

## Social Media and Political Campaigns

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In 1948, when President Harry Truman held a copy of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* over his head, the front page emblazoned with the headline, "Dewey Defeats Truman," an iconic American image was born. Today, that image would likely be captured on Twitter as something like: @PresTruman R U sure about that? RT @ChiDailyTrib Dewey Defeats Truman #election48. If that makes sense to you, you're among the growing number of Americans using Twitter. If not, while you're certainly not alone, you're part of a shrinking number of social media holdouts. As social media platforms continue to weave their way into the fabric of our daily lives, political campaigns and many politicians are at the forefront of these new avenues for communication and message dissemination.

Social media outlets like Twitter, facebook, YouTube and other emerging platforms are rapidly expanding the playing field for political communication. What was once a bumper sticker is now a facebook profile picture. What a candidate used to tell an audience of 40 people over rubber chicken and mashed potatoes can now be broadcast around the world on YouTube.

To be sure, social media outlets are now utilized by campaigns to perform many tasks they've always needed to do, but with greater efficiency. A decade ago, time and energy went into placing telephone calls or gathering e-mail addresses to round up volunteers for a grassroots effort. Today, a call to action goes out to all of a candidate's friends and followers on facebook through one click of the mouse.

Further, with any campaign, the fundraising never ends. And in the area of online campaign contributions, this year every major candidate in Ohio is set up to solicit and accept donations on his or her website. On the heels of his better-than-expected finish in the 2004 Democratic Iowa Caucus, Howard Dean became a trailblazer for online campaign cash, racking up thousands of often small contributions, a practice that was perfected by President Obama's 2008 campaign. (I would be remiss not to mention that the Ohio Chamber of Commerce PAC is set up to receive contributions through our website.) In 2010, a company called BlueSwarm is poised to take the connection between online political contributions, social media and campaign organization to the next level. This software, which is being used by numerous candidates around the country, including Ohioan Rob Portman, will not only allow individuals to make their own donations online, but it will also allow them to become part of the campaign by soliciting contributions for the candidates they support from their social networks.

Beyond traditional campaign missions like grassroots and fundraising, social media platforms have also opened up a new avenue of direct communication between candidates and voters. In the traditional media model, a candidate holds a press conference, answers reporter's questions and the reporters, in turn, solicit a comment from the candidate's opponent and then present both sides in an unbiased piece of journalism. Today candidates are speaking directly to voters without any filters at all, and are receiving feedback directly from the voters. While the president is still the only politician who can command coverage from all the television networks, any politician (or anyone at all, for that matter) with a webcam and a microphone can address the entire Internet over YouTube.

Of course, all of this is not without some risk for campaigns. For instance, in the increasingly contentious Ohio governor's race, both incumbent Democrat Ted Strickland's camp and Republican challenger John Kasich's supporters have capitalized on the power of Twitter and the web to frame each other in a negative light. Kasich's "Turnaround Ted" and Strickland's "Kasich Facts" both provide information about each candidate, though it's certainly not the same information (or at least it's not presented in the same context) as each respective campaign would endorse.

On the whole, social media is utilized by both campaigns and voters to increase access at virtually no cost. And access is a two-way street. For campaigns, the ability to contact supporters, contributors and voters directly is more efficient and effective. For voters, the opportunity to question and scrutinize politicians is never more than a few clicks away. Harry Truman, though, might wisely remind us to consider the source and read each headline with a degree of skepticism.