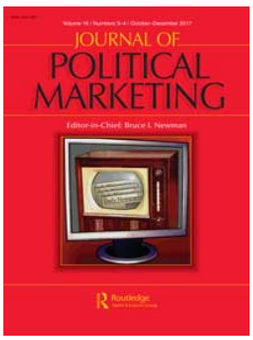

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Introduction: Social Media, Political Marketing and the 2016 U.S. Election

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This essay introduces the contributions of the volume "Social Media, Political Marketing and the 2016 U. S. Election." Using a variety of methodological approaches, the authors investigate the communication strategies of the Democratic and Republican candidates for president together with the responses of their audience. Collectively, this research offers insights into how new communication technologies are changing both political marketing and the ways candidates and voters interact.

KEYWORDS campaign communication, political marketing, presidential nominating contest, social media, 2016 U.S. election

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram create new ways to market political campaigns and new channels for candidates and voters to interact. We can gauge the scale of social media's role in the 2016 presidential election from data reported by the Pew Research Center (July 18, 2016). According to their survey, 44% of the U.S. adults got information about the 2016 presidential election from social media. That is more than the percentage cited for either local or national print newspapers or for candidate websites and emails combined. And 24% got news and information from social media posts by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Trump had almost 10 million Twitter followers to Clinton's seven million, and his nine million Facebook followers were about double her number. In May of 2016, the Pew study found that candidates averaged five to seven posts per day on Facebook and 11 to 12 per day on their Twitter accounts.

This volume investigates the role and impact of social media in the 2016 U.S. election, focusing specifically on the presidential nominating contest. That contest presents a unique case for study, with one author (Kurtzleben

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2016) itemizing 65 ways 2016 was unprecedented! Notably, this was an open seat election that saw the largest field of candidates in the modern era and one that arguably splintered both political parties. A stop Trump movement associated with prominent Republican leaders and donors raised significant amounts of money for a negative advertising campaign. By way of example, one anti-Trump Super Political Action Committee (PAC), Lift Leading Illinois for Tomorrow, spent $9.9 million, allocating nearly all of it to digital media (Williams and Gulati 2017). Indeed, campaign financing broke several records: outside groups spent more than some candidates' own campaigns; a small number of donors raised unprecedented amounts of money; and a record number of female donors helped fuel Clinton's campaign. Both candidates and advocacy groups launched major outreach campaigns that targeted Latino and Asian voters. Not only voter registration but also turnout for Super Tuesday and other state contests reached new highs, primarily on the Republican side, and their first candidate debate rivaled that of major sporting events with an audience of 24 million. Yet despite this intense courting of the electorate and the level of interest generated by these events, a majority of voters disliked both nominees heading into the general election (Chozick and Thee-Brenan 2016).

The research compiled in this volume is further noteworthy for the wide variety of methodological approaches and statistical techniques used to probe the rich, vast stores of social media data now available. Through case studies, experiments, survey research, and content analysis, its contributors use both human and machine coding to analyze social media text and video content. The individual chapters examine what different candidates posted about and which posts generated more response. The analyses shed light on what social media can reveal about campaign messaging strategies and explore the linkages between social media content and their audiences' perceptions, opinions, and political participation. The findings highlight similarities and differences among candidates and consider how continuity and change are manifest in the 2016 election. Finally, taking a look forward, the contributors consider the implications of their work for political marketing research and practice.

Michael Cornfield sets the stage with his analysis of the first Republican debate, a notable opening foray in the 2016 presidential nominating contest. He illustrates how Donald Trump's insurgent marketing strategy encapsulated in his choice of words and targets dominated social media conversations, generating more likes, retweets, and growth in followers than any other candidate. Through his debate performance, Trump sets the agenda by defining which issues and character traits would become salient in the campaign. Cornfield concludes that social media have made the "invisible primary" visible and allow unaccredited people to register their support or opposition in a campaign phase previously limited to elites.

Joseph Ryoo and Neil Bendle investigate which topics candidates emphasize in their Twitter and Facebook posts and how that emphasis changes over time. They generate these themes using two methods: a supervised process based upon a predetermined list and an unsupervised topic modeling process Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). Over time, Donald Trump increased the attention he paid to trade as well as his focus on himself, yet avoided mention of the abortion issue. By the conclusion of the nomination phase, Hillary Clinton increased her posts on Trump, but maintained a level focus on women's rights. In that same time frame, Bernie Sanders shifted emphasis from himself to the Democratic Party. The study demonstrates that social media posts constitute a rich repository of data, which can be mined for insights into a campaign's communication strategy.

Kate Kenski, Christine Filer, and Bethany Conway-Silva use computer-assisted content analysis to examine candidate tweets during the preprimary and primary phases of the presidential election. Party was more important than ideology in their messaging, with no difference between outsiders and establishment candidates in the emphasis placed on in-group affiliation. Candidates tweeted about themselves more than either their intra- or inter-party opponents. That said, Hillary Clinton mentioned Donald Trump more than he mentioned her, although other Republicans did criticize Trump and President Obama in their tweets. In contrast to expectations derived from social identity and reference dependence theories, social media are used primarily to boost name recognition in the initial stages of the campaign.

Caroline Munoz and Terri Towner categorize the visual framing of candidates' Instagram images during the presidential primaries. The ideal candidate frame is preferred to a populist one and generates the highest numbers of likes and comments from viewers. Its visuals include elected officials and patriotic symbols (statesmanship), the latter being frequently depicted in Donald Trump's images, and family (compassion), often depicted in those of Hillary Clinton. Candidates differed in the frequency of their posts and use of text overlays, and whether viewers engaged with a like or a comment depended on the image. This study is one of the first to describe and evaluate candidates' visual self-presentation strategy on social media.

In another study of visual marketing strategy and effectiveness, Edward Elder and Justin Phillips analyze the effectiveness of Facebook autoplay videos in targeting potential voters, specifically the coveted Hispanic demographic by the Clinton campaign. Her targeted videos attracted more likes from new supporters than untargeted ones. Moreover, live unedited event videos were more effective than those professionally produced, especially if paired with images of other Hispanics. On the other hand, videos focusing on Donald Trump did not attract new Hispanic support, which the Clinton campaign appears not to have recognized. More generally, this research confirms the effectiveness of a targeted political advertising strategy.

Michael Jensen and Henrik Bang investigate the different strands of populism reflected in the Facebook posts of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump and their supporters' response to them. In their populist campaigns, both present themselves as champions of the people fighting the economic and political establishment. Nearly 25% of Trump's posts, however, reference himself and portray him in a hierarchical authority role: the strong leader who will come to the rescue and restore greatness. Sanders' posts instead emphasize the power of citizens to effect change or horizontal connectivism. These candidates' contrasting depictions are likewise reflected in comments on their respective posts. Trump's supporters reference the need for strong authority, which correlates with expressions of fear; Sanders' supporters express optimism with references to democracy and their own capacity to make a difference politically. Rather than de Tocqueville's fear that populism would give rise to despotism, Jensen and Bang see in connectivism a potential path forward for democratic politics.

Aaron Veenstra, Benjamin Lyons, and Alev Degim Fannagan conduct experiments to determine whether centrality, favorability, and social network homogeneity influence perceptions of media bias during the primaries and general election. The centrality and favorability of candidates to respondents influenced perceptions of candidate bias, but party support factors did not influence party bias. Postconvention, candidate favorability remained significant for candidate bias while social network homogeneity predicted party bias. While personalization could be the result of an unusually divisive nomination contest in 2016, long term, candidate-centered identity could undermine general election support from the losing candidates and from the voters who supported them. More broadly, social media communities fueled by media hostility could undermine the democratic role of the press.

Turning to behavioral impacts in the concluding chapter, Daniela Dimitrova and Dianne Bystrom investigate the effects of online and social media activity on participation in the Iowa caucuses. Active social media use through liking and sharing content positively impacts caucus attendance while passive use diminishes it. Social media is the strongest predictor of attendance among all information channels, followed by cable television viewing; late night TV comedy shows and radio are significant, negative predictors. The authors conclude that individual communication channels do not motivate participation as much as attention paid to the caucuses. The findings suggest that campaigns should redirect attention away from passive website viewing and develop social media content that will generate likes and shares.

Our special issue, "Social Media, Political Marketing and the 2016 U.S. Election," contributes to a growing literature focused on the data and role of this new technology in political campaigns. Its chapters illustrate how social media, like print and broadcast before it, offers insights into campaign communication strategy. Collectively, these studies also demonstrate that

social media are well suited to measuring audience response to candidates' messages and thus the effectiveness of their marketing. This research showcases differences among the 2016 presidential candidates over the course of the campaign, although questions remain about differences among social media platforms, demographic subgroups, and electoral contexts. It is too soon to know the extent to which these findings reflect unique attributes of the 2016 election or are harbingers of a fundamentally changed electoral order. What is clear is that the internet has created a communication environment that is larger, faster, and more heterogeneous than ever before. Social media are a significant player in this new environment. This volume provides a timely exploration of its emerging impact on political marketing and the interactions that undergird the relationship between candidates and voters. As the early months of the Trump presidency bring the positive and negative potential of social media to the fore, this research agenda needs to keep pace and address its role and impact as a governing tool.

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