

Running Head: Medium as King

Medium as King:
Social Media & the Political Campaign

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To my parents – Henry and Lisa Schea

Thank you for showing me what it looks like to live a life of excellence in all areas of life and for always encouraging me through any circumstance. I dedicate this thesis to the both of you as a small measure of gratitude for everything you have done in helping me arrive to where I am today.

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Abstract

There is a growing need for a greater understanding of the intersection between great content, effective targeting and proper media usage in mediated communication and especially in American politics. As more campaigns move their efforts online in an attempt to reach a rapidly growing digital constituency, more content will continue to be less visible. The major quest for this study will be to challenge the long-standing idea that “content is king” which Bill Gates termed at the inception of the internet. A theoretical background of Marshall McLuhan and Kathleen Hall Jamieson will not only allow us to answer this question, but then will also allow for future researchers to build upon these concepts. This study will aim to demonstrate how the Ted Cruz presidential campaign of 2016, prior to his departure from the race, was an excellent example of the sweet spot in content creation, voter targeting and medium implementation.

Keywords: Mediated Communication, Marshall McLuhan, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Political Communication, Social Media, Medium is the Message, Content is King, Ted Cruz, Twitter

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When observing American political campaigns of the 21st century it is impossible to see a successful campaign without a robust digital strategy. The Obama presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012 are shining examples of just how powerful an effective digital media strategy can be when employed. In 2008 the Obama campaign raised an impressive \$400 million through digital efforts alone. This amount is incredibly high given the fact that many digital channels that are common-place now for raising money were practically brand new during that election. Despite 2008's impressive numbers, the 2012 campaign raised even more online: approximately \$500 million through digital channels alone. That meant nearly half of all campaign fundraising for the biggest political race in the country - perhaps the most expensive in the world - was raised through email, website availability and social media (Scherer, 2012).

Not every campaign properly utilizes social media; one reason may be limited information pointing to how cost-effective a social media strategy is in terms of resources available to campaigns and consultants. The resources that a campaign uses in terms of developing an effective social media plan would be: (1) financing the plan (paying for a staff member, or volunteer for free), (2) advertising the content (both Facebook and Twitter have ways to increase visibility of posts and more channels are beginning to move in this direction) and (3) time involved in creating effective content. Effective content would depend upon the campaign's needs but overall a robust social media plan requires some thought and creative strategy to get the most out of each individual post and follower.

If the current trends are to continue, it is imperative that political campaigns learn how to tap into the precious resource of the digital community. Even with the statistics and information

available however, many political campaigns struggle to make social media and their digital advertising a priority. From the time that is required to devise a continuous stream of engaging content and the amount of money that needs to be sunk into creating effective advertising, social media campaigning can be an overwhelming if not impossible task. Even once the costs have been calculated, other important questions begin to emerge. How many resources should be spent on the advertising? How often should the content be original and how much of the content should be shared from other sources? How often should content be posted? Who is going to make sure that the voter base is engaged with when they post a question to the account? All of these questions are good to think about, but the one most often brought up is this: what social media channels should be utilized and how can one tell how effective this medium is being?

Now that some of the general questions have been raised it is time to specify what exactly this study will be looking into. An overview of the literature surrounding the three key concepts will be conducted in order to provide a framework with which to begin testing our subject. These three key areas are first, McLuhan's (1964) concept "the medium is the message," secondly, a case will be made for the need of in-depth micro-targeting strategies using the works of Kathleen Hall Jamieson and then the last concept will be the phrase coined by Bill Gates that "content is king." Once we have established a body of literature, we will go into our study of the Ted Cruz 2016 presidential campaign and analyze his effectiveness in mediated communication. The focus will be on one major social media channel currently in use across a broad spectrum of political campaigns: Twitter. Everything will be then wrapped up with a discussion of results and areas for further research as this study seeks to build upon the current body of research.

In order to provide clarity of terminology, we will need to define the differences between channels and mediums. First we will look at defining the term medium which, according to

Griffin (2012) is the singular form of media and is the “[g]eneric term for all human-invented technology that extends the range, speed, or channels of communication” (p. 322). For the purposes of this study, we will use a medium when referring to the larger vehicles of communication such as social media, television as a whole and even printed content which all carry a message from the sender to any number of recipients. Channels of communication then for this study will refer to the specific entities within each medium: Twitter as a channel of the medium social media for instance.

There will be one guiding question that we seek to answer at the conclusion: is content really still king or is the medium gaining prominence as the focus for effective messaging. This question is incredibly important to answer since it is directly applicable to all communicators right now. Understanding how to have the most effective communication strategies will help anyone attempting to send messages have higher return on investment.

The Problem

How exactly does one evaluate the effectiveness of a medium possessing little to no monetary value for users on the platform? While many political campaigns see the benefits of having strong engagement on social media, they do not always follow through with making an effective strategy. This can lead to either simply creating noise which will be drowned out or not posting anything out of fear of saying something damaging. According to the Pew Research Center: “66% of social media users (39% of American adults) have engaged in... political activities with social media...” (Ranie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady and Verba 2012). With such a large population of potential American voters using social media and with the trends of seeing those numbers only increasing in coming elections, it is essential that each campaign have a planned social media strategy (Brenski, Hardy, and Jamieson 2010; Hollihan 2009; Ranie, Smith,

Schlozman, Brady and Verba 2012).

One question to ask is whether or not a channel on any given medium that is being used will increase voter engagement numbers. This question becomes especially important when trying to decide which of the available channels will have the most positive impact over the course of a campaign. There are many different channels within the medium of social media that are currently available for organizations to use to their benefit, but there are also distinct differences in the ways that each of these allow their users to interact with one another. For the purposes of this study, we will primarily be looking at one of the most established social media platforms to date that is being implemented by a high number of political campaigns: Twitter.

This study aims to analyze how users interact with each other on this platform (which can be eventually applied to other platforms) and also to see what kind of content appears to be the most effective. To do this will require an analysis into the successes of a large campaign that has shown the benefits of strategically implementing social media. We want to show that the medium will play an integral role in the development of our subject's strategy. For this, we will be using Marshall McLuhan's ideas of 'the message is the medium' to evaluate if the medium and channel are as important as the content that is being created.

McLuhan's (1964) work will be an invaluable basis for this study. We will be using his theory to explain whether or not social media as a medium of communication will result in a change of perception from our subject's audience. The main concept of McLuhan's that we will be using is the idea that 'the medium is the message.' There are other concepts of his that are important to a deep understanding of McLuhan's ideas, however, we will only focus on just the above concept so as to provide clarity.

The second area that will be addressed in our analysis is to determine just how important

digital strategies are in current political campaigns. We will be working with ideas from Kathleen Hall Jamieson to extrapolate this information as we narrow in on our target. Her work in the area of political campaigns and their use of technology as well as the way in which candidates and potential voters interact with the media in use will also prove to be invaluable. Jamieson (2012) writes that, “The presence of explicitly ideological media expands the range of audience choices...” (p. 413). While it has been true for a long time that the only way messages from political campaigns reached their constituents was via biased outlets (such as broadcast television, radio, newspaper organizations, direct mailers from the campaign, etc.), social media has allowed for information to spread from campaigns in a somewhat less controlled fashion.

The final part of our theoretical analysis will center around the concept of ‘content is king’ from the perspective that Gates introduced the world to in 1996 with his essay on the upcoming advantages and possibilities of the internet. For the better part of two decades, this perspective has been practically unchallenged in the media as well as in the professional realms of marketing and advertising, thus making it an important concept to cover in this study. Gates wrote that the individuals who understand the value of content and how the internet will shape its creation and dissemination will ultimately be the ones at the top of the ladder.

The scope of this study will encompass just how social media as a medium interacts with potential voters. We want to first demonstrate how important it is for political campaigns to have an effective digital media plan as the researcher predicts that this will ultimately lead to electoral success. Since there are cases of campaigns haphazardly throwing together digital media strategies, it is important to have a well-executed plan that will ultimately lead to success.

The second question that we want to answer is related to the opposing ideas of content is king and the medium is the message. This study will stand to prove that one is a stronger driving

force in the influence of consumers (in this case, voters) and how exactly micro-targeting strategies come into play. A qualitative analysis that will draw out statistical data gathered from a current campaign will help us to begin opening up this topic for further discussion.

Rationale

This study will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of social media in political campaigns in the American political environment that is becoming increasingly digitally oriented. In order to solve these questions, we will be taking a look at the current United States presidential bid from Ted Cruz and his campaign's use of social media. Therefore, we will analyze how political campaigns and potential voters engage on social media by using Marshall McLuhan, Kathleen Hall Jamieson and material from Gates' essay. The study will be conducted in qualitative fashion by organizing data that has been publicly made available.

This study is worth conducting for a variety of reasons. Firstly, this study will provide political campaigns and consultants with information that they can use directly to inform their decisions when organizing their digital strategies. This will be important because it can cut down on the initial stages of preparation that a campaign would need to go through so that strategists can spend their time on content rather than on medium decisions. This could provide campaigns to be overall more effective at reaching the right viewers so as to have highest levels of engagement with their constituents.

Additionally, we will be creating a fresh application of McLuhan's (1964) ideas into the realm of political messaging. This outcome will more than likely have a larger impact in academia than it will in politics, but that makes it even more worth mentioning. As technology continues to develop and people become increasingly attached to their technology, the more important it is to understand how McLuhan's (1964) media ecology plays out. The emphasis

within this study will be that the medium that the message is being sent out in is as important if not more important than the message itself as the writer suspects that each individual channel is viewed differently and therefore will have an impact upon the reception of the message.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Marshall McLuhan

In order for one to understand the assumptions made in this study, one must understand Marshall McLuhan and the implications of his works of understanding media and media ecology. McLuhan (1964), in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, he presents the study of mediated communication with a new thought: that the medium is the message. McLuhan (1964) explains that understanding this idea will help to illuminate the “personal and social consequences of any medium” (p. 13). This idea of the medium is the message explains that no matter what object is used, it has a way of communicating meaning.

McLuhan’s ideas have encouraged much discussion for how man engages with media as well as forces one to examine the entire field of communication through a new perspective. His book, written in 1964, “sold a hundred thousand copies” (Mullen, 2006) and was thus propelled into the American culture at large. Laymen and scholars alike became accustomed with the idea that ‘the medium is the message’ and how media can affect human behavior and engagement (Mullen, 2006). Even amongst academics that disagree with some or all of McLuhan’s ideas do agree on the fact that one cannot study media and mediated communication in its current form without at least referencing McLuhan.

We will begin by analyzing McLuhan’s possibly most famous idea that ‘the message is the medium.’ This portion of the material is essential in order to understand the importance behind choosing the correct channels and media when deciding where to disseminate content. Different content will still send essentially the same message, according to a McLuhan

perspective, if the content is all sent across the same medium and possibly even the same channel. This directly conflicts with the prevailing belief that ‘content is king’ and as such creates tension for our study. Our hypothesis will greatly rely upon these assumptions.

To understand this, we must really dig into what McLuhan means when he explains that the medium is the message. Messages are unable to be understood without the transmission of a medium because the very messages themselves, according to McLuhan, are actually mediums. For instance, McLuhan uses the example of a lightbulb and electricity. The electricity that goes through the lightbulb is able to create light which, without further interpretation, simply has no message. However, if the light was transmitted through a bulb that was shaped to create an open sign on your favorite restaurant, now the bulb has allowed the light to be interpreted as a message. However, if this same method was applied to a lighthouse off the coast of Maine, the message would be entirely different. McLuhan (1964) goes on to explain that:

“Whether the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference. It could be argued that these activities are in some way the ‘content’ of the electric light... This fact merely underlines the point that the ‘medium is the message’ because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (p. 14).

The force that separates the interpretation of the multiple mediums used to carry the light is within the medium itself. This is to say that individual interpretation is also to be considered.

According to McLuhan (1964), “The electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no ‘content’ ... it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium” (p. 14). This builds upon his idea that all mediums can be a message but they require the assistance of what humans perceive as content, which

really are separate medium forms. After this point McLuhan's (1964) understanding of media becomes quite complex.

The second major part of McLuhan's work that will be observed concerns his ideas about mediums being extensions of man that carry messages from a sender to the recipients. One of the major factors that play a role in the perception of mediums and messages is the recipient's interaction with the medium. This is where the idea that mediums are 'extensions of man' meaning that the medium (therefore the content) interacts directly with the viewer's self. Content, therefore, extends beyond just simple text, visuals and sounds; rather, it encompasses everything that can be experienced through the senses by anything that exists.

Whereas a lightbulb is illuminated via electricity and a car is powered by electricity, they both have very different contents and are engaged with very differently by man. This difference in engagement is where McLuhan states the 'extension of man' via mediums occur. Building upon this, content would extend beyond the traditional sense of communication which is that content is simply a vehicle for exchanging ideas, thoughts and beliefs. Communication would extend beyond simply on a personal or maybe even animal level: but on that of an abstract material level.

McLuhan (1964) wanted to demonstrate that media engages with a society on multiple levels and this is where the mediums of choice become extensions of man's relation with his world. Man is engaged by mediums on physical, societal, psychological and communication levels and this is based upon the manner of the medium which McLuhan terms the technology. McLuhan (1964) compares technological media to natural resources such as coal, cotton and oil and how they can be important for the interactions among individuals and among societies (p. 21). Technology, according to McLuhan (1964) is anything that enhances communication and

therefor allows for man to be increasingly more effective at communicating.

McLuhan (1964) explained: "That our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies them, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us..." (p. 24). Our experiences when interacting with the world around us is therefore impacted by the mediums that we choose to use. However, his ideas were so far ahead of his time that they were more than just revolutionary: they also created a strong reaction from the academia of the decade.

After several years the interpretation of McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' began to change and so challenged his ideas. This resulted in a change of understanding the concepts that he used. According to Kwiatkowski (1998), the medium originally meant it: "...could be a television program, radio show, magazine, or billboard location. The medium was the vehicle to create awareness and initial imagery. The medium was the vehicle carrying the advertising – the virtual product if you will" (p. 44). As the idea of the medium has evolved, so too has its applications.

Kwiatkowski (1998) explained that advertising has been heavily affected by the idea of the medium is the message. He even insists that mediums now go so far as to include websites, physical locations such as the stores where products are sold and what he terms the 'point of sale.' Kwiatkowski's purpose for using McLuhan's ideas was to affect the world of advertising but for our purposes it also shows the adaptability of the concept.

Macdonald (2006), however, explained that McLuhan did not understand the electronic mass media that is now so popular. This is because the current digital communication system completely debunks McLuhan's reach of Understanding Media. However, he agreed that McLuhan did understand that media are "[P]rofoundly human responses..." (p. 506). This is to

repeat the idea that we relate to our circumstances and lives through the mediums that we choose to engage with.

Fishman (2009) writes that much of what he said was “filled with dualisms.” McLuhan’s work contained some conflicting ideas and even in some of his terminology he is inconsistent with the meaning. This has led to his works being criticized especially after many of his most popular writings had been on the market for about a decade. Regardless of this, his work has been immensely insightful into the understanding of the rapid growth of the internet.

Macdonald (2006) also explains that in order to understand McLuhan, you must see there's an emphasis on the "material dimensions of media" (P. 508). The reason for this is because mediums change the way we see the world and help us have a common understanding of knowledge and even shapes how societies function together. "... it is because a medium is not a bodiless milieu but a substance for the transmission of force, power, and energy" (p. 509).

MacDonald (2006) in his analysis states that while he may disagree with some of what McLuhan theorized about, he did think McLuhan understood media and the danger that it poses if not used correctly.

In summarizing McLuhan, MacDonald (2006) writes that “To succumb to this rhetorical assault is to be ‘stupefied’ by the Gorgon’s head of persuasion’ ... For this reason, argues McLuhan, we must view the mass media indirectly, from a critical distance, much as the mythical hero Perseus uses a mirror to gaze upon – and behead – the medusa” (p. 508).

MacDonald (2006) concludes by saying that if media was a weapon and there was a war going on, then the explosion of digital mediums would be the equivalent of weapons of mass destruction.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson

Kathleen Hall Jamieson is the Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication and Walter and Leonore Annenberg Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Her areas of expertise are in political communication, rhetorical theory and criticism and she also researches campaign communication and presidential discourse. Jamieson encourages the scholar to look at communication through the lens of rhetoric and communications technology. In particular, she has looked at how recent campaigns have used communication technology to their advantage and what it means for the future. Her primary works and research that she has helped to conduct provide an excellent middle ground between the two predominating ideas in this study: that of the dominance of medium or the dominance of content.

As communication technology becomes more complex, the ways in which a campaign can send messages to the voters becomes much more targeted and therefore may challenge the idea of medium over content focus. Campaigns have the ability to create increasingly targeted messages that are designed to only be seen by specified individuals which can greatly increase the levels of positive engagement resulting more than likely in more votes on Election Day. We are going to analyze several of Jamieson's major works in regards to message targeting in order to gain a complete picture for our study.

One study that she conducted looked at the realm of micro-targeting and gathering analytics-based data for use in constructing overall campaign messaging. Jamieson (2013) explains that while it does seem to be the trend going forward that messages require a mountain of data before they are deployed could possibly allow for the distortion of messages. "Access to data-mined information will increase the likelihood that the candidate with the larger war-chest will gain an advantage by changing the composition of the electorate" (pg. 429). This trend could

possibly lead campaigns to have less accountability about the messages that they produce which makes this a matter of great importance and understanding for the student of persuasion.

The other sides of this however is that with the increase in data, campaigns really do become more efficient at giving the right message to the right individuals that will be positively impacted. Jamieson (2013) provided an example: “A pro-life union member in an Ohio or Michigan household will not be told that Obama is pro-choice but rather that he championed and Romney opposed the auto bailout” (pg. 430). Being able to use the new technology to make the message smoother in this case might create ethical issues and that is something that Jamieson warns about.

Jamieson (2013) argues messages which are more targeted are also more capable of delivering content that is deemed more valuable and therefore, will cost more money for campaigns to utilize.

Because micro-targeted communication delivers “impressions” more efficiently and with less risk of backlash from unintended viewers than does mass mediated content, it is reasonable to conclude that in coming elections third party and campaign advertisers will shift more of their resources to these new technology channels (pg. 430).

This shift in resources will result in the increased usage of 3rd party groups to air advertisements, but that is not the important part for this study. The important factor to pay attention to for this study is the fact that in order for a candidate to win, it appears that they must simply outspend their opponent on messaging to outside groups. Obviously the content coming from these other groups may not be received the same as if they came directly from the campaigns themselves, but the partisan content will still be clearly seen.

One of the major concerns that Jamieson (2013) brings up in this article is that this will lead to the increase in more deceptive content being produced (pg. 431). Content that is produced as deceptive will change the way that consumers/voters will engage with it and therefore demonstrates an emphasis upon the content as the real vehicle messaging. Messages which are micro-targeted are able to provide higher levels of deception simply because it is harder for other entities to keep the messaging accountable. This is fairly common in politics to mask the conversation to potential voters by deterring them from the truth and will either result in a non-voter or even possibly a voter that has switched sides for their vote.

The study concluded by arguing content being sent out in these micro-targeted ads is not only difficult to track and challenge if found false, but that it might ultimately change the way in which voters engage with campaigns. Jamieson (2013) writes that the process itself is being compromised in some way, but that it is currently difficult to determine to what extent that is the case. "...[S]cholars have no good way to determine what effects, if any, this new form of campaigning is having on the candidates, the voters and the process writ large" (pg. 434). So while the full effects of this form of rhetoric are still in the process of being understood, it is important to note that Jamieson is saying it is the conflux of content and medium that seem to be the sweet spot for understanding how audiences will interpret messages.

In order to see just how important messaging is, we will be taking into account the amount of micro-targeting for messages campaigns have used and how this will apply to our subject of Ted Cruz. Jamieson (2010) postulated that "...Obama won the day by backing a micro-targeted message with the significant audience delivery needed to shift votes" (p. 265). Cruz and his campaign team have carried this idea even farther by paying around \$4 million before the conclusion of the campaign on gathering data according to the Associated Press

(Detrow, 2016). Jamieson (2010) explained that ultimately, the candidate with the larger war-chest is more likely to win since micro-targeting truly is a game of money. However, not all money will be used to the same effectiveness: "... [A] dollar spent on one channel at a particular time in one medium does not equal a dollar spent at a different time in the same venue..." (Jamieson, 2010, p. 267). This means that more variables are able to contribute to the overall effectiveness of a message and increases the tension between medium and content.

Medium vs Content

One cannot complete a study on medium without addressing the now-popularized saying that "content is king." Content producers and communicators of almost any profession hold to the belief that in order to be successful with messaging, one must produce excellent content. The vehicle in which the content is carried, distributed and otherwise decoded only seek to enhance the message rather than to actually be the message as McLuhan would acclaim. We will take a brief dive into this concept here in order to be more inclusive with the material used in this study.

Bill Gates (1996) was the original person that coined the phrase "content is king," and it has been a motto for marketers to live by since the coining of the phrase. "Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet..." (Gates, 1996). He explained even as early as 1996 that the internet would change the way in which information was gathered and distributed but that it would also change the way in which content could be created. No longer would the creation of content be limited to the elite such as the media or advertisers, but rather now the masses had a way to communicate their own ideas with the world.

Content also extended beyond the normal written and verbal messages that many people would regularly associate with the term. "When it comes to an interactive network such as the Internet, the definition of 'content' becomes very wide" (Gates, 1996). Even computer software

could be considered content because it is something that people can consume and then share with others. This means that content almost could become real estate in the sense that you must snatch up the good space in order to be most marketable. Gates (1996) wrote that he would societies would see “intense competition,” which would mean that any company could now participate in the global marketplace, no matter how small the company.

Now that we have established an understanding for what Gates was trying to explain, it is important to see how this concept is being applied in the current world of digital content creation. Good content is widely considered the necessary ingredient to effective communication whether the platform is digital or physical. This idea is especially strongly held in the media (Lynn and Cooper, 2008; Waugh, 2011) as well as by marketing experts as they attempt to reach new audiences and retain current ones. The idea that content is a commodity creates an intense level of competition among large industry giants and small independent bloggers alike. Waugh (2011) writes that “humour, concision and insight are the new currency” (p. 47) and because of this there is an explosion of information that can be found.

Content can be easy to find no matter where the consumer looks. Simple content can be created by the average person. In order for content to truly achieve what Gates was explaining, then the content must be compelling and, more importantly, visible to the correct audiences. This is where the intersection of McLuhan and Gates becomes so incredibly important to understand. Desai et. al. (2013) conducted a study that was focused on determining if content produced on YouTube by “reputable healthcare organizations” (p. 6) for purely educational reasons or if the same topic covered in television shows would be more effective. Desai et. al. (2013) acknowledges that “Content and quality may be key ingredients for entertainment-focused organizations. When an organization authors an optimal video, the general public is no more

likely to engage with it than with less optimal videos” (p. 6).

In this case, the subject matter can still be covered in two different mediums and also for two different purposes. Their study concludes that in the field of medical education, the idea of “content is king” does not dictate the success or distribution of material. This means that the quality of the content and the type of content that is being communicated are not the ultimate test of success. The medium still plays a role in how messages are interpreted, despite the overwhelming leaning towards being simply content-centered.

Social Media in Politics

Social media has become increasingly important not only in general communications, but especially for political purposes (O’Boyle, 2014; Smith, 2013; Williams and Gulati, 2013; Karpf 2010, 2013). While it may seem like social media has made it more difficult for candidates to control the conversation, it has actually allowed for more dialogue and less one-way communication. Ultimately, this can lead to more effective messaging in the long run for campaigns as they strategize on how to best reach their audiences.

Jones and Hopkins (1985) explained that some of the mediums they used were more traditional at the time but that they also used methods that were brand new to see if it made a difference. Face-to-face and group meetings were much more common at the time of the study so phone soliciting and direct mail were seen to be more effective across the board. In their conclusion, they write that their evidence overall however was ‘mixed and far from conclusive.’ The implication is that although fundraising techniques may be universally applicable, the successful fund raisers will be those who know and understand the territory in which they seek to apply the new technologies.

Williams and Gulati (2013) conducted a survey that was aimed at discovering just how effective social media is for political campaigns. They specifically looked into candidates during the 2006 and 2008 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives and examined their implementation of Facebook throughout the course of the campaign. Since this was early in the days of Facebook, it was also important to notice how quick the subjects were to adopting this new medium. “Challengers and candidates for open seats were more likely to be early adopters, but incumbents used Facebook more extensively. Both higher adoption rates by peers or competitors in the candidate’s own state and a propensity to adopt earlier campaign technologies are strong positive motivators for early adoption, but irrelevant to usage” (pg. 52).

Williams and Gulati’s (2013) hypothesis was they wanted to prove campaigns early to set up a Facebook page and regularly updated would be reflected by being the same campaigns that jumped in on the early days of digital campaigning. They took their sampling of candidates and then checked to see if the campaigns had been active since the creation of their page. They also performed a content analysis to see how they were using the features available to them at the time. They discovered that simply speaking the message of the campaign is not enough to be successful with a social media strategy for a campaign. “Active engagement by the candidate and a well-maintained site can make the candidate more accessible and seem more authentic” (Williams and Gulati, 2013, pg. 67).

In a separate article, Karpf (2013) conducted research on how political campaigns use the internet and looked at some of the major research on the subject. He found that there are five main premises that the research all points to. The first premise is that when looking at the overall electorate, the use of the internet has not changed the types of individuals that participate in the campaign. “Many journalists and practitioners look to the internet with hopes that it will spur an

imagined rebirth of egalitarian democracy... The research literature paints a far more muted picture” (pg. 415). Karpf (2013) explains that although everyone has access to being able to have their individual voices heard on digital mediums such as blogs, personal websites or social media, the people that still have the most influence are those at the top of the academic or professional spheres of influence, just as it would be without access to all of the different kinds of digital mediums. “Heavily Skewed online traffic patterns approximate power law distributions creating a digital space in which anyone can speak, but only a small elite can be widely heard” (Karpf, 2013, pg. 415).

Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2014) conducted a study that specifically looked at Facebook and how the content that was generated a company would help increase the receiver’s likelihood of being persuaded to take any number of actions. They chose to analyze the interactions of two companies in Finland that involved the company customer care professionals and the customers that would message the page asking for assistance. The study found that company employees that used messages that were socially acceptable and either helpful or relocated the customer to another section of the company were shown to have high levels of success and promoting positive action on behalf of the customers.

A study was also conducted by Lee and Shin (2012) that used Twitter as the primary medium engagement however this study was related to politicians’ use of their Twitter profiles. The study compared how the subjects reacted to interacting a politician’s Twitter account versus how they perceived the politician in a newspaper interview. The research was conducted on current Twitter users in South Korea that currently were not following any politicians on their profile.

The research showed at the end of the study that the people who engaged with the

politicians via Twitter developed a near story-like involvement with the politician. The most important finding for our purposes however is that this directly helped them to see that the medium through which the messages were delivered really did play a part in the persuasion of the subject: “Overall, the current results indicate that people respond differently to a politician’s identical messages depending on the channel through which the messages are delivered, and such channel effects hinge on their cognitive propensity” (Lee and Shin, 2012). This study helped to conclude that the chosen mediums by campaigns really do effect the persuasive capabilities that the campaign’s messaging can have upon its audience.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Throughout the course of the study we will be analyzing the social media strategy and efforts of Ted Cruz and his campaign for the 2016 presidential election cycle. Specifically we will be looking into the campaign's Twitter account and conducting a qualitative analysis by first breaking down data via a 3rd party analytics application to determine just how effective Cruz has used this channel and then discussing the findings. The results of the study should help to determine whether or not his social media plan has been successful and then to provide a starting point for future studies requiring mixed methods or purely qualitative studies into the content itself.

This study is designed to prove that people interact with mediums differently and respond in varying degrees as well as in separate methods. If the same content is delivered on Facebook as well as on Twitter, there should be a statistically relevant difference. According to PEW Research Center there is a large majority of people that are using Facebook and Twitter to engage with political campaigns. According to their 2013 study: "60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter" (Smith 2013). Out of the number of the total adults in America, 66% of those on social media sites engaged in at least one of civic or political activities polled. Since users are engaging with content at this high of a rate, it is impossible for political campaigns to ignore the advantages of having their messages specifically targeted (Smith 2013). According to many social media consultants, there are not only best times to post content but they're also best channels to use for a given entity. This study will be focusing on the studies conducted to establish the best content for the appropriate channel, however there is also plenty of information available in regards to scheduling content that will not be addressed.

Subject

Ted Cruz is currently the candidate with the most comprehensive digital media plan in place during the course of the 2016 elections. “When Cruz launched his presidential campaign in March, he turned first to Twitter - releasing a 3 second announcement video on the social networking site several hours before his formal speech at Liberty University in Virginia. He then posted the video on Facebook where it garnered over 1 million views” (Chittal, 2015). This set a precedent for several other major candidates from both Republican and Democrat sides of the political spectrum to do the same. As politicians become more and more strategic with their use of social media, the more likely it is that this trend may continue. Barthel (2015) explains that this is “a sound strategy” since this is where Americans seem to be turning more often for their news.

However, this strong showing from the beginning of the race can be traced back to his first time running for the US Senate in Texas as well. Friess (2012) writes that Cruz “[C]limbed from obscurity to the brink of the year’s biggest upset and, in the process, became Exhibit A of how to effectively use social media to grow a movement.” His use of social media was not only a novel way to reach out to voters, but it was also effective. Friess (2012) went on to explain that the strategy to employ a more robust digital plan also was effective in masking the disparity in fundraising capital that he had with his opponents in 2012.

It has been more than just the campaign’s deployment of social media that has made the efforts so successful. The 2016 Cruz campaign has also been able to gather a massive amount of data on users in much the same way of the Obama campaign in 2008. Through a variety of methods - both direct and indirect - the Cruz campaign has collected demographic and psychographic data on potential voters which will significantly assist in message targeting

online.

The gathering of data for the Cruz campaign is a crucial point of discussion because of the direct application of Jamieson (2010, 2013) and her work. His campaign has proven that the effective gathering of data on constituents is extremely important in today's elections. This way, his content is being directed to the voters with the greatest chance of either greater active participation in the process or to the voters that are most likely to have their opinions swayed in his favor. When compared to the other candidates, his strategy has been more methodical and has been able to capitalize upon his advantages in the digital realms. "However, where Rubio and Trump's follower activity peaked after the Caucus, Cruz's social engagements continued to rise. According to Keyhole.co, Cruz was also mentioned on Facebook and YouTube slightly more often than his GOP rivals" (Patterson, 2016). Cruz's ability to engage with voters is on the rise and while there are other candidates with slightly higher numbers, they may be plateauing at the same time that Cruz is surging in the polls and social conversation.

This study will pull data strictly from the time period of January 12, 2016 until March 3, 2016. The study waited until the debate prior to the first primary election. This is to provide correlation of data that will demonstrate how effectively the chatter on social is being translated into votes. It takes more than just executing a sound social media strategy for the Cruz presidential campaign to come out ahead and by comparing the results of each of the primaries with how engagement is seen on the candidate's social pages, we are able to show whether or not the data is significant in indicating a preferred result.

Hypothesis

The study will be conducted over a period of time containing primary elections as well as major debates between the top contend Republican candidates. These events should allow us to

see the progression of engagement over the course of the timeline as well as help to provide significant time markers to look for spikes in activity. Data will be gathered strictly in a qualitative fashion, breaking down the statistical data that will be gathered through various kinds of engagement being monitored on Twitonomy. In order to achieve this testing, we will be looking at various forms of engagement. Ted Cruz's social media platform on Twitter is the subject of this study and we will be seeking to gather information from the analytic statistics gathered from Twitonomy. We will be looking specifically at the data concerning other-user engagement such as retweets, likes, and mentions.

Our hypothesis will be mainly centered on one idea: since Ted Cruz has the most robust strategic digital media plan in place, his campaign should not only control much of the conversation on social media but it also should result in a victory in the Republican primaries. We suspect that the high level of digital content development will ultimately result in what Jamieson alluded to when she explained the advantages of micro-targeting voters especially in digital mediums. The emphasis for this study is heavily placed upon the medium that the messages are created in order to see how the data demonstrates the level of user engagement.

Chapter 4

Results

The data that was gathered helped to shed some light on exactly how effective Ted Cruz has been on Twitter. We analyzed data through the 3rd party tool, Twitonomy, and have been able to come up with an accurate reading of content development as well as the more important factors for this study: the engagement from followers on the channel. Engagement on the channel has been strong in several areas and the data shows several ways in which this is the case.

After analyzing the data from Twitonomy, we were able to discover the number of times that the subject was engaged in conversation with the followers. These areas include the number of tweets posted during the predetermined time, retweets, and number times that tweets were favorited. This data allows us to begin painting a simple picture of how much engagement was actually seen on this channel for Ted Cruz and his presidential campaign during the timeline indicated previously.

For purposes of this research, we only gathered data that was provided via Twitonomy which simply reduced the information to raw numbers which will require some interpretation to fully understand the implications of these findings. From January 14, 2016 until March 3, 2016 there was a total of 1,901 total posts to Twitter by the Ted Cruz campaign and it is from these posts that the information was gathered. The data that was gathered showed some information about the types of tweeting that the campaign used, however, for the purposes of this study, we will only be looking at the engagement numbers to show the success rate of the overall social media strategy. There was a total of 690 tweets that were 'retweeted' which comes out to a little over 36% of the original 1,901 that were posted. However, these 690 tweets were 'retweeted' a total of 373,516 times in total over the course of the time period. This is about 541 times per

tweet. 690 tweets were also 'favorited' a total of 554,802 times which averages out to about 804 favorites per tweet.

This analysis provides a sampling of data to work with in order to help paint the larger picture in question for this study: have Ted Cruz's social media methods been effective at generating engagement and victories in the primaries? The data that has been gathered does prove that Ted Cruz has been effective at not only talking about important topics surrounding the election, but it also shows the campaign's efforts have not gone unnoticed by the many followers of the candidate's account as they have been able to generate large amounts of engagement.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Now that the data has been cited, we must take a closer look into the results as we begin to move into a discussion of our analysis. The results have shown that Ted Cruz truly has had a great impact on the conversation throughout the current GOP election cycle. The first part of the results that we will be looking at is the way in which our research highlights the concept of different content for different mediums which was part of our original hypothesis. According to our early interpretations of McLuhan (1960), we suspected that content would be engaged with slightly differently depending on the content and mediums themselves and applied this idea to Facebook and Twitter. However, the information that we gathered in this study did not show that there would have been a statistical difference between posting content on Facebook as opposed to Twitter. However, more of this will be discussed at length later.

While there are some pieces that make it difficult to paint a complete picture of the scenario that was originally hoped for, we did make some definitive discoveries with this research. The first surety is that Ted Cruz has been a major contributor to the information made available throughout the 2016 Republican election cycle. Despite being overshadowed throughout the cycle by another candidate, the Cruz campaign has proven that he has had the most amount of research thrown into his social media plan. The data shows that his campaign has been able to capitalize very effectively on major events during the time that was analyzed. For instance, Ted Cruz made quite the impact in terms of engagement numbers by the way in which his social media team handled the death of Justice Scalia on February 13. His numbers also spike up around his posts about the primary results in different states. While Ted Cruz's campaign has been very effective at implementing strategy in their social media efforts, it has not

directly lead to the results that we were hoping to prove with this study.

Despite the planning and research of the Cruz campaign, their level of engagement has not quite been at the level of Cruz's biggest rival for the GOP nomination: Donald Trump. Unlike the Trump campaign, Cruz has been unable to translate social media effectiveness into election results on Primary Day. This runs counter to what we had predicted in our hypothesis that effective social media planning would result in election wins. This shows that there some outside factors that were not analyzed in this study that can accurately predict how an election can be won.

Some other areas of consideration for this topic would include information about how voting habits and other variables affected the ultimate outcome of this study. Voters tend to engage in politics for a variety of reasons. While social media usage and engagement in politics may be on the rise in America, this does not mean that the candidate that says the right words and has the right strategy on Twitter will win outright. Social media is just one tool of many that are available to political candidates and their staff, so it is important to see how only certain markets may be affected by effective social media planning.

Not only do voters tend to engage in politics on more than one medium, they also form their own opinions outside of what they see strictly on social media and these other factors have much deeper impacts on the outcome of an election. Many voters may already have an opinion of a certain candidate and this is usually difficult to change. We gathered data from a certain period of time and then provided a qualitative look into what the data means however a more in-depth mixed methods research would have been beneficial to completing this study.

Limits

There are several limits that have inhibited the progress of this study. While this study has been able to answer the questions asked in our original hypothesis, there were some areas that came into some minor conflict. The first of these limits has already been mentioned briefly, but will be extensively examined now: namely, that Twitter is the only channel that we gathered our data from for the study. When it comes to the integration of our theoretical background provided by McLuhan, we would have been able to provide a more complete data set if we put together data from all social media channels, since together they all form the one medium of social media. This limitation would have directly influenced one of our primary hypotheses: that creating content on one channel is received differently than it would on another channel. This distinction between channel and medium is a very important factor and the data that was gathered does not directly answer question of whether or not certain content is better to be published on Facebook or on Twitter.

In order to truly analyze one medium, we would have needed to pull information from all of the different social media platforms. This would have provided us with a wide variety of data with which we would be able to accurately compare the information with that of another medium, such as television advertising. Using one channel, however, did allow us to begin working within this area using McLuhan principles to help build this body of work.

A second limit that was placed upon this study was the fact that Twitter made it difficult to gather data from sources other than the platform itself. This meant that data which had been previously made available to anyone with access to the proper 3rd party applications was no longer available outside of a certain range of dates as of the time of conducting this study. Information was made available to the owners of their own accounts, but not for anyone else looking to do research. This obviously affected our tool used in this research: Twitonomy. At the

onset of the research, data was only available for the year of 2016. The data that Twitter allowed to be mined grew gradually, but it still limited the time frame that we could use to test our hypothesis.

Obviously, the next limit that was placed upon the study would be that we were limited to a small time frame. The study only covers a small amount of time in the grand scheme of the larger political cycle and is essentially only as reliable as the events that take place during the data set. While this did limit the amount data that we could gather, it did make sure that it would be easier to narrow down the important information for the purposes of solving our hypotheses.

Lastly, while we did conduct a qualitative analysis as we looked into the interpretation of the data that we gathered, we would need to do a more dedicated mixed-methods study in order to truly paint the whole picture. We gathered only simple quantitative data and while this did provide some solid information for us to work with as we constructed our analysis of the information, it would have been able to set up a data set that could have predictive powers as far as determining the true success rate of the Cruz campaign's Twitter. We were simply limited by the amount of information gathered by the sheer form of analysis that we stuck with for the entirety of the study.

Areas for Further Research

This study will add to the bodies of literature for several areas of academic research. These additions will be important because of the nature of the rapidly changing landscape of social media, the explosion of usage for social media in political campaigns and lastly the relevance with which the study shows how McLuhan's body of work can continue to be integrated into the understanding of the digital age. However, there are three key concepts that we will focus on that will be largely beneficial to future researchers as this work is built upon.

The first area for research would be to analyze social media in its entirety for a subject as a medium itself. This was one of the limitations that was discussed previously and would provide an immense opportunity to grow. If, instead of analyzing one channel, one was to find a subject that is actively involved in multiple channels of social media then the researcher could conduct a study that would truly develop an accurate portrayal of just how much people have their communication affected by the vehicle we call social media.

This would become useful in the realm of political campaigning as we know it due to the possibility of truly discovering not only who to target with one's messaging, but also to discover the absolute most effective way in which to execute. The study could, in theory, examine the way in which a follower interacts with a message on Facebook as opposed to a personal tweet on Twitter. To a campaign, this would make the difference between a passive follower that might be able to get the candidate one vote on Election Day and a follower that now is equipped with knowledge and the desire to influence their personal realm of acquaintances. A campaign that knows the best message for the right follower for every potential voter could drastically change the way in which political campaigning is conducted in the present.

The next area for further research is similar to the first and builds upon the same principles: analyzing apps, games and other mobile channels as a whole. Along with the understanding of how social media works, it is also incredibly important to see the way in which voters are involved in entities such as messaging apps or mobile games. Finding ways to analyze these channels could very well lead to the next level of communication from campaigns to their followers. This could be done in direct ways to communicate amongst advocacy groups, providing a more elaborate experience of gamification similar to what the Cruz campaign has accomplished with their mobile app or other possibilities as researchers discover new needs for

communicating in these ways. Being able to provide an even more experiential communication process would greatly benefit the field of research within political communication as well as the study of mediated communication.

Lastly, this study did not focus on the intensity with which the Ted Cruz gathered data on voters. As more social media channels are turning to an algorithm based system for the standard information 'feed,' it is becoming increasingly important to not only know more about the voters themselves and their behaviors, but to also learn how those behaviors affect what posts they would normally see. Not knowing how to get enough eyeballs on the information for a political candidate would severely reduce the effectiveness of the campaign's social media strategy. When a campaign knows what their constituents are looking to find throughout the course of their social media experience, it will be more likely to be seen and then generate an active response.

Of course, there are other ways in which social media strategies can target voters: spending money on social advertising can be an effective way to get more people seeing your precious content. However, if the goal is to be relevant to as many voters as possible, then an increase in data mining may actually reduce the amount of money that is necessary to get people seeing one's content. More research could be done to see just how the Ted Cruz has done data mining throughout the 2016 election cycle. This would provide an excellent case to examine the possibilities of effective data mining for social media content creation.

Conclusion

The questions that were raised by this study (whether answered in full or not) have contributed to the overall body of research of mediated communication, understanding how interaction and content effectiveness come into play and will provide the backdrop for practical

application of these concepts into future political campaigns. We began by showcasing the Obama presidential campaign successes of 2008 and 2012 which allowed further conversation into the importance of social media as well as data gathering in the current political scene. This provided a natural lead into for our subject in this study, Ted Cruz. Although Cruz has dropped out of the presidential race in 2016 at the time of this writing, his successes that he did have were similar to those that President Obama experienced early on in his campaign.

Our body of research showed that there are still questions that need to be answered: does the medium truly affect voters in a measurable way; is content still king; and lastly, what is the sweet spot between these two concepts. More studies will need to be conducted to truly test out where is the exact sweet spot between emphasizing content and emphasizing the medium. McLuhan's concepts, which have been relatively low on application for current communication studies, should be used when trying to solve these questions and it will greatly benefit more than just political campaigns, but rather it could improve mediated communication as a whole.

Some best practices from this study can be summarized for future campaigns. First, it will require more effort than simply producing excellent content in order to get the results necessary to win an election: the content needs to get in front of the right people at the right time. The way to do this is make sure that content is first being produced on a variety of mediums so as to reach the largest audience (this extends beyond social media but rather extends to all mediums). Research must be conducted to find out who is on what medium and then break it down to discover which channels of that medium will have the largest return on investment. Once that research has been conducted, a campaign could create messaging that could then be targeted at particular users on particular mediums and their channels for increased effectiveness. One last practical application of this study would be to understand the need for discovering the sweet spot

of interactions and content effectiveness. Once a campaign has found this sweet spot, it will be difficult for opponents to reach the same audience with any desired results.

This study was able to address all of the questions, however, our areas of further research show that there are is more to be done to fully grasp this topic. While we did not prove definitively that the medium or the content is the true king of communication, we did provide enough evidence to support the idea that there needs to be a blending of the two as well as some micro-targeting in order to truly reach the right audiences. McLuhan's ideas were integral to the completion of this project and now this same information can be used in order to build upon the body of research that may soon be resurfacing as digital communication continues to grow. Political communication as a whole has yet to determine what is exactly the secret ingredient to an unstoppable candidate, but the realm of possibility is shrinking as more studies are conducted. Perhaps scholars and professionals alike will soon be faced with the decision to dethrone content as king and soon place the crown upon a new head.

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