

MEDIASCAPE White Paper 08/22
ELECTION 2.0: The US Election and Social Media
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The 2008 US election has radically changed the face of public issue communication. Never before has the Internet, in particular social media, been used so effectively. During his campaign President Obama not only changed the way we consume information, but changed the way consumers expect to be communicated to. Current statistics show:

- 46% of Americans used the Internet, email or SMS technologies to get news about the campaign, share their views and mobilise others
- 35% watched online political videos
- 10% used social networking sites to get involved
- 6% made contributions online
- 11% forward on or posted someone else's commentary on the race
- 5% posted their own commentary/analysis on the race (this jumped to 12% for 18 – 29 year olds)

(Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008)

How did the candidates use digital media?

Jeremiah Owyang, Senior Analyst at Forrester Research: Social Computing compiled a snapshot of social media campaign results:

Facebook

Obama: 2,379,102 supporters
McCain: 620,359 supporters
Obama had 380% more supporters than McCain

MySpace

Obama: 833,161 friends
McCain: 217,811 friends
Obama has 380% more friends than McCain

YouTube

Obama: 1,792 videos uploaded since Nov 2006 (4 a day)
114,559 subscribers and **18,413,110** channel views
McCain: 329 videos uploaded since Feb 2007 (2 a day)
28,419 subscribers and 2,032,993 channel views
Obama had 403% more subscribers than McCain

Twitter

Obama: @barackobama 112,474 followers
McCain: @JohnMcCain 4,603 followers
Obama had 240% more followers than McCain

Who used social media tools more effectively?

President Obama used these technologies more effectively. While Senator John McCain also embraced social media, unlike Obama, he did not make it, and other digital technologies, central to his campaign, nor did he embrace it as quickly and therefore did not gain the same following online as Obama.

Not only was Obama more dedicated to social media, his twitter account was updated several times a day in first person and provided links to live streaming of public appearances. Additionally the customised social networking site my.barackobama.com was launched much earlier than the KickApps McCain social networking site. Furthermore Obama extended his campaign beyond the popular sites into merely emerging social media outlets even including video game advertising and an iPhone application.

How did Obama supporters use social media?

Obama supporters were generally more inclined to show their support in the social media realm. There were numerous applications and groups that supported Obama on social outlets such as Facebook and YouTube. For example ObamaGirl's "I got a crush on Obama" received over 10 million views and Will.i.am's "Yes We Can" video was watched over 11 million times. Four Obama supporters even went so far to create the "yeswecarve.com" community encouraging supporters to create "Barack O'Lanterns" out of pumpkins on Halloween.

What did other organisations use social media for?

Social media wasn't just used to sway voters, but also to ensure the transparency of the election itself. VideoTheVote, a partnership between several nonprofit organizations and businesses, encouraged voters to document their experience during the election to "keep watch on democracy". The YouTube channel has so far received 2,241 video uploads and 164,090 views (20/07/2009) along with links to the Twitter feed and similar projects.

Myfairelection.com was another project that set up a live map of polling conditions in an attempt to avoid and document the problems voters faced such as long lines, list purges, voter intimidation, malfunctioning and mislaid equipment etc. Such projects came about as a result of the 2000 and 2004 elections where voters faced similar problems, but the bigger picture wasn't realized until days after the election, by which time the election was over and the media had moved on.

What can we learn from the 2008 US election?

As communicators, we can learn a lot from the 2008 election, but one key lesson is clear: **the way consumers communicate has changed. They are no longer satisfied with having messages yelled at them. They want to have conversations, and they already are. We, the communications professionals, have to catch up and join in.**

Where can you find more information?

For a more in-depth look at the way social and digital media was used in the election have a look at these sites:

<http://blogs.forrester.com/groundswell/2007/12/the-social-prof.html>

http://www.pr-squared.com/2008/11/the_cmo_of_the_obama_campaign.html

<http://www.blonde2dot0.com/blog/2008/11/06/how-social-media-helped-obama-get-to-the-white-house/>

<http://www.socialmedia.biz/2008/11/my-friend-natha.html>

<http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3631387>

For more information contact:

Philippa Moss

Senior Conversation Analyst, Mediascape Global

Email: philippam@mediascape-global.com

Phone: 02 9904 9444

Web: www.mediascape-global.com