

Digital Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

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December 16, 2016
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Sponsored by International Exchange
Fund Program

Outline of Talk

- Evolution of new media in American elections
- Digital media in the 2016 presidential election
- Thoughts about the future of political communication in the U.S.

The Advent of the New Media Era

- Late 1980s: Entertainment media takes on new political roles
- 1992: The Clinton campaign launches the first presidential campaign website, and it is hardly noticed
- 1996: Campaigns experiment with “brochureware” style websites, email outreach to voters, and basic discussion boards
- 2000: All major and minor presidential candidates have websites, but campaigns are reluctant to make use of the interactive features of the Internet



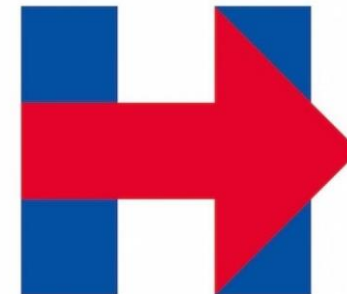
New Media in 2004

- Candidates embrace the interactive features of the web
- Blogs proliferate
- Citizen journalists become prominent
- Howard Dean changed the dynamics of campaigns by using digital media for fundraising and meet-ups
- Dean's campaign was derailed when a video of "The Dean Scream" made during a pep talk to campaign workers after a disappointing result in the Iowa caucuses went viral on television news
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDwODbl3muE>



2008: A Landmark New Media Election

- Obama's social media strategy was radical
- Developing a candidate's brand is important.
- Obama's logo: An O representing a rising sun
- Obama's slogan: "Change We Can Believe In"
- Donald Trump's slogan: "Make America Great Again"
- Donald Trump's logo: No official logo
- Hillary Clinton's slogan: "Stronger Together"
- Hillary Clinton's logo: An H with an arrow



2008: New Methods of Reaching Voters

- “Opportunistic consumers of technology”—use of trial and error
- Innovations in digital media facilitated networking, collaboration, community-building, and active campaign engagement
- Websites were full-service, multimedia centers that allowed voters to access information and videos, view ads, post blogs, provide commentary
- Obama had an active and visible social media presence
- The Obama campaign developed advanced microtargeting methods
- Actively developed lists of supporters’ email addresses and cell phone numbers to use in outreach



2008: Citizen Social Media Engagement

- The most important new media development of the campaign was citizens' innovation with social media outside of campaign and party organizations.
- Voters used social media for peer-to-peer outreach within their networks
- Citizens created videos and covered campaign events live
- Voters encouraged others to get involved in the election
- People created online organizations that performed functions traditionally relegated to political parties, such as setting the issue agenda, hosting voter registration drives, and getting out the vote
- Young voters were at the forefront of this movement
- The Obama campaign embraced voters' independent use of social media on its behalf, and did not try to co-opt these efforts



2012: Strategic Integrators of Media Technology

- The Obama team carefully managed all aspects of their media strategy in 2012.
- The campaign tightly devised social media tactics for organizing that dovetailed with their mainstream media messaging
- Obama's organization and the Democratic National Committee provided platforms for voters to engage in the campaign which allowed them to have control over the message
- Voters were less motivated to innovate with social media in 2012 than they had been in 2008, which made controlling the media agenda easier for Obama



Media Trends in the 2016 Election

- Almost all campaign news was bad news.
- Many media messages focused on controversy and scandal.
- The media engaged in “feeding frenzies” and attacked candidates
- The media focused too much on polls.
- The media engaged in “horserace journalism”—using polls to analyze which candidate was ahead and which candidate was behind.
- Voters received very little issue information.



New Developments

- A majority of Americans followed the election on cable television news.
- Cable news relied heavily on social media as a main source of stories.
- Social media became a mouthpiece for Donald Trump and his surrogates.
- Journalists from legacy news organizations (like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*) wrote good stories that were overshadowed by coverage of nasty tweets, rumors, and fights.
- Fake news stories gained attention and were believed by many people.
- Reporters were more interest in developing their brands than getting the facts straight.



Where Voters Got Campaign Information

Television	78%
Cable News	54%
Print Newspaper	36%
Radio	44%
Digital Media	65%
Social Media	44%
News Websites or Apps	48%

Cable News Coverage

- A large audience for election news.
- Coverage consisted of panels of partisan commentators who spent their time fighting with one another.
- Fact-checking involved having the panelists argue about some topic, which typically ended without resolution.
- Much of the information on cable television originated with candidates' and their surrogates' communication.



Negative News and Publicity

- Most of the campaign news coverage was negative.
- 64% of Clinton coverage was negative
- 77% of Trump coverage was negative
- Even bad publicity can bring attention to candidates.
- The candidate who got the most press attention in the primaries and the general election won.
- Trump got 15% more coverage than Clinton in the general election.
- More live coverage of Trump on the campaign trail than Clinton.
- Trump had more opportunities to get his message across.



Targeted Ads on Social Media

- Social media platforms promote political content targeted at voters based on user profiles. Targeted candidate ads pop up unsolicited when voters access their social media accounts.
- Targeted ads placed by Google and other vendors captured “micro-moments” in the campaign that voters may have missed.
- The Clinton campaign created ads about immigration and other policy issues that appeared on voters’ social media accounts in states where they were most relevant.
- The Trump campaign had pop-up ads featuring daughter, Ivanka, telling people where they could go to vote.



Social Media Election Playbook

- The playbook for candidates using social media in campaigns involves a two-pronged strategy.
- Inside Strategy: Solidify the base.
- Outside Strategy: Market big ideas that have broad appeal to voters and the media.
- Clinton focused on the inside strategy
- Trump focused on the outside strategy



Clinton's Social Media Strategy

- Aimed at solidifying her base rather than promoting slogans and attracting a larger audience.
- Messages targeted specific groups considered to be critical for the campaign's success, like women, minority group members, and young people.
- Her social media messages asked voters to declare, "I'm with her."
- She did not make many attempts to mobilize her supporters to take action.
- Under normal circumstances, a conservative social media strategy would have been prudent, as it allows the candidate to control the message and avoid gaffes.
- The 2016 electoral environment made Clinton's social media presence ineffective.



Trump's Social Media Strategy

- Trump used offensive Tweets to dominate the news cycle.
- He launched personal attacks against his primary opponents and “crooked” Hillary.
- People who challenged him were labeled “stupid,” “bad,” “crazy,” “horrible,” “dumb,” “overrated,” and worse.
- He used Twitter to reinforce his catch phrases, such as “Build the Wall” and “Lock Her Up.”



Trump Retweets High School Student

Trump retweeted supporters messages.

He retweeted a message against CNN by 16 year old high school student, Seth.

Saturday Night Live parodied the retweet.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoPha9_gz3g



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

Follow

"@Filibuster: @jeffzeleny Pathetic - you have no sufficient evidence that Donald Trump did not suffer from voter fraud, shame! Bad reporter.

9:19 PM - 28 Nov 2016

7,794 32,742

Video as a News Source

- News organizations and social media platforms rely heavily on professional, amateur, and archival video in their campaign coverage.
- Videos add drama to election reporting, and can incite journalists to engage in “gotcha journalism” by catching candidates behaving badly.
- A widely-publicized clip of Hillary Clinton at a fundraising event with supporters depicted her stating that half of Donald Trump’s supporters fell into a “basket of deplorables.”
- Perhaps the most damaging video of the campaign was of a 2005 conversation between Donald Trump and *Access Hollywood* correspondent Billy Bush where Trump brags that his celebrity status allowed him to behave badly with women.

Bullying the Media

- Trump felt that the press was too negative and unfair in its coverage of his campaign.
- He tried to discredit the press through his speeches and using Twitter.
- He bullied journalists by calling them names and making fun of them.
- He banned certain media organizations from his events.
- He rarely gave interviews.
- He refused journalists' requests for information.
- He threatened to sue publications.



Trump Attacks the Media at a Rally

“They are so dishonest, folks. You can't even read articles in certain papers anymore. *New York Times* is a total lie. You can't, I mean, you can't — it is so false. Nothing to do with me. I'm just telling you, such lies. Such lies, such fabrications, such made-up stories. Now the *Times* is going out of business pretty soon. That's the good news.”



Fake News

- Misinformation, misleading stories, and boldface lies were treated as serious news.
- Donald Trump made a habit of using his Twitter feed to blast out statements that could not be verified or which were complete untruths.
- Journalists were unable to hold Trump accountable.
- Trumps misleading tweets coincided with the rise of fake news during the campaign.
- Conspiracy theories, hoaxes, and lies were spread efficiently through Facebook, Snapchat, and other social media.
- Fake news reached millions of people during the campaign, some of whom were more willing to believe an anonymous Facebook post than an attributed article in the *New York Times*.

Conclusion

- The 2016 presidential election marks the beginning of the era of post-truth news. It is a treacherous time for journalists and responsible news organizations. The press' legitimacy is being challenged by an alternative media universe where Twitter rants and fake news hijack the political agenda hiding the important issues of the day.
- There has been backlash against publicizing misleading information and fake news.
- Newsrooms need to take the lead in reclaiming their position in the media ecosystem.
- Left unaddressed, post-truth media threaten the requirement of an informed citizenry and democratic governance.

THANK YOU!

Brief Bio

Diana Owen is Associate Professor of Political Science at Georgetown University in the Communication, Culture, and Technology graduate program of which she is a cofounder. She served as Director of Georgetown's American Studies Program for a decade. She is the author of *Media Messages in American Presidential Elections* (Greenwood, 1991), *New Media and American Politics* (with Richard Davis, Oxford, 1998), and *American Government and Politics in the Information Age* (with David Paletz and Timothy Cook, FlatWorld Knowledge Press, 2nd ed. 2015). She is the co-editor of *The Internet and Politics: Citizens, Voters, and Activists* (with Sarah Oates and Rachel Gibson, Routledge, 2006) and *Making a Difference: The Internet and Elections in Comparative Perspective* (with Richard Davis, Stephen Ward, and David Taras, Lexington, 2009), and *Internet Election Campaigns in the United States, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan* (with Shoko Kiyohara and Kazuhiro Maeshima, Palgrave Macmillan, expected August 2017). She has published widely in the fields of civic education, political engagement, media and politics, political socialization, and elections and voting behavior. Her current research explores the relationship between civic education and the development of citizenship orientations as well as new media's role in politics. She has conducted studies funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Center for Civic Education, Storyful/News Corp and Google, among others. She is the co-principal investigator on the James Madison Legacy Project of the Center for Civic Education which is funded by a SEED Grant from the U.S. Department of Education.