Social Media and Political Campaigns

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Introduction

Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon of interest may be described as the extent to which social media may be used in political campaigns, including past campaigns and future campaigns. This includes four main questions: (1) Was there significant use of social media in past political campaigns, namely the 2008 campaign of President Barack Obama? (2) Has social media continued to be used in subsequent political campaigns? (3) If social media has been used, have there been any problems with its use? (4) What is the best way to utilize social media in future political campaigns?

The inspiration for this topic stems from studies in both journalism and political science at the University of Tennessee and personal observation of social media trends in the past few years. Social media is now a major aspect of the news media, and today, it is not uncommon for news to break on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Also, many politicians now utilize websites like Facebook and Twitter to reach and interact with constituents and supporters. During the 2008 election, it was observed that Barack Obama, who won the election, had a large social media presence. In subsequent years after this election, many other candidates for political office created a presence on social media as well. This leads observers to question the correlation between social media and success in presidential campaigns.

Topic Significance

There is no doubt that social media and social networking websites have ballooned over the past few years. Facebook has grown exponentially since 2006, and now more than 51% of all Americans have a Facebook page (WebMediaBrands). Twitter, once a small micro-blogging website, now has 200 million members worldwide. And now social media is affecting political campaigns. One in five online adults (22%) used Twitter or a social networking site for political purposes in 2010 (Smith). According to a November 2010 study by Matthew James Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto published in *Mass Communication and Society*, "the growth of online political behavior has been facilitated partly by the recent emergence of new interactive, media-rich Web sites (Kushin and Yamamoto)." These social media sites exist under the "conceptual

umbrella" of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 includes social network sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, that allow users to create profiles and establish connections with friends and acquaintances on the Internet (Kushin and Yamamoto). Other formats, such as blogs, microblogs, and video-sharing sites, among others, are also included in Web 2.0. Microblogs such as Twitter allow users to post short messages that are published online in real time. Video-sharing sites such as YouTube enable users to share user-created video and interact with other users in an online community. For all social media Web sites and platforms, an underlying commonality is the user-generated element characterized by openness and collaboration (Kushin and Yamamoto).

According to the *Mass Communication and Society* study, the ability to express political views and opinions online plays an important role for social media in campaigns. "Social media allow users to not only seek information but also interact with others through online expression such as posting political commentaries on blogs and social network sites and sharing multimedia commentary (Kushin and Yamamoto)." In past campaigns, Facebook users have expressed themselves politically in many ways, such as making online donations, encouraging friends to vote, or posting graphics or status updates expressing political attitudes and opinions. Twitter and blogs have been used by candidates and voters to comment on social and political issues, share information and encourage participation. Also, YouTube and CNN partnered to sponsor a debate in which candidates took questions from user-created videos as opposed to a moderator (Kushin and Yamamoto).

Potential Research Results

Research on this topic would show on overall support or refute of social media playing a significant role in political campaigns. Given the support for social media's role in political campaigns, research would show how social media affected previous campaigns, specifically President Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, and the growing importance of social media to future political campaigns. Research would also indicate the potential problems and best uses of social media in future campaigns.

Research Questions

- How has social media been utilized in previous political campaigns, specifically the 2008 presidential campaign?

- Did the utilization of social media affect the outcome of the 2008 presidential election? If so, which social media platforms were the most advantageous?

- How has the use of social media changed in subsequent political campaigns?

- Have there been any negative effects or new problems created because of social media?

- What is the predicted future of social media use in political campaigns, particularly in the 2012 campaigns for president?

Literature Review

Overview

Within the selection of resources reviewed, the following subcategories were identified: President Obama's use of social media in the 2008 presidential campaign, the current use of social media in political campaigns, problems with social media use, and the future predictions for use of social media. This is the order in which the following research is presented. It is important to note that some of these sources could be applied to any and all categories.

President Obama's use of social media in 2008

These articles address the use of social media by President Barack Obama and his campaign staff during the campaign for president in 2008, the first campaign to use strongly social media. Articles that supported the idea that social media was an important part of Obama's campaign in 2008 addressed the thesis topic in question and formed the foundation for the research's hypothesis that social media affects political campaigns.

Doris Graber's book *Mass Media and American Politics* provided useful statistics about President Obama's use of social media in the 2008 campaign and the apparent discrepancies between Obama's use and the use of his opposition, John McCain. These statistics, such as the fact that Obama had 2 million Facebook friends while McCain only had 600,000, show that Obama used social media much more than McCain in the 2008 election (Graber).

Also, a November 7, 2008 article on the New York Times blog by Claire Cain Miller discussed the importance and effectiveness of Obama's use of social media, supporting the hypothesis that social media had an effect on the 2008 presidential campaign.

Also, a study by Matthew James Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto published in *Mass Communication and Society*, provided insight into the social media habits of young people (adults under the age of 30), a demographic targeted by Obama in the 2008 campaign. The study

found that young people tend to get political information from social media more than any other age group ((Kushin and Yamamoto). A 2011 study conducted by the Harvard Institute of Politics found similar results and concluded that 27% of young adults find that Facebook and other social media websites have more of an impact that other types of advocacy (Harvard Institute of Politics). These two studies show that the use of social media helped Barack Obama target young people in his 2008 campaign.

Because this thesis concerns social media use, social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were used as source material. Of particular interest were Facebook groups like "One Million Strong for Barack" and "Students for Barack Obama" that emphasized user-generated support for Obama during his 2008 campaign. "One Million Strong" was created in 2007, before the official campaign, by Farouk Aregbe, and it helped mobilize supporters and organize events (Aregbe). President Obama's official Facebook page was also viewed to gain insight into his use of social media. Also of interest were YouTube videos like Will.i.am's "Yes I Can," that used celebrities to garner support for Obama, and the parody video "I Got a Crush on Obama" by the Obama Girl, that was said to have made an impact on the campaign (Story: Obama Girl). These sources provided insight into the social media platforms and the viewing of them by campaign supporters.

Sources contributing to this subtopic include:*

- *Mass Media and American Politics* by Doris Graber
- "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics" by Claire Cain Miller
- "Did Social Media Really Matter? College Students' Use of Online Media and Political Decision Making in the 2008 Election" by Matthew James Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto
- The Obama Girl website www.obamagirl.com
- Farouk Aregbe's Facebook group "One Million Strong for Barack" http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2231653698
- Facebook group "Students for Barack Obama" http://www.facebook.com/#!/obamastudents?sk=info
- "Obama faces brave new Web world" by Brian Tau

- President's Obama's Facebook fan page http://www.facebook.com/#!/barackobama

*Please refer to page 29 for full Works Cited

Current Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns

The focus of these sources is the use of social media after the 2008 election, namely in the 2010 midterm elections. These sources discuss the use of social media today, and how it has grown since the 2008 election. A study by the Pew Research Center provided useful statistics about the increasing use of social media websites and recent statistics about 2010 use. The study also details important details about the use of social media for political purposes in 2010. An article from Politico by Byron Tau echoes this sentiment and discusses the changes in the social networks themselves since 2008. The articles show that young people are not the only ones using these social networks now, a departure from the Obama's 2008 campaign.

A *New York Times* article about the Pew report by Jennifer Preston describes this shift to social media and also discusses the use of social media by the different political parties. According to the article, in the 2008 election, Obama and the Democrats used social media well, but the Republicans lagged behind (Preston). The article shows that Republicans have now almost bridged the social media gap and are quickly catching up to Democrats in terms of social media use (Preston). This shows that social media is becoming important for all political candidates and is not just a fad for the 2008 election.

Sources contributing to this subtopic include:*

- "Pew Research Reports: In Internet and Campaign 2010" by Aaron Smith
- "Internet Users Turned to Social Networks in Elections, Survey Finds" by Jennifer Preston
- "Obama faces brave new Web world" by Byron Tau
- "How Political Campaigns are Using Social Media for Real Results" by Matt Silverman
- Harvard Political Institute 2011 survey http://www.iop.harvard.edu/Research-Publications/Survey/Spring-2011-Survey

*Please refer to page 29 for Full Works Cited

Problems with Social Media Use in Campaigns

Since social media is a relatively new way for politicians to communicate during political campaigns, it is not surprising that problems with social have arisen for politicians. These articles discuss the problems and challenges associated with social media, because it is important to note the negative effects of social media on political campaigns. A March 18, 2011 *USA Today* article discusses the problems that the speed of this technology can cause. Referring to Twitter, the article contends that "…it now only takes 140 characters to damage a political campaign" (Kucinich). Because these technologies move so quickly, any off color remark can instantly be read and shared by millions of people (Kucinich). An article by Noah Rothman, the editor of *Campaigns and Elections*, contends that blunders such as these are especially worrisome when candidates handle their own social media profiles without the help of staff (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet). The issue of social media providing damaging material for opposition researchers is also discussed in this article. While opposition researchers say they do monitor social networks, it is not their main source of finding information (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet).

A January 2011 *New York Times* article discusses the problems political bloggers can also present for candidates with the rise of social media (Peters). While it is important to note that bloggers now play a role in the social media landscape, if used correctly, social media can provide new strategies to combat these problems (Greyes).

Another problem noted in these sources is the social media ineptitude of candidates campaigning in local politics. An article by Steve Pearson and Ford O'Connell in *Campaigns and Elections* magazine describes the need for local politicians to utilize social media correctly (Pearson and O'Connell, Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls). Pearson and O'Connell discuss problems and solutions for local campaigns using social media. Though many campaigns do not do this, they advise that engaging with constituents and having a concrete message are two of the

most important things to remember when using social media (Pearson and O'Connell, Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls). Dusty Trice, a Democratic new media strategist, also lists suggestions to combat this problem, especially with Twitter. Natch Greyes, a Democratic media strategist, also provides recommendations to overcome these problems in an article in the March 2011 *Campaigns and Elections* magazine.

Sources contributing to this subtopic include:*

- "Direct Message to Politicos: Think Before Clicking 'Tweet'" by Jackie Kucinich
- "Political News Sites to Flood 2012 Campaign Trail" by Jeremy W. Peters
- "Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls" by Steve Pearson and Ford O'Connell
- Dusty Trice website www.dustytrice.com
- "Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet" by Noah Rothman

Please refer to page 29 for Full Works Cited

The Future of Social Media Use in Political Campaigns

The focus of these sources is on predictions for social media use in future campaigns, and suggestions about the best ways to use social media in the future. These articles that support the hypothesis that social media will continue to be an important part of political campaigns help conclude that social media has had a lasting effect on social media over the past 4 years. These articles feature predictions by many social media experts about the future of social media. An article by Byron Tau in Politico describes the changes in the social media landscape, and the implications for the 2012 campaign. The article states, "…the rich, dynamic web of 2012 will bear little resemblance to the stodgy 'Web 2.0'-era Internet, circa 2008 (Tau)." In a radio interview with The Madeleine Brand Show, Dusty Trice, the Democratic social media strategist, describes the dramatic changes to Twitter and Facebook, two of the most popular social media websites used in the 2008 campaign (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics).

The article by Pearson and O'Connell discusses the changes they believe must be made by politicians to keep up with the changing social media landscape. Tau's article expands on this and discusses the changes President Obama has made to his social media strategy to keep up

with the changes in social media since the 2008 campaign. Though Trice contends that Obama's incumbency will provide an advantage in social media in the 2012 campaign (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics), an April 2011 article by Jeremy Herb describes the strategies Republican presidential hopefuls are undertaking to compete with Obama in the 2012 campaign. These sources also describe different social media experts' takes on the best way to utilize social media in the future. In Greyes article, she says that "nanotargeting", especially for Twitter, will provide the most effective way to reach supporters (Greyes). In a Politco article, media strategists discuss the growing importance of smartphones and mobile tablets in the social media sphere.

It is important to note the one article that disputes the importance of social media in future campaigns in Jeremy Herb's "In 2012, A New World for Online Campaigning". This article contends that while social media will have a role in the 2012 campaigns, traditional communication methods such as e-mail and meet-and-greets will still raise the most money (Herb).

<u>Sources contributing to this subtopic include:*</u>

- "The Untapped Potential of Social Media: A Primer for Savvy Campaigners" by Natch Greyes
- "In 2012, A New World for Online Campaigning" by Jeremy Herb
- "Down Home Digital: Minding Your Social Media" by Steve Pearson and Ford O'Connell
- Interview with Dusty Trice on The Madeleine Brand Show: "Social media pervades presidential politics"
- "Obama faces brave new Web world" by Byron Tau
- "Jump-Starting the GOP on Social Media" by Jonathan Scott

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Findings

President Barack Obama's Use of Social Media in the 2008 Presidential Campaign

President Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign changed the way political campaigns utilized the Internet, specifically social media, for political purposes. According to an April 4, 2011 article on the political blog Politico, "…Obama brought the long-promised political power of the internet to bear on a presidential campaign, raising millions and organizing thousands through a groundbreaking website and massive email list (Tau)." Obama's use of social media in the 2008 campaign has been compared to former President John F. Kennedy's use of television. According to a November 7, 2008 *New York Times* article, "One of the many ways that the election of Barack Obama as president has echoed that of John F. Kennedy is his use of a new medium that will forever change politics. For Mr. Kennedy, it was television. For Mr. Obama, it is the Internet (Miller)." Besides using email and a website, Obama focused on social media to mobilize volunteers and reach young voters (Graber 194).

His widespread use of social media seemed to be a major factor in his victory over John McCain. According to political science professor G.R. Boynton, "It is hard to imagine two campaigns more fully epitomizing the historical juncture crossed in the 2008 election. The McCain campaign was prototypical campaign past. The Obama campaign heralded campaigns to come (Graber 193)." Obama had 2 million Facebook friends, while McCain had only 600,000. Disparities such as this were seen on other social media outlets like YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Digg and BlackPlanet (Graber 193). Obama spent millions on advertising on Facebook and Google, while McCain used mainly television advertisements (Graber 194). Obama focused on social media sites to target young people and mobilize millions of volunteers, as well as receive donations. The campaign used social media to connect with voters and supporters. According to a March 2011 article by Natch Greyes, a Democratic strategist who has advised campaigns on social media strategy, in *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, "… the Obama campaign used social media platforms to encourage voters to participate in and organize campaign activities such as house parties where like-minded voters would gather to watch campaign events or

participate in phone banks (Greyes).” Obama raised a record-breaking amount of funds, mainly through small donations.

Facebook seemed to be the major social network used in the campaign. Obama’s Facebook page, currently with more than 19 million “likes”, relays information about his whereabouts, as well as posts relevant news from the White House. Currently run by Obama for America, the President’s 2012 campaign, the Facebook page lists Obama’s favorite books, movies, television shows and hobbies, just like the Facebook page of any user. The team also runs Facebook pages targeted to specific demographics, such as Women for Obama, Latinos for Obama, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Obama. These pages contain posts with links and videos to news that pertains specifically to these groups. While Obama’s campaign team created pages for Obama and his wife Michelle, voter and supporter-generated groups also played a major role in Obama’s campaign. Facebook groups like “One Million Strong for Barack”, founded in 2007 by Farouk Olu Aregbe, have mobilized many volunteers and garnered support for Obama. “One Million Strong” was one of the first pro-Obama groups on Facebook (Aregbe). According to the group’s description, members of the group have used the group’s discussion board to “coordinate political action with one another in order to propel Barack Obama to victory in the presidential election (Aregbe).” Even after the election, the group continued to promote Obama’s policies. According to the group’s page, “Throughout 2009 and 2010, we have also continued to network with each other and organize political action in order to shape the agenda of both the Democratic Party and the President (Aregbe).” Another group, Students for Barack Obama, was started in 2006 as an online petition to encourage Obama to run for President in 2008. Now, the group has expanded offline, into what is now “the official student organization of Obama for America with over seven hundred chapters at schools across the country (Students for Barack Obama). According to the group’s Facebook page, “We’re organizing students to register voters, get out the vote, raise funds, and spread Barack Obama’s message of hope, action, change (Students for Barack Obama).”

YouTube was also a major component in the campaign. More than 1800 videos were uploaded by Obama supporters to the BarackObama.com channel, which counted about 115,000 subscribers (Graber). Only 330 videos were loaded to John McCain’s YouTube channel, and they attracted just over 28,000 subscribers (Graber). In a November 7, 2008 *New York Times*

article, Joe Trippi, a political consultant, said Obama's YouTube videos were more effective than television ads, because viewers chose to watch them or received them from a friend instead of having their television shows interrupted. Trippi also asserted that advertising on YouTube is much more cost effective. "The campaign's official stuff they created for YouTube was watched for 14.5 million hours," Trippi said in the article. "To buy 14.5 million hours on broadcast TV is $47 million (Miller)." Also, internet sensations like the band Black Eyed Peas member Will.i.am's Yes I Can video, which has received more than 20 million views on YouTube, utilized celebrities like Scarlett Johansson, John Legend, Common and others to promote Obama and his campaign. Also, even parody videos like the Obama Girl's "I Got a Crush on Obama" helped to promote Obama. Originally posted in June 2007 by the comedy network Barely Political, the video was created as a parody after Obama announced his candidacy for President (Story: Obama Girl). According to a *New York Times* article about the video, "That video probably had more to do with shaping Obama's complicated public image – young and exciting but maybe a bit shallow – than any Internet appeal devised by the candidate's own aides (Story: Obama Girl)." In total, Obama Girl's videos have been viewed more than 100 million times, with "I Got a Crush on Obama" receiving more than 20 million views (Story: Obama Girl).

Not only did Obama utilize each of these social media platforms, he also integrated them. According to the Greyes article, the Obama campaign focused on connecting with voters through a unified online presence. For example, new YouTube videos also appeared as Facebook posts, and new Facebook posts were also tweeted. "By doing this the Obama campaign delivered the content supporters wanted in the format they wanted it (Greyes)."

In the 2008 Barack Obama campaign, young adults (adults younger than 30 are usually considered in this designation) were a targeted demographic, especially through social media. According to the study in *Mass Communication and Society*, "Attention to social media for campaign information was significant during the 2008 campaign, particularly among young adults (Kushin and Yamamoto)." In the study, 27% of adults younger than 30 reported obtaining campaign information from social network sites compared to 4% of adults age 30 to 39 and only 1% older than 40. As it turns out, social media is the best way to reach this age group. According to a March 2011 survey by the Harvard University Institute of Politics, 27% of 19- to 29-year-

olds — called Millennials by marketers — in the U.S. believe Facebook, other social media and blogs together have more of an impact than any kind of in-person advocacy in election campaigns (Harvard Institute of Politics). Also, the Harvard survey found that usage of Facebook by millennials has grown to 80% from 64% over the past year, and 90% of all college students polled by Harvard have Facebook accounts (Harvard Institute of Politics). The survey also found that Twitter usage was increasing among this age group – the percentage with Twitter accounts grew from 15% to 24% in the past year; growth in Facebook usage outpaced growth in Twitter usage by a three-to-one ratio, though (Harvard Institute of Politics). The political apathy sometimes associated with younger generations could also be remedied by social media. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that many young adults do not actively search for political information but rather encounter such information while going online for other purposes (Smith). Such unintended encounters can occur frequently in social media. According to the study in *Mass Communication and Society*, "Facebook and Twitter, for example, deliver a stream of status updates by other users they friend or follow. These services push content to the user with limited active information seeking (Kushin and Yamamoto)." So, even if young adults are not looking to find political information, they see and recognize it in many forms from their peers. The amount of information from these websites can have negative effects on political participation, though. According to the study "The social media formats that present a wide variety of information simultaneously may distract users' attention and impair their capacity to extract politically efficacious information and see out additional political information (Kushin and Yamamoto)."

Current Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns

While 2008 was the first time social media was a major part of a political campaign, the use of social media in the political arena has been increasing. According to the Pew Research Report, one in five adults who use the Internet, including a number of older, conservative Republicans, turned to social networks to get or share information about the midterm elections in 2010 (Preston). Also, according to a study by Nielsen, 25% of all time spent online is on social networks, and more than 170 million Americans over the age of fifteen accesses social media platforms each month (Preston). Also, the study found that viewing online political videos in the months leading up to the 2010 elections rose to 31% among adult Internet users from 19% in 2006 (Preston). Though the Obama campaign was one of the first to use social media for campaign purposes, most political candidates are now using social media. According to the Greyes article, "In 2010, nearly every campaign used the strategies developed by the Obama campaign… (Greyes)." According to the April 2011 Politico article, "Twitter and Facebook are no longer mere social networks – rather they're robust, sophisticated digital platforms with developer tools that let third parties build entire services around them (Tau)." According to the article, Facebook had less than 100 million users throughout the entire primary campaign in 2008. By inauguration day in 2009, Facebook had reached about 150 million users. As of April 2011, Facebook had over half a billion – a five-fold increase since mid-2008 (Tau). Besides use for political purposes, money allocation for social media by political campaigns has also increased. "Overall, you see significant budgets going to Facebook – because that's where users are," said Vincent Harris, a Republican media consultant who helped run the digital shops for Mike Huckabee and Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell in the April 2011 Politico article (Tau). Now, it's not just young people, one of the most targeted groups in the Obama campaign, who are now using platforms like Facebook. "There's an interesting understanding among savvy operators: not just young people are using these tools," said Adam Conner, associate manger for Facebook's public-policy division in the April 2011 Politico article (Tau). In a March 1, 2011 article in *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, Justin Hart, managing director at RaiseDigital, a new media consulting group, said that as older users increasingly take to social media platforms,

campaigns and legislative offices would be foolish not to pay attention to them. “When you look at the fastest growing demographics on places like YouTube and Facebook, they are people fifty and up who are absolutely voters. They are also likely donors, which is part of what will make social media increasingly important to future campaigns,” Hart said in the article (Rothman, Is Social Media's Importance in Politics Overblown?).

Facebook is also being used for new purposes. According to the Facebook page U.S. Politics on Facebook, which highlights the latest uses of Facebook by politicians, Obama held a Facebook Live town hall meeting in Silicon Valley, demonstrating that social media is playing an increasing role in politics. Also, in June 2009, Republican State Rep. Justin Amash began posting every vote from the floor of the Michigan House of Representatives (Silverman). He then began posting his own votes, with explanations. According to a June 2010 article on mashable.com, a news site devoted to social media, Amash had positive feedback. “I instantly received comments from dozens of people who wanted me to know how much they appreciated what I was doing. It became clear to me that posting my votes in real-time on Facebook could revolutionize the process of legislating,” Amash said in the article (Silverman). Amash said in the article that his strategy has helped him gain credibility with voters (Silverman).

The gap in social media use by Republicans and Democrats is also closing. Though Obama and the Democrats won the social media battle of the 2008 election, Republicans caught up by 2010 (Preston). “There was a great leveling out between the activists on both sides,” said Patrick Ruffini, a Republican political online strategist who was the digital adviser to President George W. Bush’s campaign in 2004 and later for the Republican national committee, in a March 2011 article in *The New York Times*. “The notion that the Internet was owned by liberals, owned by the left in the wake of the Obama victory, has proven false (Preston).” Most Americans believe the Internet provides more political views than newspaper and television. According to the Pew report, 61% of adults surveyed agreed that the Internet exposed people to a wider range of political views than they might get from traditional news media sources (Smith). But more quantity doesn’t always mean better quality. The report found that 56% of Internet users believe it is usually difficult to differentiate information they find on the Internet that is true from information that is not true (Preston). This could mean an increase in social media use for political purposes, though. Alan Rosenblatt, associate director of online advocacy at the

Center for American Progress Action Fund, said in the *New York Times* article that the lack of trust is what will drive more people to use social networks because that is where they can find recommendations and information from trusted friends (Preston). “Given the opportunity to interact with people rather than institutions, people are looking to connect with people they can trust,” Rosenblatt said in the article (Preston).

Problems of Social Media Use in Political Campaigns

While social media provides a new campaign platform, it also creates new problems. According to a March 18, 2011 article in *USA Today*, "As the 2012 presidential race gears up, the growing popularity of Twitter is forcing potential candidates to confront an unfriendly digital reality: It now only takes 140 characters to damage a political campaign (Kucinich)." The instantaneous nature of social media sites can be very destructive. "The rise of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have accelerated the rate an off-color remark or e-mail can be posted on a news site and in seconds turn into a national news story read by millions of people," the USA Today article said (Kucinich). While political blunders have been caught on tape or sent in email for years, the speed at which bad news travels is dramatically faster than the 2008 presidential campaign (Kucinich). Recently, an example of this was seen through the campaign of Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, a potential Republican presidential hopeful. A spokesman for Barbour resigned mere hours after news reports revealed the aide had made a series of insensitive jokes in daily e-mails about earthquake victims in Japan, Janet Reno, and genocide in Cambodia (Kucinich). News of these e-mails, broken by Politico, "ricocheted across Twitter and the blogosphere" (Kucinich). Phil Singer, a Democratic strategist and former spokesman for Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential bid, called digital media " 'gotcha politics' on steroids" (Kucinich). There is also an issue with candidates running and using their own Facebook and Twitter accounts. Political consultants worry that allowing their clients to interact directly with online followers on social media platforms can result in embarrassing missteps that can cost them the campaign. According to a March 2011 article in *Campaigns and Elections* magazine by Noah Rothman, Facebook is generally a safe forum for interacting with followers because most candidates have a representative take care of their Facebook posting (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet). But candidates still have to be cautious of their Facebook posts. Darren Eustance, president of the North Carolina-based Republican consulting firm Malleaus Political Strategies, said in the Campaign and Elections article that one of his clients who was running for chair of the Young Republican National Federation was strongly criticized for a comment she made on a comment from someone else (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet). "Someone commented on her page something stupid and racist about Obama," said Eustance in the article. "This candidate

commented on her post, basically saying 'LOL, good comment, ha ha, you tell 'em.' That came back on her like nothing else (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet)." Twitter seems to be the bigger problem with things like this, though, because candidates often compose their own tweets. "In my experience, you are more likely to find stupid stuff on Twitter than anything else," Eustance said in the article (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet).

But Dusty Trice, a Democratic campaign consultant, believes that having staffers put up messages will soon be a thing of the past as candidates become more comfortable with technology (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics). In an interview with The Madeleine Brand Show on 89.3 KPCC, Southern California public radio, he cited John McCain as one political figure who already handles his own Twitter account and does it well (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics). Some recent remarks made by McCain about Jersey Shore star Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi resonated with audiences. "It was a news item that he did it, and it highlighted a policy position (McCain) was holding. It doesn't get more grassroots that that," said Trice in the interview.

Also, while opposition researchers say they check social media sites for damaging information, it is not their main resource for finding that information. Ed Smith, a Democratic opposition researcher with the Florida-based Hamilton Campaigns, said in Rothman's March 2011 *Campaigns and Elections* article that traditional opposition research resources like newspaper article, past voting records, financial histories, and legal records are much more valuable than anything on social media. But opposition researchers do use social media websites to check for inconsistencies in a candidate's platform or speeches (Rothman, Opposition Researchers Say It's Still Safe to Tweet). According to the article, "Often a candidate will elaborate on a position or comment on a news story on Facebook or Twitter, offering the eagle-eyed researcher a chance to pick up a candid opinion and exploit it if it runs counter to the candidate's public statements or is outside the mainstream of acceptable political thought." Obama's campaign team used a negative social media experience to improve their 2008 social media campaign strategy. According to the April 2011 Politico article, in 2008, a group of liberal Democrats upset at Obama's stance on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act revision,

created a group on the Obama campaign's own social networking site called "Get FISA Right" (Tau). Their demands went viral and they quickly became the most popular group on the site – even drawing an official response from Obama himself (Tau). Because of this early mishap, the president's team was "concerned about how an open platform could leave Obama vulnerable to criticism from within the ranks of his own supporters" (Tau). So, to avoid similar issues, according to the article, the Obama campaign ran a "famously tight, closed-shop digital operation," and they built their own social network at barackobama.com from scratch, rather than through a third-party platform.

The rise of political blogs can also present a problem for candidates. According to Greyes in the March 2011 article, "Any rumor, no matter how absurd, can be presented as fact on any adversarial blog at any time. Soon enough, that rumor may be reprinted in papers and discussed on cable television as if it were fact. That story will have gone viral, leaving the campaign with a massive PR mess to clean up." Many of these blogs, such as Politico and Talking Points Memo, specialize in "micro-scoops" and "quick-hit articles" in order to drive traffic to their sites (Peters). In fact, Politico, which has nearly tripled its staff since the 2008 campaign, started a website in February 2011 called 2012 Live, for stories and other political minutiae, like politicians' daily schedules, county-by-county demographic data in key primary states and historical voting trends (Peters). Also, the site features biographies in micro-detail and an interactive map that tracks where candidates have traveled as far back as 2008 and how many visits they have made to a particular state. In addition, as of January 2011, Politico had already assigned specific bloggers to follow and cover presidential hopefuls, like former Minnesota Gov. Pawlenty, even though no formal declarations for candidacy have been made (Peters). This up-to-the-minute coverage could spell disaster for some candidates, but Greyes believes that social media can be used to combat rumors or missteps, because a savvy new media campaign can challenge a rumor before it becomes viral (Greyes).

It's not just presidential candidates that need social media for campaigns, though. According to social media campaign consultants, local politicians should also utilize social media platforms for their campaigns. "Local politicians still have to use social media," said Trice in the April 2011 interview. Because local campaigns usually have smaller budgets and staffs

than large campaigns, local campaigns must adapt their social media strategies. According to an August 2010 article in *Campaigns and Elections* by Steve Pearson and Ford O'Connell, the founders of Project Virginia, a political action committee that gives away social media tools, the most important thing about social media campaigns, both large and small, is a coherent message (Pearson and O'Connell, Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls). "Hourly tweets or a shocking video rarely compensate for not having something meaningful to say," state Pearson and O'Connell in the article. Using social media to its full advantage is also important to local campaigns. According to Pearson and O'Connell, "Fundamentally, social media is about having conversations and making connections with supporters as the opportunities arise. You may not have every moment scripted, but you need to be paying attention and know when to speak up and shout out (Pearson and O'Connell, Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls)." Trice agrees, saying on his website, www.dustytrice.com, that interacting with others on social networks, especially Twitter, is imperative to the success of local campaigns According to Trice's website, "Sure you can use Twitter to deliver a monologue, but like everything in politics, your goal is to engage people and start a dialogue. Connect with people, ask some questions, and if you get an '@reply', try to respond promptly." Though most local political campaigns are working with small budgets and staffs, Pearson and O'Connell say in the article that they should be wary of "delegating social media to the lowliest intern" to save time and money. They warn that unless candidates are screening every comment and tweet, something could be published that is incorrect or does not reflect the beliefs or platform of the candidate (Pearson and O'Connell, Avoiding Social Media Pitfalls).

Future Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns

In the 2012 campaigns, it is predicted that social media will play an even larger role in political campaigns. According to Trice, the Democratic campaign consultant in the April 2011 radio interview, there has been a greater acceptance of new media since the 2008 campaign. "It's a place you have to stop in the 2012 campaign," Trice said in the interview. Social media has grown beyond having a Facebook and Twitter profile. According to the April 2011 Politico article, "… four years is a millennium in the world of social media and the rich, dynamic web of 2012 will bear little resemblance to the stodgy 'Web 2.0'-era Internet, circa 2008." "I think every campaign is wrestling with how to tap and adapt to most of the activity occurring outside of traditional websites – occurring on the major social networking platforms," said Mindy Finn, a Republican new media strategist who works for former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in the article. Even President Obama, who mastered social media in 2008, will have many changes to make to keep up with the changing social media environment. According to the Politico article:

> "In 2012… the Obama campaign and his Republican rivals will have to grapple with the reality that the entire new media world has shifted again. Email and blogs have been declared passé. Meanwhile, raucous social media platforms and carefully-controlled iPad apps are splitting up the new terrain. And total control by any campaign may be a relic of the past."

Trice says that even social networks like Facebook and Twitter, which were already used in 2008, have changed dramatically since the 2008 campaign. According to Trice, "Twitter was barely scratching the surface in 2008, and now it is the bread and butter for many campaigns. Now, people may have events solely off Twitter, they may run entire financial campaigns off Twitter (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics)." In an April 10, 2011 article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Mindy Finn, Tim Pawlenty's media adviser, voices her agreement. "It's easy to forget that when the 2008 presidential was getting started, Facebook and Twitter were barely a factor. The big shift that's occurred since then is the growth of participation on social networking sites ... half of Americans are on Facebook (Herb)." Greyes, the Democratic strategist argues in a March 17, 2011 article in *Campaigns and Elections* that many things about social media have changed since as recently as the 2010 midterm elections. "…savvy 2012

campaigns will approach a new media platform like Twitter differently from how most 2010 campaigns did," Greyes contends in the article.

As for future campaigns and other candidates, it's not enough to just have profiles on social media websites, says Project Virginia's O'Connell and Pearson (Scott). "Merely having a presence on social networking sites and sending press releases to new media outlets are not enough," Pearson said in an October 26, 2009 article in *Campaigns and Elections*. "For the past few years, the use of technology was the story. Now, as the technology becomes more commonplace, the difference will be in the skill with which campaigns apply the constantly-changing set of tools at their disposal (Scott)." Trice says that it's also not just about the number of followers or friends a candidate has on social networks. He says the best measure of effectiveness for the 2012 campaign will be the number of "likes" and comments on Facebook posts and the number of re-tweets on Twitter (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics). Trice contends that while having a large number of followers or friends makes it easier to share information, it is more important to have an active audience who will share information that candidates put out (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics). Pearson and O'Connell, the founders of ProjectVirginia, agree that activity is more important than size in campaigns. "It is not about the number of Facebook fans your campaign has, but what those fans are doing to drive your campaign's message to other voters (Pearson and O'Connell, Down Home Digital: Minding Your Social Media)."

The Obama campaign responded to the new environment by re-launching their website, barackobama.com, in tandem with the announcement of the President's re-election campaign. The page now has "deep Twitter and Facebook integration" (Tau). Users can log in using their Facebook accounts and a bar at the top of the site invites Facebook users to "Invite Your Friends," showing the names and faces of friends who haven't joined the site. According to Sam Graham-Felsen, Obama's 2008 campaign blogger, Facebook was mainly used in 2008 to get people to come to Obama's website, but now that has changed (Tau). "Our main goal was to reach out to people in those communities, and get them to come to (barackobama.com) and get them to interact with our tools. I think this time, though, everybody is on Facebook now," said Graham-Felsen in the Politico article (Tau).

Trice contends, though, that Obama's incumbency will give him an advantage in the social media world for 2012. "With Facebook and Twitter, it's all about the followers, and Obama will have a four year head start," Trice said in the radio interview. Trice said that while Obama has more than 19 million Facebook friends, Sarah Palin has only 2 million, and Tim Pawlenty, a Republican presidential hopeful, has only 83,000 (Trice, Social media pervades presidential politics). Other presidential hopefuls are already planning social media strategies, though. Tim Pawlenty, the former governor of Minnesota and Republican hopeful, announced his presidential exploratory committee via Facebook message, making him the first to do so on a social networking site (Herb). Pawlenty's website also has a feature called "Pawlenty Action" that allows supporters to earn points and badges for completing tasks like recruiting friends and posting supportive messages on Facebook; he also has created many online-only campaign videos instead of traditional television advertisements (Herb). According to the April 2011 *Star-Tribune* article, this campaign shows the importance of social media in the 2012 election:

> "Pawlenty's Web strategy shows that online campaigning -- once considered extraneous bells and whistles -- now ranks up there with trips to Iowa and New Hampshire for presidential hopefuls. Pawlenty, U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann and other potential 2012ers are planning online campaigns that could make President Obama's pioneering 2008 campaign look like something out of the era of America Online and 56k modems (Herb)."

The increased use of social media platforms on smartphones and other mobile tablets is another new phenomenon that will affect future political campaigns. "Many people who choose to follow the president or his challengers on Twitter and Facebook are going to arrive on the campaign's website on a mobile device," said Jonah Sieger, managing partner of Connections Media, a firm that works with corporate clients and Democratic clients, in the Politico article (Tau). The article contends that running for office will be transformed all over again by the campaigns that can harness the power of mobile computing and organizing. "With the new tools that will be available, when you're out walking your dog, you can conceivably pull out the Obama app and find five houses in the neighborhood that are likely voters," said Sam Graham-Felsen in the article. "If you're waiting at a bus stop, you could contact five voters while you're hanging around doing nothing."

Some social media strategists contend that focusing on niche audiences and long-tail nanotargeting (targeting many small online niches with messages tailored to their particular interests instead of sending out a generic message to everyone) will be the most effective ways to utilize social media in the future (Greyes). In the March 2011 article in *Campaigns and Elections* ,Greyes said that sending out impersonal, general messages via traditional political communications like mailings, phone calls, newspaper editorials, television ads and emails is waste of time and money. In the article, Greyes says:

> "…savvier operatives would be advised to develop messages targeted to the specific interests and sensibility of potential supporters in the new media sphere. Once you have piqued an online niche audience's interest, its members will happily spread your message by posting it on other new media sites or passing it on to friends and acquaintances via the already middle-aged medium of e-mail. The key is to find a way to mobilize online networks that have already formed around a common cause or goal (Greyes)."

Greyes suggests using a platform like Twitter for nanotargeting, because tweets are searchable by hashtag – a word or abbreviation placed into a tweet after a pound sign to indicate the topic (Greyes). Greyes says in the article that ad-hoc communities organize around certain hashtags, making them easy to target with messages tailored specifically to their interests. Greyes says this type of targeting can reach those outside the campaign's designated area (Greyes). According to Greyes in the article, "Marking tweets with niche-specific hashtags has the further advantage of allowing a campaign to reach donors and online activists outside the campaign's geographic area, potentially bringing increased funding and attention to the race." While targeting specific audiences can be time consuming, Greyes maintains that it is necessary for candidates to set themselves apart in the upcoming 2012 campaigns (Greyes). According to Greyes' article, "Users who feel a deep connection with a person or brand are happy to show their public support and provide free marketing for that person or brand through their online activities." Greyes says that the extra time spent "to make sure environmental advocates hear about oil spills, not marriage equality, and gay rights advocates hear about marriage equality, not oil spills" will help a campaign in this era of constant interaction (Greyes).While social media is constantly changing, Trice says that websites like Facebook and Twitter will continue to be increasingly used because of their ability to cross-section the advertising base and their organizational power (Trice, You're Doing It Wrong: 5 Twitter Mistakes Made by Political Campaigns) According to

Trice in the interview, “Organizing wise, Facebook and Twitter are great for media. You can pack an auditorium just by sending out one message on Facebook.”

Though many experts believe social media will play an important role in the upcoming election, some say that traditional campaign measures will still have significance in the 2012 campaign. According to the April 2011 *Star Tribune* article, even with the new technologies social media provide, one of the best tools for fundraising is still e-mail. "Even though Twitter, Facebook and YouTube get a lot of press, direct marketing via e-mail and search still brings in the overwhelming majority of donations," said Eric Frenchman, a digital strategist for Rep. Michele Bachmann, in the article (Herb). Mindy Finn, Pawlenty’s media adviser, agrees, saying that that traditional strategies like fundraisers and meet-and-greets will still be as important as ever to the 2012 campaign (Herb).

Conclusion

From the above research, it can be concluded that social media has played and will continue to play a significant role in political campaigns. In addressing the key questions presented in the beginning of the study, it can be reasonably concluded from the research that there was significant use of social media in the 2008 presidential campaign, specifically by President Barack Obama. It can also be concluded, especially by the statistics in the work by Doris Graber, that social media played a role in Obama's victory over John McCain in the 2008 presidential election. Also, it seems that social media has continued to be increasingly used in political campaigns since the flagship social media use in the 2008 campaign. There have been many changes in social media since the 2008 campaign, and the research suggests that many politicians have adapted to those changes by creating new social media strategies. There are still many problems with social media use, though. From the research, it can be concluded that a lot of these problems stem from the novelty of the technology. The speed of the technology and the sheer volume of people social media can reach in a short amount of time creates problems for those ignorant of the technology, but it can be concluded that these problems can be remedied through further use of the social media technology.

As far as the future use of social media, it can be concluded that though traditional means of communication like e-mail and fundraisers will continue to be utilized in political campaigns, social media will play an ever increasing role in campaigns. Through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, political candidates will continue to interact with supporters and receive support in the form of donations and volunteers. There are many opinions from social media experts about the way social media should be used in the future. Some say it should be used to target specific groups for advertising, while others believe it should be used to deeply connect with contributors. No matter how politicians use social media in their campaigns, it will continue to be an important part of the campaign process.

Because social media is constantly changing, this research can provide a basic framework for the history of social media's use in political campaigns and general suggestions on how to improve social media use in campaigns for years to come.

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