

Yes We Can Make America Great Again: A Shift from Traditional Campaigning Methods to Public Relations Techniques

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ABSTRACT

There has been a shift from traditional campaigning methods to more of an emphasis public relation of (here and after referred to as PR) methods within the ways presidential campaigns are run. This shift was first seen in the 2008 Obama campaign which paved the way for these new campaign strategies to take place. Once the 2016 elections came around, both candidates were able to use similar tactics used by the Obama campaign and implement them into their campaign. Since technology is constantly progressing, they were able to use the previous strategies while adding advanced PR tactics as well.

INTRODUCTION

Before social media, candidates utilized the technology we had to their benefit which are known as traditional campaigning strategies. These include tactics such as phone calls, door to door canvassing, flyers in the mail, radio and television. Now with a larger emphasis on social media, many of these traditional strategies have changed to keep up with what voters use in their daily lives. For example, many candidates now use text messages in place of phone calls when trying to reach voters because people are more likely to check their texts instead of picking up a call ^[1].

The combination of these new approaches and the use of information manipulation theory, leaves no choice but for voters to be persuaded in a certain way. As campaigning strategies continue to become more compelling, it is

imperative to understand what this means for us as a democracy and how to become aware and knowledgeable citizens. The 2016 presidential political campaign would be one that would change the realms of contemporary American politics. Since this campaign has had a lasting impact on our democracy, society and the way political campaigns are approached, it is crucial that we understand the changes that took place that help lead to a successful campaign. This shift in campaigning takes us from the traditional campaigning strategies to more of a focus with PR strategies [2].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional campaigning methods

Traditional campaigning methods used to entail reaching their audience using methods that were popular at that time. They would aim to be the best candidate possible and win over the American people through speeches and proving that they were the better candidate. A great example of how excitement was created within campaigns would be Truman's campaign in 1984, where he famously did a whistle-stop tour of the country aboard a special train. This allowed him to successfully win the election and was a tool used to get the American people excited about his candidacy [3].

Traditional campaigning strategies, pre-social media, were very costly and required a large number of supporters and volunteers to help with the campaigning efforts. Some of the traditional methods included canvassing, mailing, and phone calls. Canvassing for a political candidate is when supporters get together and go to neighborhoods, advocating and giving information about the candidate they are supporting. This strategy requires a large amount of support and lots of on foot walking with a low amount of success. A study done to see the effectiveness of canvassing found that it only increased voter turnout by 0.5%.

Direct mailing is something that has been used successfully for decades and is something that is still deemed as a successful political strategy. When looking at how voters felt about different forms of political outreach, direct mail was the most credible form of political advertising. As long as there was knowledge about your target audience and who the message was directed to, direct mail was something that is relatively inexpensive and although it is an old school strategy, it is something that is deemed successful [4].

Phone banking is used not only to let voters know about the candidates, but is more about finding committed voters. Candidates want to know who the reliable voters are and constituents feel like they are a part of something important when speaking to another individual on the line. This is why most campaigns that use phone banking have to have a sufficient amount of volunteers working with them to make the phone calls. Even though phone banking can be deemed as a frustrating tactic, pre-social media, phone banking was a strategy used by almost all political candidates.

PR strategies

When looking at PR strategies within political campaigns, there is the connection that some of the strategies have been embedded within our political system from the start. For example, the recognition strategy, which is associating a political party to a colour and animal, has been used since the 19th century. The fact that the republican party is associated with an elephant and the colour red and the democratic Party is associated with the donkey and the colour blue is part of a recognition strategy used in PR. Now with social media, these animals and

colors are used in a different way. For example, the GOP's Instagram account, their profile picture is a red elephant and the account has the color scheme of red [5].

One of the simplest campaign strategies that is used is repetition which is a way to keep a brand or product in the forefront of the consumer's mind. Candidates often have a handful of topics they want to focus on throughout their campaign and they repeat it constantly in the campaign. This presents simple messages of what they stand for during debates, interviews, rallies and social media feed. This simple tactic is so successful because people tend to remember simple message. This strategy was seen in Trump's 2016 campaign with his messages of "Make America Great Again" or "Build a Wall."

Another strategy that is used in the realms of politics is hosting special events in areas where politicians need more support. These special events or rallies help voters get excited and passionate about the candidate and work as an activation tool. Once people are excited, they are more likely to spread the message, volunteer or donate to the campaign. The newest tactic used now is social media. When it first was on the rise 10 years ago, politicians were able to still run a successful campaign without using it. In today's world, it is impossible to gain traction without it. On both the federal and state level, politicians have some form of social media that allows them to stay connected with voters and stay up to date with what constituents want. By using social media, politicians are also able to be transparent with the work they are doing. For example, presidents often will post about them giving back to others or working at charities. This can be used as leverage during election season and shows the public the good they do within their community [6].

Importance of 2008 Obama campaign

When understanding the importance of PR in presidential campaigns, it is important to understand where this shift started from. Obama set a precedent which established the utilization of PR strategies with social media that has allowed for it to shift from being an advanced technique to the new norm. The rules of politics have been changed and president Trump's campaign reinforced the new rules. There is no longer a debate about going back to traditional methods, but now a focus on how these new strategies will continue to be used and evolve within our political system.

Traditional campaigns were focused on having the better candidate. A candidate who was well known, spoke well and had previous experience that allowed them to fit the role of president. However, in 2007, President Barack Obama ran for his first presidential election and changed the basis for how campaigns would be run in the future. President Obama was named the first president who used social media as part of his election campaign. Part of this new strategy was the timing. With Facebook gaining popularity in 2006 and the release of the iPhone in 2007, his campaign was able to see the changes in technology advancement and used this to their advantage. Obama had an amazing PR team that was effective in getting their message out to the public, gaining the trust of the public and establishing how they wanted Obama to be seen in the eyes of the public. President Obama made strides through the use of social media in his campaign, whether it was through Q and A's on Tumblr, live streams through periscope or having a Facebook account.

This was the first time it was ever used in a presidential campaign and was something that was seen as shocking in the political arena. He was the first candidate to utilize live streaming during his events which would allow his voters to feel connected to him and as if they were with him. Obama also utilized Twitter by reaching out to the common people and retweeting some of the positive comments they had to say. He was personable and humanized the

voters that he interacted with. Through this feeling, he established credibility and trust within his voters that further pushed him higher through the polls and ultimately led to victory [7].

Obama was also one of the first presidents who focused on hiring technologists on his team instead of politicians. These were the people who would work on the digital and technology teams and fully understood the data and statistics behind the technology. This social team was very innovative and saw that their target voters were in the age range of 18-29. However, this group was completely unreachable by phone call (a traditional campaigning method), but 85% of them were friends with Obama on Facebook. The campaign then turned to Facebook as a targeting platform and asked supporters to reach out to target voters. 20% of the team then took political action through volunteering and supporting his campaign.

The strategies that Obama used in his campaign would set the stage for future campaign strategies and would provide a drastic shift in what to focus on while campaigning. After seeing the success of his campaign, it showed politicians that we have entered a new era that has a larger emphasis on PR. Any strategy that uses social media, gaining the public's trust or establishing credibility falls in the category of PR. These strategies are a large reason Obama ran such a successful campaign and paved the way for how PR strategies to play a dominant role in campaign strategies [8].

Information manipulation theory

When understanding how a politician wins a campaign, a tactic that is always used is the method of persuasion. Although this word typically has a negative connotation, having persuasion tendencies isn't necessarily a negative trait. Being able to sell yourself is something that is useful in any career, especially in the world of politics. However, there is a fine line between being persuasive to your audience and being deceptive. When looking at the 2016 presidential election, President Trump used deceptive tendencies when speaking of his opponent which leads to a problem of ethical campaigning and what that means for democracy as a whole.

President Trump's campaign would use deceptive strategies throughout their campaign which would send false information to voters and lead to a significant amount of fake news. When a speaker exploits information in order to mislead the audience, it is considered information manipulation theory. This theory is focused on looking at how "deceiving others, people play with or "manipulate" relevant information in myriad ways within their discourse. When applying this theory to Trump's presidential campaign, it is important to dissect the impact that false information played on the audience. For example, Facebook during the 2016 election exposed 126 million Americans Russian-backed, politically oriented fake news. These stories would be supported by the Trump campaign as they would test 40,000 to 50,000 variants of its ad's to see how they would perform with their audience and to ensure it would reach their target group. Even though this fake news reached millions of Americans, even if only a fraction of these people actually read the story, in an election as close as the 2016 one, this could've been the amount of votes Clinton needed to win.

Analysis

When understanding the significance of this 2016 presidential race and the way PR strategies merged with digital media, we first have to dive into the strategies used by both president Trump and Clinton. Since this election was seemingly close, it all came down to the strategies that were successful to get him elected. Through this analysis,

there'll be an established connection as to why president Trump was elected and what led to the ultimate downfall to Clinton's campaign ^[9].

Clinton's campaign and PR strategies

Hillary Clinton's campaign attempted to duplicate his success and in order to do that, she would've had to apply and integrate the social media strategies, but missed the marks in quite a few places. Clinton started off with campaigning in 2015 with a favorable rating of 50%. By the summer her rating dropped to the mid-'40s and then dropped even more to 41% by labor day. The main reason for the dropping of her approval rating is that her email scandal surfaced. This email scandal was extremely detrimental to her campaign and this was seen in her approval ratings, as after the scandal was released, her approval never went above 45%. Due to this email scandal, she lost all her credibility as a candidate. Voters who originally were planning to vote for her no longer trusted her which resulted in them not voting at all. 61.4% of eligible voters voted in the 2016 election. Clinton also took a very defensive approach to her email scandal, where she deflected the problem, leading it to never getting fixed. After the scandal, her reputation was tarnished and the ability for the public to ever see her as a "real" or "respectful" person was gone. In an election as crucial as 2016 one, Clinton needed every possible vote, but instead turned away voters who decided not to vote at all because they disliked both candidates.

PR techniques

Many independents and central leaning democrats needed a candidate that they could trust and Clinton lost their trust after the scandal came out. Her PR team did a weak job of fixing her reputation since they weren't able to gain the public's trust again. They attempted to reach out to voters through emails, text messages and even live phone calls, but many voters found this as an inconvenience or an annoyance and didn't change their thoughts on Clinton. The campaign was no longer transparent and the label of crooked Hillary never left the public's ear. Her reputation was never rebuilt and the voters now had a message ingrained in their head that Clinton was a criminal and this caused her to lose many votes to President Trump.

During the 2016 election, there were three phrases utilized most in the campaign: "Make America great again", "I'm with her" and "stronger together." Clinton's two slogans were either about her as a candidate or about the party. The slogans never had any thought as to what the voters wanted and this forced independents to go with the candidate who seemed to care more. The slogan "I'm with her" wasn't very catchy and it was self-centered which reflected on Clinton as a candidate. If she couldn't care about the people who were voting her into office, how could they trust that she would care about them in office?

The slogan "stronger together" referenced the democratic party, instead of the people. She wanted the party to come together to take down Trump, but this alienated the middle party, who eventually ended up voting for Trump. Neither one of her slogans focused on what she stands for and hopes she had to achieve if elected, they focused on simply beating the competitor, which ended up giving him votes ^[10].

Clinton's audience

However, in the process of focusing on the wrong crowd, she failed to appeal to young people and minorities (nicknamed the "Obama coalition"). These are people who were excited about her candidacy in the beginning but were then disappointed as the campaign progressed. These voters had lots of hope for her as a candidate but were

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quickly lost when they felt like she didn't care about them as people and for what they wanted. The image she presented was that she was willing to do anything to beat Trump, and with that tainting her image, she lost many voters who were loyal to the democratic party.

Clinton focused most of her campaigning efforts on blue collar, in hopes to steal these votes from President Trump. Clinton chose to focus on these voters because, in the previous 2008 and 2012 election, many blue-collar men voted for Obama because they thought he could relate to their struggles more. Clinton failed to think of the difference as to what was going on the economy and the fact that she spent the last eight years climbing up the ladder of global elites.

There were many polls and focus groups that showed that a majority of voters who typically would vote democratic (African Americans and Millennial voters) weren't inspired by her candidacy. Polls also showed that many people dislike both candidates, but Clinton assumed that they would show up and vote for her out of fear of President Trump. The result was the opposite since people, in turn, voted for the third-party candidate, who had no hope of winning. They did this as a "protest vote" but it caused Clinton to lose votes that would've most likely put her in office.

Trump's audience

The combination of having a database of specific voter information combined with the advanced psychographic targeting techniques allowed for the Trump campaign to use basic Facebook analytic tools to create and post specific content that would have a large influence on undecided voters to an extent never seen before. This specific campaign also came down to a slim marginal difference between the successors so it was crucial that each candidate got every single vote possible. When looking at the research composed by the Trump campaign, they were able to identify three major groups that Clinton needed to win in order to win overwhelmingly. These groups broke down into idealistic white liberals, young women, and African Americans. With the identification of these groups, Trump's campaign used "dark posts" which are non-public paid posts that are shown only to selected Facebook users and would send out advertisements that would show Clinton in a negative fashion and discourage voter turnout.

The Trump campaign spent over \$150 million on these advertisements in the final week of the election and worked successfully. Since the election was so close and every vote counted, the fact that the Trump campaign was able to depress some of Clinton's voters had a drastic impact on her ability to have a high voter turnout. This had an impact on the number of people electing not to vote for the Republican or Democratic nominee went up by 4.5 million votes, nearly tripling from 2012.

President Trump's campaign

When looking at the determining factor of what propelled Trump's campaign to win compared to Clinton's, came down to the differences in digital approaches when determining the winner. The first thing the Trump campaign established is working for Cambridge analytica, a data consultant firm. With this firm, his campaign would use the work of Cambridge psychologist's to target specific messages and ads using psychographics and measurements of psychological traits using the ocean model. The ocean model was used to study and understand how audiences would perceive their message and to ensure that the message the campaign is sending out would resonate with voters (Table 1).

Table 1. The ocean model breaks down.

Consumer's personality characteristics	
Openness	How open are you to new experiences?
Conscientiousnes	How much of a perfectionist are you?
Extroversion	How sociable are you?
Agreeableness	How considerate and cooperative are you?
Neuroticism	Are you easily upset?

The importance of this model is that it allows an increase of effectiveness of personality targeting which can attract 63% more clicks on certain ads and up to 1,400 more conversations in advertising campaigns on Facebook when you are able to match products to your consumer's personality characteristics.

Campaign strategy

A large part of Trump's communication plan revolved around his slogan and the usage of it throughout his campaign. By using the slogan "make America great again" he not only resonates with the groups of voters he was trying to reach, but also makes voters feel like he is the only one who was able to fix the problem of our country. This slogan was also used in a variety of merchandise that became very popular when the election started to come to a close. The campaign spent \$1.2 million on buttons, stickers, hats, signs and rally signs. Even though merchandise has been used in past elections, this was the first time it was seen everywhere in promotion for his candidacy. He focused on reaching out to voters who shared similar lifestyles, world perceptions and concerns about employment and catered his slogan to that specific group. By also using the feelings of voters who felt like their basic needs for safety have been compromised, he was able to create a loyal voter base that allowed him to focus efforts elsewhere.

Along with his popularized slogan, Trump would also name call his opposition in order to create reactions from candidates and leave psychological impacts on voters and their perception of said candidate. Two of his popular nicknames were "Crooked Hillary" and "Lyn' Ted" which made voters feel like they weren't able to trust the other candidates. These nicknames were also reinforced through social media posts in relation to rallies, spreading it to individuals even if they didn't support it. This was the first time a strategy was employed like this because in traditional campaigning, it would be seen as immature to name call your opposition, but in this case Trump used the strategy and it created buzz. There's an argument that it was negative buzz, but at the end of the day having that word of mouth conversations allows his name to be known.

Trump's communication plan's success was focused on using social media for PR attention and this new strategy posed a risk but ultimately succeeded and won him the presidency. When looking at the usage of Twitter throughout Trump's campaign, he would use it to build relationships with his voters and create more buzz through his unique rhetoric. Since Clinton's campaign didn't have nearly as much buzz, it allowed Trump to build attitudinal loyalty which is where a customer prefers or likes one brand over the other. There were also the uses of rallies to

create media attention. He would hold events that would be attended by certain groups that were broken down based on their behavioral demographic, geographic and psychographic characteristics. By holding these rallies he would get them excited about his campaign and the thought of him potentially becoming president. In the tail end of the campaign, there was a clear difference between the amount of money being spent on social media. During the last month of the campaign, Trump spent over \$70 million on digital operations that were targeted towards Trump supporters.

DISCUSSION

The importance of the impact of these two campaigns can be seen when understanding the shift in campaigning strategies. After Obama set the precedent of using PR strategies with digital media, our political system will never go back to traditional campaigning methods and will continue to progress with the digital strategies. Trump was able to successfully use the strategies Obama used and has solidified that we will never go back to earlier methods. Previously, campaigns were focused on showing the audience who the best candidate was and the usage of traditional campaigning methods of having professional dialect, reaching out to voters through phone banks and winning the debates. As our society continues to progress, it is only just that we grow with it. This is reflected through the campaign strategies that were presented by the two candidates and their strong usage of social media. Social media has been a way that enhances the diverse methods of communicating with your audience. Candidates now have a way to communicate directly with their audience and also give constituents a way to speak directly to candidates. This is something Trump utilized immensely through social media platform “Twitter” in which he would tweet his thoughts on the political arena, retweet supporters and comment on other tweets. By using this to share his thoughts and ideas, voters could see his authenticity and this went a long way throughout the campaign.

Trump's campaign focused on taking the middle party and getting them to not vote for Clinton, voting third party or not voting at all. They implemented the usage of getting fewer voters out through a forceful PR campaign. By creating the negative nicknames for his competition, Trump created doubt in the voters minds. He established this early on within his campaign and had a strong use of the catchphrase throughout his campaign process. Ultimately, this led to voters doubting her at the polls and it was just enough for Trump to win more electoral colleges. Trump also used his platform to connect with voters, whether it was through live streams, retweets or Q and A's on Instagram. Trump utilized this strategy as it was deemed a success when Obama used it. Since a catchphrase like that was a part of his campaign, it is clear to see that by having strong strategies, even if you're a less qualified candidate, you are able to win. Since our democracy is very reliant on social media, the strategies that utilize it have a strong likelihood of being successful.

Implications

Even though the usage of social media is great from a candidate's reflection, the effects this has on us is something that needs to be brought to other individuals' attention. Trump's success of a campaign can ultimately be traced back to the manipulative techniques that were utilized on social media. These strategies have a psychological toll on individuals and can have a large influence on them, whether they know it or not. Overall as a democracy, this would force us to be more cautious when it comes to where we get our news from, what our social

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media feed looks like and the information we can trust from other candidates. The psychological techniques utilized by Trump's campaign also brings up the question of ethics within politics and the effects it has on our society. As voters, we tend to trust what campaigns and what candidates have to say. If candidates continue to spread lies and be harsh on the political landscape, those messages will translate to us and have lasting effects on our democracy. The party polarization that was seen during the 2016 election is an example of the impacts the candidates have on our society. Our country has never been so divided and we are still working on trying to come back together as a country.

Future research

As our society continues to advance, it is important that we continue to understand how PR is utilized in future campaigns and the extent to which it is used. As of right now, we were able to see a shift of techniques on a presidential level, but it is important to see if this trend will trickle down into congressional elections or local elections. This topic is important to research because it has a direct correlation between the individual and our democracy. If we are able to understand the campaigning techniques used, we will be able to have thoughts of candidates that aren't persuaded. By understanding this topic, you are also able to have an in-depth understanding of our democracy and the functioning of politics from within.

CONCLUSION

The 2008 Obama campaign was a catalyst for change for campaign methods. By departing from traditional campaigning methods and utilizing public relation methods, such as using social media to reach out to voters, having social media accounts and live streaming his speeches. Obama proved these methods success by running for re-election in 2012 and winning. Trump reinforced these methods through his 2016 election which was also deemed a success. By these two consecutive campaigns, it showed the political arena that we've moved away from traditional methods and that the PR strategies with the convergence of digital media is something that will continue to be utilized throughout campaigning. Trump utilized these methods by having a strong campaign slogan that resonated with his voters. His slogan would also spread rapidly, being seen on shirts, hats, bumper stickers, signs and any other article to show support towards his candidacy. He also used social media for PR attention. This was often seen through his usage of Twitter and ultimately got individuals talking about him, which serves its purpose. These changes are important to acknowledge because it sets a tone for how political campaigns will be run now and in the future. By building off the successful techniques, candidates will be able to change and alter their approaches to ensure their success as a campaign. The world of political campaigning has changed and it is crucial that our democracy understands the implications of it.

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