

Political Marketing: How Social Media influenced the
2008-2016 U.S. Presidential Elections and Best Practices Associated

Morgan Swartley

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2018

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

Emily Knowles, D.B.A.
Thesis Chair

Kendrick Brunson, D.B.A.
Committee Member

Michael Davis, Ph.D.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

Political marketing has become a growing facet of marketing that has infiltrated the campaigning of U.S. presidential elections. Within this cognate of marketing, social media has become a major component of predicting election outcomes starting with the 2008 U.S. presidential election. An analysis of the social media performance of candidates from the 2008 to 2016 U.S. presidential elections reveals how the power of social media can be harnessed to increase voter participation, connect voters to offline political activity, and engage voters with candidates on a more personal note. Social media political marketing should further emphasize the candidate's brand and build followership through targeted messaging to desired segments. Social media continues to grow in use and bypass direct news sources; therefore, it must complement and create a dialogue with traditional media, as it will likely surpass it someday. To use social media effectively in political marketing, best practices are outlined in this paper with regards to content, engagement, security, platform selection, targeting, group membership environment creation, and display.

Keywords: social media, presidential elections, engagement, voter participation, market segmentation

Political Marketing: How Social Media influenced the
2008-2016 U.S. Presidential Elections

Political marketing as a campaign strategy done properly is a large facet of a successful political campaign today as it assists in communicating the message of the campaign. Specifically, political marketing aids in the creation of a candidate's brand image, candidate differentiation, and helps decipher who the target audience is. Political branding and marketing have become a norm in U.S. politics especially after the 2008 campaign where Barack Obama integrated social media and branding into politics (Doutta, 2008). An examination of political marketing as a science and how social media has impacted political marketing strategy in recent elections including the 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections is important for marketers to consider. The following analysis will include the key components of political marketing—image, branding, and relations with media—and how social media impacts the effectiveness of these various components within political elections. From this analysis, best practices for conducting political marketing on social media are established (Lees-Marshment, 2011; Thejllmoller, 2013).

Political Marketing Background

The political arena has become a competitive forum for opposing ideas and a clear marketing strategy must be implemented to help win critical elections through proper message and communication channel choice. Throughout history, American presidential elections have always been centered around image (Boller, 2004). Although the mode has continuously changed from Henry Harrison as the "Old Tippecanoe" in 1840, to John F. Kennedy on television in 1960s, to the use of social media content

starting in the 2008 election (Boller, 2004). Thus, political market has always been present in elections, but the term was not coined until the 1960s and is continuously evolving into its own aspect of marketing to help meet the needs of political consumers (Marian, 2013). According to Marian (2013), political marketing can be defined as:

Techniques which have as an objective favoring a candidate's adequateness to the potential elector, of making him known to as big as possible number of electors and to each of them in particular, to differentiate himself from the competition and with a minimum of resources. (p. 49)

Political marketing encompasses a variety of activities to aid in the understanding and communication to the electoral market—focus groups, e-marketing, polling, segmentation, public relations, and “get-out-to-vote activities” (Lees-Marshment, 2011). Without marketing, it may be impossible for a presidential candidate to reach the Oval Office and orchestrate a successful campaign. It is imperative that candidates running for office view voters as political consumers and understand the need for brand management of their campaign as political branding provides social, economic, rational, and psychological benefits in the decision-making process (Smith & French, 2009). From a psychological standpoint, viewing voters as political consumers corresponds with the theory that humans are “cognitive misers” who rely on short cuts and association to make decisions in a similar way to purchasing products (Smith & French, 2009, p. 217). Knowing voter segmentation and how to optimize brand recognition of a campaign will directly impact political engagement (Smith & French, 2009). Candidates may lack the ability to promote their ideas and reach their needed audience to help them win against their opponent if marketing was not a central aspect of the campaign.

Social Media Defined

According to Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen (2012), social media encompasses the set of online tools with the main premise of creating social interaction. The World Wide Web content, the origin of social media, is developed not strictly by individuals, but by all users in a collaborative manner (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). Social media includes a multitude of web-based technologies such as blogs, microblogs, and social sharing services, editing tools that require collaboration, discussion forums, and social networking services. Although these tools are extremely different in competence and approach, they all share the common purpose of being a platform for communication and interaction. In comparison to traditional media, social media relies solely on user-generated content created by the general public and not professionals. The focus of social media is to assist the creation of a dialogue rather than being a broadcasting platform as traditional media typically is (Bertot et al., 2012). Although social media encompasses various applications, this analysis focuses on social networking sites—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The use of social media is imperative in today's elections and must be used in a strategic manner as 67% of Americans receive their news from social media shaping their worldview and political participation (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017).

Analysis of Specific Presidential Elections with Social Media

2008 Presidential Election

The 2008 presidential election had a drastic impact on political marketing with the inclusion of social media to reach political consumers as 15 social media platforms were heavily integrated into his campaign (Effing et al., 2011). Social media networks help foster political engagement; therefore, it is a key marketing platform. In the 2008

presidential election, candidates used social media for their campaigns and young voters were not as reliant on traditional news media. They were seeking more online media as a source of political information. According to Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero (2012), chat rooms, online news, and political email correspondence do predict higher voting rates; thus, it is clear why these platforms started to be used in marketing of political campaigns. The 2008 election cycle was the first in which all candidates, presidential and congressional, tried to connect with American voters using online social networks—Facebook and MySpace and 10% of Americans said they accessed these social networking sites to engage in the election (Doutta, 2008). The election was even coined the “Facebook election” (Doutta, 2008).

During this election, the primary means for information to be posted on social media are through candidates publishing specific content in blog format and using social media to disseminate it, and through the organic production where content is created from user to user. Along with Facebook, Twitter and other blog platforms were used by both candidates and voters to comment on political issues, encourage voting participation, and share information. Kushin (2010) notes that 27% of adults under the age of 30 gather political information from social network sites during the 2008 presidential campaign (p. 613). According to Smith (2009), 60% of internet users were going online for news with regards to politics and 38% of internet users were communicating about politics with others through the use of the internet during the 2008 campaign. In fact, 59% of users used tools such as text messages and social media platforms like Twitter to share and receive campaign information (Smith, 2009).

With the use of social media, Obama was able to win the 2008 presidential election even though Republicans were more likely to be internet users due to higher levels of education and income within the party—83% of Republicans versus 76% of Democrats were Internet users (Smith, 2009). According to Effing et al. (2011), Obama systematically based the majority of his campaign on social media. In correlation with his website, Obama used 15 social media platforms to orchestrate his campaign. Using these 15 platforms, Obama enabled online activity to compliment offline activity, like fundraising, by sharing offline experiences online and through facilitating offline activities online (Effing et al., 2011).

Through the use of the Internet, specifically social media, Obama was able to lower the cost of constructing a political brand and increase both engagement and connection with his voters (Carr, 2008). The primary reason that Obama was still able to capitalize his campaign using social media platforms, was due to how they engaged in online political activism through posting and commenting about the election (Smith, 2009). Strategically, Obama had, Chris Hughes, a Facebook cofounder, on his campaign team. The young 24-year-old was responsible for the creation and execution of the campaign's "Web Blitzkrieg" (Doutta, 2008). This coincided with Facebook's awareness of its influence within American politics; in fact, Facebook launched a forum to encourage debates online and collaborated with ABC to cover political forums as well as components of the election.

Along with strategy, the content that each presidential candidate displayed on their personal Facebook also had an influence on voters. Obama's featured his "Our Moment is Now" motto, listed is favorite musicians such as Bob Dylan, and his favorite

pastimes that were catered to the audience he was trying to attract (Doutta, 2008). For example, the pastimes listed on his personal Facebook include basketball, “loafing with kids”, and writing (Doutta, 2008). In comparison, John McCain’s Facebook had a hard time connecting with the majority of Facebook users at the time because the content listed was dated; his pastimes included fishing and the movie *Letters From Iwo Jima* which do not align with the majority of American Facebook users at the time (Doutta, 2008). YouTube also worked with CNN to broadcast presidential debates which is significant because approximately 35% of Americans said they watched political videos online (Doutta, 2008). The Obama campaign partnered the use of social networking application with the campaign movement to create a successful force for raising funds, local organization, fighting against opposing campaigns, and getting out the word to vote which would help Obama beat Clinton and then John McCain (Carr, 2008). From a statistical standpoint, Obama was clearly more successful on social networks compared to his opponents with two million Facebook supporters compared to McCain’s 600,000. On Twitter, Obama had 112,000 actively tweeting supporters, while McCain had just 4,600 Twitter followers (Doutta, 2008). Thus, the conclusion of the 2008 presidential run illustrates the concept that social media campaigns could not be considered amateur activity. In correspondence with engagement, the content posted by Obama’s campaign was meaningful to his base and created a conversation (Carr, 2008). From this point on, political marketing would involve focus groups, technical expertise, and specialized staffing to strategically plan social media campaigning (Enli, 2017).

2012 Presidential Election

The use of social media within presidential campaigning was expounded upon within the 2012 election, which was between President Obama and Governor Romney. In comparison to the 2008 election, social media application became increasingly more various in terms of platform choice and more omnipresent (Enli, 2017). However, each elect approached online campaign tactics differently. Although both candidates used social media, Obama implemented nine different social media platforms while Romney only used five (Enli, 2017). Social media was an integral part of each of their campaigns that aided in the expansion of political membership and allowed their supporters to express party affiliation and their ideologies (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). Again, the use of social media played a vital role in the success of President Obama within this election because he used the participative nature of platforms like Facebook and YouTube to communicate the need to vote as well as enable grass-roots fundraising (Doutta, 2008). To attract young voters, both candidates needed to have a presence on social media; 92% of individuals between 18 and 29 are on and engaging in social media (Kennedy, 2017). Overall, the Obama campaign was more attractively constructed to share campaign generated posts which created unity amongst supporters. Sharing content on social media activates the promotion of a campaign in an organic form that is more appealing to social media users (Kohn, 2016). This unity stemmed from his social media supporters being gathered around common values and deteriorated the need to post negative content in relation to the opponent.

In contrast, uncertainty on central policy position within the Republican Party resulted in social media magnifying a wide spectrum of views from “right wing”

affiliates, which ultimately removed power that derives from unity within social media messaging. (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). This had drastic consequences on the vote, where 69% of individuals who completed the exit polls claimed they used social media for something related to the 2012 presidential election—37% increase from individuals who reported during the 2008 election (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). Further research revealed that 30% of registered voters were encouraged through posts on social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, from friends and family on whether to vote for Obama or Romney (Kennedy, 2017). The behavior of each party's supporters on social media also further instilled the gap in campaign performance on social media. For instance, 79% of liberals stated they actively used social media while only 60% of conservative voters did; thus, 25% of Twitter was liberal while only 10% was moderate of voters who frequently tweeted their thoughts in 2008 (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). Therefore, undecided and unaffiliated voters were exposed to more liberally aligned post content than conservative (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). This pattern of leveraging Facebook data for political gain continues into the 2016 presidential election as Facebook labeled political affiliation of users based off of what they liked or shared (Merrill, 2016). The gathering of this data enabled Trump to spend money on targeting campaign advertisements to individuals Facebook named politically moderate (Merrill, 2016).

In this election, even more resources were dedicated by both campaigns to monitoring their web personas: both campaigns hired third party sites to data track their websites (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). According to Enli (2017), staffers had more autonomy to post messages and content without consulting the organization's upper political team, including the politician. Thus, more resources were dedicated to hiring the right social

media staffers. Online news is at the forefront of political communication and allows each individual to become a political analyst. The negative repercussions of this can be devastating to a campaign as Mitt Romney experienced. During the election, Mitt Romney experienced immediate black lash via Facebook comments, posts, and tweets in response to an online news source commentating on how he said remarks with regards to the 47% of Americans who do not pay income taxes and that he had “binders full of women” (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). However, this was not the end of the commenting on social media because a more delayed reaction occurred from featured bloggers mocking Romney through images and an entire Tumblr blog was created that featured negative images of Romney (Dalton-Hoffman, 2012). Thus, 2012 marks the election where the marketing of campaigns needed to fully utilize the platforms of social media as it continued to become a primary influence in an individual’s life.

2016 Presidential Election

The use and impact of social media has become a norm in presidential elections including the recent one in 2016. The mainstream media presence is no longer bounded to television; thus, it is imperative that political candidate’s campaign through social media to ensure their voice is heard. Increasingly in the 2016 election, candidates were required to have a “performative flexibility” to help connect with voters in an optimal manner (Umstead, 2016). This entails being able to move comfortably between various format criteria and underlying expectations—informal to formal and personalized to professionalism. In terms of political marketing, this created a need for highly flexible as well as professional communication to be a key division in a candidate’s campaign. Another pivotal change that occurred between 2012 and 2016 presidential races was a

stronger emphasis on the use of images and videos to help portray messages on social networks. For example, the 2016 Hillary Clinton campaign posted videos on their social media accounts and campaign websites on a regular basis (Enli, 2017). Simultaneously, social media became increasingly used to bypass normal streams of media and became a direct source of news. For example, instead of conducting a press conference and putting full reliance on social media to announce her campaign, Hillary Clinton tweeted her decision to run on April 12, 2015 in correlation with a YouTube video (Enli, 2017). This further illustrates how video has emerged as an effective marketing medium that is easily shared over several social media platforms as illustrated in the fact that 110 million hours of YouTube candidate and issue-related content was watched by April 2015 in the 2016 election (Stanford, 2016).

The campaigns and approaches of both nominees in the 2016 presidential election are extremely different: Clinton followed a more traditional, polished approach to campaigning, while Trump displayed a more brass, grass-roots campaign style. Thus, their approaches to marketing within their corresponding campaigns is unique. Ultimately, the candidate who is able to successfully filter their message through an innovative marketing strategy will win the election. The online marketing and advertising of each candidate has been a prominent platform for reaching voters compared to elections in the past. The use of social media also provides a venue to establish a strong base of supporters around a corporate or individual brand. Overall, Trump had more followers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram compared to Clinton. DeMers (2016) noted that as of July 2016, Trump had 10.3 million followers while Clinton only has 7.84 million on Twitter. The primary reason for Trump's larger base is due to his more active

presence on social media and his ability to speak his mind directly. This aids in his relations with his target audience. On Twitter the distinction in terms of professionalism and authenticity is abundantly clear where 82% of Clinton's tweets were considered traditional while 55% of Trump's tweets were more authentic and unconventional (Enli, 2017). Unlike the 2012 presidential election candidates, Trump did not rely on social media staffers or communication experts to develop professional communication material; instead, he embraced his position as a genuine outsider and this concept permeated his tweets (Enli, 2017). According to a study conducted by Wang, Li, and Luo (2016), Trump's Twitter followers are polarized—extreme in immense or little social media influence. This signifies how impactful they are in terms of persuading others and advocating for Trump. Clinton's followers, in contrast, cross more demographics and are ethnically diverse (Wang, Li, & Luo, 2016). For example, Clinton had 14.91% black social media followers and 6.78% Hispanic. Trump only had 10.23% black social media followers and 4.82% Hispanic by comparison (Wang, Li, and Luo, 2016).

Despite Clinton's promotion of her gender differential, there is no clear gender affinity effect in terms of her Twitter follower base (Wang, Li, & Luo, 2016). Along with having a stronger follower base which is measured by his larger amount of followers, 22.7 million versus 15 million, on almost all social media platforms, Trump managed to acquire over twice the frequency of engagement rates on social media in relation to Clinton (Graham, 2016). Engagement rates measure how interacted with social media a follower is; thus, a more engaged follower is more likely to vote in a political sense (DeMers, 2016).

Through the passion of his engaged followers, Trump increased his visibility in the social media world. With the use of real-time platforms like Twitter, Trump did not have to wait for the media to come to him and compensated this deficit with the news media. His engagement in real-time was able to spark headlines across the country in multiple media outlets and is an example of direct marketing (Kerin & Hartley, 2015). He used media as a platform for reacting on his behalf, while Clinton waited until the media approached her (Boczkowski, 2016). The performance each candidate made in the public news media outlets compared to social media do not associate. Trump had a strong social media presence to use as a way to express his message but was not favored in public media news outlets as Clinton's message was highlighted. This is pivotal to note because news media outlets are contracting, while there has been significant expansion on the reliance of social media for news coverage. This suggests that social media had more of an outcome on this election than in the past (Boczkowski, 2016).

Trump and Hillary's websites have key differences that contribute to their digital marketing strategy. Campaigns need to design and execute marketing programs that, "capitalize on the unique customer value-creation capabilities of Internet technology" according to Kerin and Hartley (2015, p. 457). Similar to Obama's "Donate & Get A Gift" for marketing his campaign in 2012, Hillary Clinton implemented incentives to help gain donations creating a higher conversion from visitor to donor on her website (Boczkowski, 2016). On Clinton's webpage, she shared the spotlight with President Obama in her image selection, while Trump is the main focus in the image he selected for his website—prompting more effective brand recognition. Trump's website also displayed live social media updates of his account, critically tying his website into one of

the most successful marketing avenues of his campaign. From an optimization standpoint, Trump's website was overly crowded and lacked high levels of responsiveness as links either inclined a consumer to have to switch to a different device in order to donate, lacked connection, and asked the same information too many times (Orendorff, 2016). Overall, Clinton's imagery on her homepage was overwhelmingly positive, and the imagery sends a clear message of how to participate making it more feasible to consumers. Although her homepage was not as overwhelming—in terms of too many images and phrases trying to grasp the consumer's attention—as Trump's, Orendorff (2016) pointed out that it struggles to obtain a clear overall focus, visual hierarchy, and direction.

Image management through strong brand recognition for a clear target population must remain at the forefront of a candidate's campaign (Marian, 2013). Contrary to popular belief in campaigning, Trump clearly focused on one key market as the basis of his marketing: "left-behind" voters (Fottrell, 2016). To build a brand that correlates with the target market, Warren (2016) explains that Trump adequately generated attention, differentiated himself with politically incorrect rhetoric, and provided a clear, simple benefit associated with a presidential outcome in favor of his campaign. Through the creation of his image, he was able to balance customer acquisition and retention by appealing to committed Republicans and the "left-behind" voters he was targeting. Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again", centered on this idea of left-behind white, working-class voters. In an election where swing states were needed especially in the Midwest, Trump's slogan resonated with blue-collar workers that formed his base. Brian Eisenberg, an e-commerce consultant explains that the emotion

and nostalgia of his simple slogan are illustrated with the printed, red baseball caps developed specifically for his supporters. Another important feature of the “Make America Great Again” was how it paralleled with Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign slogan of “Let’s Make America Great Again”, which would have pleased his base supporters because they thought his presidency was successful (Fottrell, 2016). Trump’s campaign employed a “true category dissociation strategy” according to Millward Brown’s 100,000 Brands market research conducted in August 2016—this created a brand like no other candidate before (Fottrell, 2016). Lastly, the brand Trump established through “Make America Great Again” encouraged a course of action by calling consumers to participate in an all-inclusive call to arms for a purposeful goal (Quelch, 2016). The word “Again” was also a key part of his brand image and slogan because consumers respond more towards recreation of the past that is recalled by the word “Again”. This was necessary because Trump was an outsider with no former political experience, which insinuates an uncertain future in the minds of voters (Quelch, 2016).

In comparison to Trump’s brand, Clinton’s campaign provided a sober, undifferentiated approach (Fottrell, 2016). Her campaign alienated the large voting bloc within the United States that consisted of working-class voters because it was directed more towards college-educated, minorities, and younger voters. Stephen Greyser, professor of marketing and communications at Harvard, explained that Hillary Clinton’s campaign reached out to more of the middle-class and “left-out” voters in contrast to Trump’s key market (Fottrell, 2016). In the sense of “left-out” voters, Greyser suggested that, “If Hillary [Clinton] did have a target market, it was black and Latino ‘left-out’ voters” (Fottrell, 2016). Clinton’s campaign slogans of “I’m with Her” and “Stronger

Together” were not much different than what the Obama administration offered; thus, they did not have the same drastic impact as Trump’s campaign slogan. “Stronger Together” is the foundation of a brand that is all inclusive; however, unlike Trump’s brand, it calls for a process that dilutes the consumer’s perspective of the end goal (Quelch, 2016). To have a successful brand in politics, Warren (2016) suggested that a candidate has to separate themselves from all of the other established candidates. As stated, Clinton’s campaign struggled to build a unique brand that separated her from previous politicians, especially on social media. Clinton’s brand can be best summarized as Quelch (2016) suggests as, “brand Clinton promised a bright future but looked like the candidate of yesterday, a little tired and overly reliant on a supporting cast of Obamas and Bon Javis” (par. 4).

Best Practices Approach to Social Media in Political Marketing

To succeed in social media political marketing, a strong strategy with clear objectives that adheres to the best practices outlined below must be in place. Value and relevance are key to the impact of social media on voters. Communications on social media should not just focus on the party a candidate is affiliated with but should also focus on the candidates themselves where transparency equates to likability and trust in the social media world (Thejll-moller, 2013). Posts created need to be simple, rather than complex or academic (Thejll-moller, 2013). If these messages are simple and attractive, participants on social media may be more likely to share them over their social networks, which will be more accepted by others as it is coming from their peers rather than candidates themselves. Simply delivering information will not work and will not succeed in harnessing the power of social networks. According to Thejll-moller (2103), people are

more likely to support candidates that display appeal as well as integrity on social media especially if they are endorsed by other individuals in their network. In any form of marketing, including social media, everything from the product, message, messenger, and tone must align completely to entice consumers to read, share, and engage (Thejll-moller, 2013).

Content

Without effective content, political marketing efforts will be ineffective on social media. When developing content for social media platforms, it is important to recall the goals of using social media for political marketing purposes. According to Housholder and Lamarre (2015), the primary goals include social media use for fundraising, to rally their base voters, engage with voters to increase participation, and to achieve participation goals for the election. Thus, social media content must encourage voters to participate through voting as well as donate monetarily and through time. Within political marketing, it is also imperative that social media efforts alter the perspective from content consumers to content producers as this will generate more awareness of campaign activities and create viral social media activity surrounding a candidate's campaign (Effing et al., 2011).

From Obama's 2008 campaign, it is apparent how integral it is to ensure that online political campaign content is linked to offline activity as well as other forms of media (Effing et al., 2011). The content placed on social media for a campaign should complement or respond to traditional media because there is no evidence that social media will replace the political communication that occurs on traditional media outlets

(Enli, 2017). Therefore, social media content should strive to document, debate, mention, or feature the political material portrayed on traditional media outlets.

Authentic content has proved to be extremely successful in political marketing on social media. In the 2016 election, two polarized strategies were used for content choice: professionalism versus amateurism (Enli, 2017). The amateurism, more authentic approach that Trump used in selecting content ultimately corresponded with his image and related to his targeted audience, while Clinton's professional, typical democratic content did not achieve the same results. Trump ultimately was more consistently involved in the creation of his tweets and generally wrote tweets after 7:00 p.m.; while during the day, he would shout tweets to his staffers. To further achieve authenticity, it is important that everything from account name—handle—to posts, all generate the same foundational theme. For instance, Trump's twitter name of "areal_DonaldTrump" further illustrated the theme of authentic content within his social media campaign (Enli, 2017). The less professional more authentic approach to content creation can also be illustrated in the 2012 Obama campaign where Obama sought to avoid the use of professional staffers to generate meaningful content (Enli, 2017). However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of authenticity on social media depends on the context and targeted segments chosen. Overall, the content used on social media platforms for political purposes should resemble the candidate as much as possible.

The content developed for campaign social media platforms should resemble political marketing. This is imperative to aid in controlling the message as much as possible and ensure that the candidate is continuously promoted. Therefore, the initiation of public debate should not be the focus of the content posted.

Engagement and Sharing

Although more interaction between politicians and the public has occurred, it is still imperative that the political campaigns control the level of engagement and flow of the dialogue to ensure image is maintained. For example, in 2016 election there were no comment sections on each candidates' websites (Enli, 2017). This corresponds with the main goal of social media use in political marketing—mobilizing voters—not engaging with the public. To engage with voters in a more passive manner, reposting or retweeting are effective means. A level of engagement, in real-time, on social media is needed to succeed in elections, just in a more passive manner. According to Fulgoni, Lipsman, and Davidsen (2016), “trusted persuasion” is the term that describes content sharing on social media where communication from peers and friends is highly more persuasive than from an advertisement. This corresponds with the impact of sharing meaningful content as a more organic approach to activating and promoting campaign activity (Kohn, 2016). Social sharing is especially effective for niche candidates like Trump and Sanders who built their base through social networks rather than campaign advertising (Fulgoni et al., 2016). During the 2016 election, Trump retweeted more frequently with a quarter of his tweets being retweets and 78% of those retweets were from regular, public users (Enli, 2017). This is a stark contrast to Clinton who only had 15% of her tweets as retweets, and they were from her staffers accounts rather than retweets from the general public (Enli, 2017). Trump also regularly used capital letters in his tweets, which signify engagement, spontaneity, and sincerity (Enli, 2017). There is significant risk in retweeting content that you cannot initially control which means that it should only be done if it aligns with the core competencies of your campaign. For example, Trump portrayed himself as an

outsider so retweeting content from the general public aligned with his campaign goals and strengthened his overall mission.

Security

Combining governmental activity, such as politics, can be a security nightmare if proper steps to ensure web security are not in place. The goal of a campaigning is to end up in a government held office. During the campaigning process, if social media is used then a two-way community is created which opens up the possibility for cyber-attacks and viruses that could ultimately destroy an individual's political career. Therefore, implementing the best cyber security measures, even during the campaign process, is needed when using social media for political marketing. This will prevent attacks, and the unintended release of information. It will also establish strong public trust if security measures are in place. Political marketers must keep up-to-date to on current laws regarding social media practices for government websites. The OMB Memo M-05-04, which is a policy for federal websites, requires a level of security controls that must be in place to resist confidentiality breaks and tampering (Bertot et al., 2012). A security plan must be in place for the social media accounts of politicians to ensure that hacking is prevented as this can completely taint the credibility of a candidate.

Platform Selection

As political marketing has progressed on social media, it is evident that a campaign must strategically pick a select number of platforms to use and excel at manipulating them to enhance the campaign. Before the 2016, Obama, with nine, and Romney, with five, used multiple social media platforms (Enli, 2017). Although this was effective in the past, the 2016 presidential cycle had a significant drop in the number of

platforms used by candidates. Both Trump and Clinton decided to use Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Clinton also decided to use Pinterest as well. This signifies how U.S. presidential campaigns have initially experimented and expanded with social media for marketing purposes and are now progressing towards consolidation and mastery (Enli, 2017). Future political marketing campaigns must strategically select a few social media platforms to use that align best with their targeted segments and that will generate the most followership on them.

Targeting and Segmenting Audience

For any form of marketing, targeting and segmentation, is needed to reach the right audience with the correct message. Beginning in the early 2000s, micro-targeting and advanced audience segmentation has greatly influenced political marketing (Fulgoni et al., 2016). The need for micro-targeting in political marketing was extremely apparent during the 2008 presidential election as Hillary Clinton hired Mark Penn, a key contributor toward the micro-targeting initiative, to be her primary strategist (Fulgoni et al., 2016). Allowing data to drive decision-making in terms of target marketing began during the 2012 Obama for America campaign, where analytics were used to better the desired television audiences. The use of analytics was also used by the Obama campaign to predict activity by their target segments making resource allocation easier. The data acquired was analyzed to identify voters and send them highly personalized messaging as a means of optimizing marketing output. The analytics system used by the Obama campaign in 2012 was a customer model that used voter data in tens of thousands of daily simulations to predict which states would most likely be swing states which enabled them to shift marketing resources in real-time to be directed towards these states (Thejll-

moller, 2013). The analytics from this model were also used for day-to-day marketing purposes such as developing landing pages for their website and social content for their social media platforms (Thejll-moller, 2013).

It is important to consider that once the target segment is identified using analytics, it does not necessarily mean this is the most cost-effective approach as illustrated during the 2016 presidential election. Campaigns during this cycle decided to spend more on advertisements that fit into their micro-targeted segments to ensure they were reaching the households needed to achieve the desired level of frequency distribution. Once the target market is identified, the creative message must align; however, with as scaled cross-platform audience data becomes more available, this will likely change (Fulgoni et al., 2016). Improved reach and frequency optimization on social media platforms will likely increase as technology progresses to better reach target segments on these platforms. Using data to identify target segments and optimizing media distribution on these segments will lead to achieving the highest levels of reach in a political marketing campaign.

Creation of Group Membership

After analysis of the 2008 to 2016 presidential elections, key social media practices can be acknowledged to better enhance the use of this tool in future political marketing campaigns. Within social media, political marketers must create an environment of group membership that will encourage more political engagement (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012). Group membership is imperative to have on social media platforms—whether is it a group page on Facebook or followers on a Twitter account—because it will provide an environment to discuss politics, keeps individuals

accountable, and most importantly encourages offline participation. Although social media does not conclusively make individuals more knowledgeable with regards to political issues, there is strong evidence that it does increase offline involvement and political participation (Conroy et al., 2012). Therefore, there is a positive relationship between online group membership with regards to politics and offline political participation (Conroy et al., 2012). Group membership on social media will create a culture that requires learning through necessity as learning about policies and politics will be needed to participate and engage. According to Conroy et al. (2012), it is important to remember that for younger generations, like Millennials, exchange of information over the internet fosters trust and engagement, while this is not the case if it is strictly social recreation. Therefore, in political marketing strategy, social media posts must have deliberate, informative, and to the point.

Display and Responsiveness

The way content is displayed on social media has a dramatic impact on how it is received. Compared to the 2012 election, the 2016 presidential election had a strong focus on images and videos to communicate using social media. This transition occurred largely because of the dramatic increase in individuals who use mobile applications to consume social media. For example, Instagram, the photo-sharing platform, was used by Clinton, Trump, and Sanders (Enli, 2017). On Facebook and Twitter, video was aggressively used in comparison to the 2012 election. Hillary Clinton frequently posted videos to convey her message (Enli, 2017). For further campaigns, it is imperative that digital content is displayed with images and video. Due to this preferred display and mobile age, content must be extremely mobile friendly and developed first as most

individuals access social media on their mobile devices. In terms of display, high levels of responsiveness where a page displays correctly on various channels, such as mobile, is advised to ensure user usability—a major struggle for the Trump campaign initially (Orendorff, 2016). In correspondence with responsiveness, consistency across all channels must be maintained as a campaign's image could be negatively impacted if social channels and branded content do not align (Brand, 2016; Enli, 2017).

From an Ethical Standpoint

Although political marketing with the use of social media has been effective, it is not absent to several ethical considerations. This is especially apparent during the 2016 presidential election. The content between candidates on social media was petty, offensive to their families, and belittling. Sanders (2016) notes that social media allowed candidates to consistently attack each other in a back and forth banter that seemed to go too far. The creation of memes on social media also enabled individuals to construct offensive content that involved the candidates' families. Another troubling matter that involves the political marketing on social media includes the creation of fake social media accounts. According to Guilbeault and Woolley (2016), more than a third of pro-Trump tweets and a fifth of pro-Clinton tweets were created from automated accounts during the first and second debates. This means that over a million tweets were produced from automated accounts and further gives evidence to the speculation that the candidate's followings on social media were highly automated as well (Sanders, 2016). This is unethical because public opinion is being swayed by false perception. Therefore, social media is changing the political landscape in both positive and negatives ways.

Conclusion

Political marketing is a unique facet of marketing that has morphed to include social media into campaign strategy. As voters continuously shift toward the internet for the purposes of social interaction, future campaigns will have to continuously adjust to accommodate this new and vital platform. Voters are political consumers; therefore, it is vital to have a strong marketing presence in campaign formation to ensure a candidate's message is being heard. The 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections prove the need for strong brand image and communication on social media to win over voters.

According to Newman (1994), the initial influence of marketing was seen through the use of a sophisticated marketing, advertising campaign and brand creation to win the White House in 1968 for President Nixon. Presidential candidates must create a brand that voters can identify with and support because they feel it is in their best interest; therefore, a campaign's primary initiative is to build the brand through market segmentation that can be used to create better social media engagement. In conclusion, social media must be a prominent form of communication in relation to campaign websites that adheres to the best practices stated because social media platforms will continue to bypass direct new sources and become more infiltrated into political consumer's lives.

References

- Bertot, John & T. Jaeger, Paul & Hansen, Derek. (2012). The impact of polices on government social media usage: Issues, challenges, and recommendations. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(1), 30-40. doi:10.1016/j.giq.2011.04.004.
- Boczkowski, P. (2016, November 08). Has election 2016 been a turning point for the influence of the news media? Retrieved November 18, 2017, from <http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/11/has-election-2016-been-a-turning-point-for-the-influence-of-the-news-media/>
- Boller, P. F. (2004). *Presidential campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brand consistency and social media. (2016). *Banker, Middle East*, Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1831706069?accountid=12085>
- Carr, D. (2008, November 09). How Obama tapped into social networks' power. Retrieved December 09, 2017, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/business/media/10carr.html>
- Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T., & Guerrero, M. (2012). Facebook and political engagement: A study of online political group membership and offline political engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1535-1546. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.03.012
- Dalton-Hoffman, M. (2012, Summer). The effect of social media in the 2012 presidential election. Retrieved December 9, 2017, from

http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=fy_papers

DeMers, J. (2016, July 28). Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton: Who's winning at online marketing? Retrieved November 15, 2017, from

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2016/07/28/donald-trump-vs-hillary-clinton-whos-winning-at-online-marketing/#589f0ec07861>

Doutta, S. (2008, November 19). Barack Obama and the Facebook election. Retrieved December 9, 2017, from

<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2008/11/19/barack-obama-and-the-facebook-election>

Effing, R., Hillegersberg, J. V., & Huibers, T. (2011). Social media and political participation: are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube democratizing our political systems? *Electronic Participation Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 25-35. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-23333-3_3

Enli, G. (2017). Twitter as arena for the authentic outsider: Exploring the social media campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(1), 50-61. doi:10.1177/0267323116682802

Fulgoni, G. M., Lipsman, A., & Davidsen, C. (2016). The power of political advertising: Lessons for Practitioners. *Journal Of Advertising Research*, 56(3), 239-244. doi:10.2501/JAR-2016-034

Fottrell, Q. (2016, November 11). How TV reality star Donald Trump won the election with his 'disruptive' brand. Retrieved November 16, 2017.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/by-winning-the-election-donald-trump-proved-that-he-is-a-master-of-branding-2016-11-09>

Graham, J. (2016, August 12). Trump vs. Clinton: How the rivals rank on Twitter, Facebook, more. Retrieved March 27, 2018, from

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/08/04/trump-clinton-social-media-twitter-facobook-youtube-snapchat/87974630/>

Guilbeault D., & Woolley, S. (2016, November 01). How Twitter bots are shaping the election. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/11/election-bots/506072/>

Housholder, E., & Lamarre, H. L. (2015). Political social media engagement: Comparing campaign goals with voter behavior. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 138-140.

doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.10.007

Kennedy , K. (2017, February 16). Use it or lose it: Social media in the 2012 US election. Retrieved December 09, 2017, from

<https://pulitzercenter.org/education/use-it-or-lose-it-social-media-2012-us-election>

Kohn, A. (2016). Instagram as a naturalized propaganda tool. *Convergence: The*

International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 23(2), 197-213.

doi:10.1177/1354856515592505

Kushin, M. J., & Yamamoto, M. (2010). Did social media really matter? College Students' Use of Online Media and Political Decision Making in the 2008

Election. *Mass Communication & Society*, 13(5), 608-630.

doi:10.1080/15205436.2010.516863

Lees-Marshment, J. (2011). *The political marketing game*. London, GB: Palgrave

Macmillan. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrary.com>

Marian, C. (2013). Communication and Political Marketing. *Research and*

Science Today, 2(6), 44-50. Retrieved from

<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/147040634?accountid=12085>

Merrill, J. B. (2016, August 23). Liberal, moderate or conservative? See how Facebook

labels you. Retrieved March 07, 2018, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/us/politics/facebook-ads-politics.html>

Newman, B. I. (1994). *The Marketing of the president: Political marketing as campaign*

strategy. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Orendorff, A. (2016, July 28). Clinton vs. Trump: 18 CROs tear down the highest

stakes marketing campaigns in US history. Retrieved November 17, 2017, from

<http://unbounce.com/conversion-rate-optimization/clinton-trump-presidential-marketing-campaigns-teardown/>

Quelch, J. (2016, November 10). 6 lessons from Donald Trump's winning marketing

manual. Retrieved November 17, 2017, from

<http://fortune.com/2016/11/10/donald-trump-campaign-marketing-success/>

Sanders, S. (2016, November 08). Did social media ruin election 2016? Retrieved

December 11, 2017, from

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/11/election-bots/506072/>

Shearer, E., & Gottfried, J. (2017, September 07). News use across social media

platforms 2017. Retrieved March 07, 2018, from

<http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/>

Smith, A. (2009, April 14). The Internet's role in campaign 2008. Retrieved December 09, 2017, from [http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/04/15/the-internets-role-in-campaign-2008/2012 Presidential Election](http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/04/15/the-internets-role-in-campaign-2008/2012-Presidential-Election)

Smith, G., & French, A. (2009). The political brand: A consumer perspective. *Marketing Theory*, 9(2), 209-226. doi:10.1177/1470593109103068

Stanford, K. (2016, March). How political ads and video content influence voter opinion. Retrieved March 07, 2018, from <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/content-marketing/political-ads-video-content-influence-voter-opinion/>

Thejll-moller, S. (2013). Social media in traditional political party campaigns: Is there a winning formula? *European View*, 12(1), 33-39.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s12290-013-0242-x>

Umstead, R. T. (2016, March 28). Hitting millennial voters where they live; youth-targeted networks take their campaign 2016 coverage online. *Multichannel News*, 37(12), 22. Retrieved from go.galegroup.com.

Wang, Y., Li, Y., & Luo, J. (2016, March 09). Deciphering the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign in the Twitter sphere: A comparison of the Trumpists and Clintonists. Retrieved November 17, 2017, from <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1603.03097v1.pdf>

Warren, J. (2016, January 27). News politics Trump, marketer-in-chief. Retrieved November 16, 2017, from <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-01-27/trumps-campaign-brand-marketing-is-brilliant>