Andrew Schulze

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Potency of Social Networking

The Democratic National Convention in 2008 was flooded with supporters flailing their respected campaign signs with aspirations of hope and change. The auditorium radiated cheer and spirit as supporters chanted Barack Obama's name. The halls echoed as they filled the air with their cries of rejoice and patriotism on Invesco field in Denver. As he took the stage he smiled and waved while he walked with pride to the podium. Adjusting the microphone he smirked with a sense of confidence before he started his acceptance speech for the democratic nomination for president of the United States. This was the final picture of Barack Obama before he began arguably one of the most electrifying campaigns in presidential history. He had come a long way during his journey of traveling miles across state lines. He constructed and accomplished a strategy that would change the game for future presidents to follow. The use of his outstanding speaking potential and charisma swept the public off of their feet and into a safety net promising hope and change. This wave of support did not crash; in fact it has carried him into his second term in presidency. There were many tools that president Obama possessed that he was able to use for his advantage during the Democratic Primary race. Some of these tools were educational and motivational in nature, while others were tangible and at his disposal. President Obama had a unique way to reach the public through means of social networks. He was able to collect contributions as well as convey his messages and talk to the public on a very innovative personal level. The old get out the vote strategy by means of phone and door knocking was infused with a new catalyst of social networking.

 To run an effective campaign it is crucial to be relevant and known. It sounds simple on paper however; for young Illinois Senator Obama it was a startup business that must learn how to run with the “big dogs” quickly. This can be an extremely tough threat during the beginning of a campaign. Establishing an identity can be exhausting on time, support, and money. These three variables very few candidates have for their disposal at the beginning of their campaign. Senator Obama knew that he must use the resources at-hand to make his actions not only quick but momentous. It was at this point in 2007 during the month of February; Obama contacted Marc Andreessen whom was a board member for Facebook. Facebook was a rapidly growing social network obsession collecting the undivided attention of millions of members. It consisted of a picture and profile that contained basic information about a person. Everyone in all age ranges and all ethnicities were already active Facebook members waiting to be won-over. Obama had recognized this new trend and he endeavored to tap into this network for an outlet to the public.

The idea sounded bleak but Obama knew the opportunities it could bring him for name recognition and campaign finances. In 2006 Facebook opened up for the use of businesses and politicians. Neither of which truly could grasp the true potential that Facebook offers. The solicitation of money possibilities combined objective declaration was an unclaimed innovation. Mr. Andreessen said to a reporter of the New York Times that; “Other politicians I have met with are always impressed by the Web and surprised by what it could do, but their interest sort of ended in how much money you could raise. He was the first politician I dealt with who understood that the technology was a given and that it could be used in new ways.” (Carr.) It was brilliant. The Internet is a resource that nearly all of America is exposed to. Anyone and everyone can access a computer and further their involvement. President Obama posted his campaign logo along with his message and cast it into a sea of online potential supporters. His campaign went viral collecting hits and online support overnight. His first address to the public was; “We have a lot of work to do to get our country back on track, and I’ll be in touch soon about what comes next.” This small message was the game changing statement that kick started the heat of his advancement.

 That same month Obama collaborated and signed on Scott Goldstein whom became the director of *Obama for America* and Chris Hughes a board member for Facebook. Goldstein and Hughes roughly collected nearly two million supporters on MySpace, about 6.5 million supporters on Facebook, and 1.7 million supporters on Twitter. Simply by keeping the public updated with Senator Obama’s campaign. In *Obama Zombies* by Jason Mattera it is documented that Obama’s Facebook friends on Election Day in 2008 towered at 2,397,253 people. This number blew John McCain’s miniscule amount of 622,860 friends out of the water. (Mattera 27.) It was a sensation. Every night that Obama would hold a conference whether it is a town hall rally in Iowa or a closed door dinner in Pennsylvania, his status on any given social network page and it would be updated informing the public of his whereabouts and ideas. In a sense the internet humanized the President-elect of the time. It was a tool used to connect with potential supporters by talking to them all individually through social media messages. Obama appealed to the youth vote because he himself was youthful. Barack may have been 47 years old, however he embodied a spirit of youth. The gestures and way he carried himself were far more charming than his opponent McCain. It was “cool” that the President-elect was using Facebook. It was a very flattering sensation to say they you are friends with Barack Obama on Facebook. Obama opened the door to true change when he utilized social media to advance his political career. During an interview Hughes expressed their success in the social networking department of the campaign. Hughes said; “People have always communicated, organized around campaigns, we just made it easier.” There was a distinct explosion in supporters who were asked for their contributions as well as their time to volunteer. The distinct direction was to connect with youth voters, the ages of twenty-five and under and that is exactly where he thrived.

This current generation is synonymously identifiable as the “Facebook” generation; however Twitter proved itself to be a worthy teammate. Tweets (Social media slang for posts that portray thought) could be sent by Obama’s personal Blackberry after rallies. His Tweets were Retweeted or responded to around the clock by fans. The concept of twitter is much like Facebook except the difference is it is more opinionated and brief. Tweets are short and casual in nature and designed to be updated frequently instead of periodically. Hash tags are used to links to different pages and forums that hold discussion and political conversations. Quickly terminology formed with phrases like; “Follow the President on Twitter” or “#TeamObama.” American citizens began throwing these terminologies around in everyday conversations. Obama knew that it would only make sense to climb aboard this new plan to adopt this resource to get out the vote. He would convey his Tweets to be short inspiration phrases. Tweets saying things like “ Its time for a Change” or “Yes we can” instilled inspiration in the hearts and minds of followers. It was the old “call to arms/ rally the troops” campaign except delivered digitally without actually having to talk to these followers personally. People were touched and persuaded in a way that politics had never seen before. Obama obtained a label of being a messiah or savior due to his ability to capture the hearts of so many. The buck could not stop here; there were still far too many people who were off of the political radar that needed to be found.

Profiles were created on every possible line of social network such as Flickr, Digg, BlackPlanet, LinkedIn, AsianAve, MiGente, Glee and others. It was a relentless attempt to allure any possible potential voter that could be hiding out in the broad crowd on each of those different social networks. Each one was a new resource waiting to be cracked into. Although the hype sounds breath taking, there was a very real problem that although participation through social networks is high, the voter turn out is historically low. Obama had to make a gamble that the use of social networking would bring a push for all of the supporters to actually make it to the polls on Election Day. The supporters on his pages could not be counted as guaranteed votes. By use of polls and surveys that he offered he stressed the importance to cast their ballot on Election Day. Today Obama carries 27,394,177 Twitter followers. This is not counting the other pages that are dedicated to news regarding Obama. He proceeded and related to the people by posting personable information such as what he ranked as his favorite books and food. Twitter and Facebook although extremely well liked, lacked in the sense that Obama’s true voice was not being heard. It was being read. He changed this by integrating video clips by means of YouTube into his statuses and tweets.

YouTube soon connected campaign rallies, conferences, as well as speeches to the public instantly. These videos could be posted via YouTube to show the public if they happened to miss a speech or address. It provided the public with the ability to re-watch Obama’s speeches as well as access new ones that they could not attend. A voter in Illinois could have complete access to a rally that Obama is hosting in Ohio. The coined phrase “Obama phenomenon” of listening to his charisma and energy could now be experienced through a computer monitor. He possessed courtesy and tact that he combined with enthusiasm in order to collect the undivided attention of his audiences. He flooded the net with numerous videos and interviews in order to allow his supporters to experience the marvel for themselves. The number of campaign videos that Obama posted to YouTube is 1,822 while John McCain only posted 330 videos. The number of views on those videos are as follows; Obama: 889 million, McCain: 554 million. Of these videos posted by the two candidates; the amount of time that these people watched the videos before election night accumulated to 14.6 million hours for Obama and 488,000 hours for McCain. (Mattera 27.) The numbers are clear that Obama trampled John McCain digitally. Voters could watch these videos and receive his messages in the confines of their own home. The Top Yahoo searches in 2008 were Brittney Spears, WWE, and in third place Barack Obama. His recognition became such a media feeding frenzy that could not be stopped. Never before had a Candidate become such a celebrity.

 Television can be an annoying resource to view campaign ads. With the overcrowding of commercials and the over use of smear campaign strategies the Internet opened the door to choice. ABC, NBC, Fox and CBS are losing their viewers at a slow but steady decline. It is a difficult task to accomplish these days when trying to capture view attention. Advisements are often loud, to the point, and concise. The use of campaign ads through television is slowly becoming a dying breed. Not only are the campaign policies becoming thicker on what you can or cannot do/say in these advertisements, but also viewers are tuning out. Viewers can click and pop up an ad online at the touch of a button by use of the Internet, allowing them to view videos and ads on their own time. “According to the Pew Research Center, 33 percent of Americans go online to get their political news. 49 percent of young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine go online to get their political news.” (Mattera 31.) Why would they want to be bothered while watching their favorite movie? Katy Steinmetz of TIME found in the survey titled “Voters Going Off the Grid: 2012,” that “Media surveyed 800 likely voters across the U.S., as well as an additional 300 in [Florida](http://topics.time.com/florida/) and [Ohio](http://topics.time.com/ohio/). They found that almost half of them aren’t using live TV as their primary source of video content this cycle. More of them own smartphones and tablets, and a rising number are switching from cable viewing to online streaming.”(Steinmetz.)

The use of telephones changed completely. Where telephones were originally used for calling from phone banks, advances such as apps and text messages changed the direction of connection. The campaign soon catered to on-the-go supporters with iPhone apps such as “Obama Mobile.” Supporters could receive updates on their phones through text messages and reminders if they subscribed to *Obama Mobile*. These advances were all a tip of the hat to Goldstein and Hughes who were relentlessly making their splash into the media. People carry their phones on them everywhere they go. They handle their devices in time of use as well as just to fiddle with if they are bored. Texts were seen from the younger generation was a more meaningful outreach. Even if a text was created and sent through means of an intern through a computer, the image of the president-elect texting you was an endearing feeling. At the Democratic Convention in Denver one of Obama’s directors notified the crowd that they should pull out their phones and text the script; “we’re going to do some work.” He did so in order to invite them to add their phone numbers to the 75,000 supporters already in the database. Once Obama was able to create solid advancements by means of the social network, his strategies of traditional get out the vote techniques were not shunned. In order to win he could not place all of his eggs in one basket.

When the birth of the ingenious my.barack.obama.com walked onto the scene, numbers began to multiply. “My.barack.obama (MyBO for short) was an interactive hub that identified and connected supporters with each other, planned events, encouraged community blogs, raised money, provided talking points and campaign logos, generated field material for door to door interaction, and stacked volunteers to man phone banks.” (Mattera 32.) MyBO was a machine that compounded every element of canvasing and morphed it into a campaign weapon. Grass roots campaigning had a new meaning. The Obama campaign took to the streets like a blitzkrieg setting record-breaking results. The movement became electrifying and inspirational; there was a very real sense of commitment by everyone to get out the vote. Supporters were contacted via Internet and email ordering them to assemble in their precincts and reach out to their neighbors and friends. His message through word of mouth was running parallel with his viral web message. Supporters flocked to the streets to pass on the message verbally and encourage others to follow him via the Internet. People walking door to door stimulated the involvement of using blogs. Supporters would stress the importance of talking to fellow voters via blog about issues at hand while delivering them pamphlets issued by MyBO about how to get involved.

MyBO users targeted apathetic voters, independents, and moderates who leaned both Democratically and conservative through databases of geography, age, profession, and languages. These users could become certified through the Internet to make calls and canvas in their own living rooms. MyBO even asked parents and students where they were attending college in order to contact them and persuade them to climb aboard. Anyone and everyone could be a potential supporter; the campaign taps into numerous untouched sources for support. Volunteers clocked around 8 million phone calls via MyBO. This participation could include working the phone banks, organizing fundraisers, contributing, or simply listening to Barack Obama. People can become involved at their own set pace and organized by MyBO. “By the time the campaign was over, volunteers had created more than 2 million profiles on the site, planned 200,000 offline events, formed 35,000 groups, posted 400,000 blogs and raised $30 million on 70,000 personal fund-raising pages.” (Mattera 32.) It was a maneuver that knocked participation out of the park. Researcher Seth Masker of Oxford Journals found that Obama’s campaign targeted battle ground states and established around 700 field offices across the country. The evidence shows that Obama’s reach out attempts enhanced his victory by targeting these battleground counties in states. The more that his likability rating and polling raised through name recognition in social media, the more counties he won over.

Political Scientists may argue that these counties would have been won regardless of his influential strategy to reach out. There is belief that President Obama did not need his political push through the internet and ground game. Political Scientists have speculated that he would emerge the winner through thorough examination of polling. Whether or not that this theory is factual, people may change their voting habits for any number of reasons ranging from the weather outside to scandals, it is hard to confirm any determination until the election is settled and the results are in. What cannot be argued is how the use of social media and the Internet in 2008 will be an on going trend for future elections. President Obama has set the bar for future candidates to abide by. Just as John F. Kennedy set a new benchmark by utilizing the television, so too has Obama with the Internet. Politics will be played by means of who can attract the most viewers through the web. Political Scientists now are altering their manuscript of how to obtain scientific research of candidate’s success rates by researching social media responses.

 Congressmen and women have adopted social networks to connect with their constituents. According to opencongress.org there are currently 355 members of congress and 105 members in the United States Senate on Twitter. 213 of them are Democrats and 250 of them Republicans. There is not much polarization on whether Democrats or Republicans use social networking more, they both understand the importance it has on succeeding in today’s politics. It is a well-adopted tool that the game of politics now uses. It can be used to understand what the public wants, what it is looking for, how it feels. As well as inform the public of how a politician or candidate feels or what they want or endeavor. Communication is a rapidly morphing concept that will continually change as society changes. In order for candidates seeking political success in today’s world they must accept and roll with change. President Obama has forever changed the game of politics. History has been altered and a new breed of campaigning is now taking over the game of politics, as we know it. It must also be considered the consequences of social media. The thoughts of politicians should be monitored as to take heed to the very real chance of slip-ups. In a 24-hour news analysis it can be very easy for politicians to use social media incorrectly compromising their political career. This is becoming an epidemic that has compromised careers such as Congressman Weiner’s career. Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube can be a blessing or a curse. Obama happened to capitalize with social media making it a weapon in his arsenal to use for campaigning.

 In todays fast paced cynical world, social media has been embraced and become a modern marvel. The new generation of people cannot imagine a world without cellphone texting or the vast amount of information available in the palm of their smart phones. Less and less people are tuning into the television or reading the daily newspaper for their news. The world is changing. It is inevitable. To find success one must accept the change and acknowledge it. Obama started a new revolution that will be used in politics for decades. Each President likes to believe that they have left a legacy with the American people whether it is economical advances or human rights advances. President Obama left the American people with a new recipe. It is a brand new how-to recipe for aspiring politicians seeking office as well as a resource for political information. Legacies can make or break presidencies. In this case, social media made President Obama’s legacy.

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