of mouth advertising at a remarkably inexpensive cost.

The 2010 Mid-Term Elections saw nearly every political campaign embrace social media, assisting in the election of many candidates. Those that failed to take a social media approach typically failed to win the election. However, without a national campaign taking place, the 2010 Mid-Term Elections were short on a few requirements that may not be necessary for smaller, more local offices. The upcoming 2012 general election will be a must watch as President Obama calls into play his social media powerhouse against the yet to be determined Republican opponent. It will be necessary for every Republican candidate to develop a social media strategy early in the campaign and then build it into an equally strong force to

have any chance of defeating an incumbent with such a social media presence as President Obama. 2012 will define exactly where political campaigns are headed, and whether or not campaigns have realized just how powerful social media can be for their brand. Social media is the present and immediate future, and until the next tremendous advance in technology occurs it will be the norm.

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