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The Impact of

Twitter on the 2016 Election

Social Media usage has been skyrocketing for the past years. Back in 2005, it was recorded that only five percent of adults recorded using a social media platform and now that number has jumped to seventy percent in recent years. This has earned the concern of people who believe it is having a negative influence on face-to-face time. The term for this is known as social displacement. However, some believe these fears are unfounded and this accusation is thrown at every new piece of technology that comes out. They date back to the days when the telephone and television were invented as similar claims were made about them. It can be theorized that due to cell phones, tablets, etc. being more portable than other pieces of technology and media, that they can affect face to face more than the other forms such as old telephones and televisions which are less able to travel with the person. Some people that want to shift the blame away from technology and social media state it could be the fault of differences in parenting that are the cause for the decline in face to face interaction. Back in times such as the 1980s were more face to face interaction between teenagers was reported than in recent years, kids were more likely to have less restrictive parenting and more freedom to be out for longer periods of time. With parenting becoming more restrictive in modern years, it has been theorized that by connecting with friends on social media, teenagers are making up for the lack of outside face to face interaction they have with them. It is also believed that social media is also an outlet for teens to express themselves in creative ways with some places such as

Common Place Media reporting that over a quarter of teens stating that social media is ‘extremely’ important for them to be able to express themselves creatively. People do still feel there are risks to social media including the belief that the wide range of people that you can befriend and interact with makes the relationships less intimate and more superficial than the smaller number of friends they would meet in smaller more local face to face places such as school or work. There is also the risk of teens running content that may not be safe or appropriate for them as some have reports running into racist, sexist, homophobic, or religious-based hate content while on social media. False or misleading information also is at risk for getting out into the world through Social Media sites and thus into the minds of teenagers involved. Some sites have taken steps to mitigate this though, with some sites putting warnings on posts that could contain false or misleading information.

In addition, The influence of media studies and media on society is far reaching. It helps shape how we view certain people or even certain groups of people. For example, during a press conference for University of Texas in Austin, in response to minority students advocating for more minority faculty and students, the converse page presented them as a vocal group who would spoke over the president and did not allow him to speak ignoring that the footage was from the end, when the president was done speaking and they were responding to the speech. The footage made it appear as if the crowd had been heckling and disrupting the president throughout his speech. This gap shows the way media can be used in order to change people’s perspective on a certain person and group in order to fit the story the media wants to tell. Many people who go to events present a very different story using their first-hand knowledge than the story that someone who only saw or read the news would get from the same event or group. Author James Root wrote in her book “Open the Box” that the media “has a role in defining what

we think of as natural...it helps to map out who we think we are". As not only can it shape our view of other people, but it can also help us shape our views of ourselves. We may base our personalities or fashions based on what we see our favorite influencer or celebrity is wearing or doing on social media. Another debate can also be brought up. That's it the individual's choice to participate in the media. They can choose to not use social media as their source of information or get the story from a person who was there first hand rather than the news or social media. It can also be debated that today we don't have much of a choice to participate in the media.

Sometimes jobs will even be wary of an applicant who they cannot Google do to a lack of social media pages or someone who uses an outdated form of media such as an older email service like AOL rather than Gmail. A person who does not participate in media may also seem strange or be made an outcast due to not having social media like many others so regardless of if their only reason for not having it is wanting to keep their life private. The media field is so large and influential that people that join it should recognize the enormous impact their job can have on the people especially if they work for a social media site where many people must place their personal information in the site just to join them post about something seemingly as innocuous as they what they're having for dinner. The field certainly is a very important one that can even influence something as big as which politicians we vote for. Sometimes politicians even specially have a social media team to post for them. The field is very far reaching and influential.

Social Media is said to be a major player when it comes to elections. Twitter and Facebook in particular were said to have large hands in the outcome of the 2016 election. Trump's own Digital Media director, Brad Parscsle, has stated himself that he believes "Facebook and Twitter are the reasons we won this thing. Twitter for Mr. Trump" Trump himself while on the show *60 Minutes* has stated "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Social Media". This election is said to be

proof of how social media affects politics and in particular, the reemergence of conservative politicians.

Many people have however believed this was not true as some believe that social media is actually biased against conservative voices. Senators Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas have both stated their desire to move to a new social media platform due to believing Twitter moderates its content in ways that censor conservator voices. Some examples of these non-mainstream apps are Parker and Newsmax. Sure, enough Trump did receive fewer votes from demographics who were most likely to be using social media and most of his support came from older white Americans who were the least likely to be using social media. Social Media sites also tend to contain more left wing users. It was estimated by the Paw Research Center that eighty percent of Twitter users were against President Trump. So, what changed?

Approval data about the candidates during the primaries showed that Twitter perhaps changed people's minds about right wing candidates instead of the Republican Party in general. People who lives in places that had a high Twitter usage percentage were disapproving of Far-Right candidates such as Trump and Cruz but were more approving of those who were more moderate such as Marc Rubio. Despite this however, Trump's team took assistance from Twitter and other sites which allowed Trump's team to reach harder to find voters and come up with possible ways to attack during debates. Trump's own unorthodox usage of the site also helped him win the election.

Despite being one of the critics who believed social media was biased against conservative voices and were censoring them, Trump was a frequent user of the site. He tweeted more like a celebrity rather than a politician. It is believed his tendency to tweet in an entertaining manner is one of the major ways he was able to get to the American people and increase his chances of

winning the election. Dr. Robinson of Stock Overflow has stated that he believes “Donald Trump is an extreme example of an outsider and entertainer” and that “celebrities have a long history of exceeding expectations in American elections, because they’re charismatic and relatable”. Due to this he also believes that it means that Americans will sometimes go for someone who they find more entertaining rather than a genuine qualified career politician.

Some even believe that Twitter also helped Trump become the republican nominee not just the president. A podcast “Why the Twittersphere Helped Trump Win” done by Ron Berman and Colman Humphrey discuss this. Twitter was chosen by them for its impact as it is a main forum people use for posting opinions and debating others when it comes to elections and debates. They believed that the election had become the Twitter Election and did their research based on what voters on Twitter were saying. The focus was on August, February,(which happened to be right before Super Tuesday and thus, the last chance for any of the other candidates to get the edge over Trump who was doing well in the polls) and March debates. Info on the debates was collected such as tweets spanning from an hour before the debate to two hours afterward. All tweets contained the hashtag `##GOPDebate#` to ensure they were about the relevant topic. A software program was then used to determine whether or not the tweet was a negative or positive tweet towards the debate. Some of them showed that in tweets during the debate the sentiment towards Trump was negative whereas after the debate the sentiment toward him became more positive. This could potentially mean that the negative stuff that Trump stated during the debate did not matter much to voters who went back to tweeting positively after the debate. Trump was used to generating controversy making him perfect for the Twitter side of the election as controversial tweets tend to gain the most ground. During the debate the news media sources were different as well. Most people didn’t state who they thought was winning or commenting

on facts, they mostly just quoted what the candidates were saying. Due to this while people were retweeting the media sources a lot, after the debate they had little influence showing social media was a bigger platform than the news media further showing its influence in the election.

The election becoming a social media affair also can have adverse effects on friendships and relationships between people both online and in real life. People may find all their friends and relatives posting about the election and start fights over who their friend or relative was supporting if it differed from their own political leaning. People may also unfollow blogs they previously were interested in and looked at frequently if the owner of that blog had a political leaning that differed from theirs or supported a candidate that they did not support. Some people even make posts urging others to not bother looking at their blogs or following their blogs if they support a certain candidate. Some people even brag proudly about unfollowing a blog that supported a certain candidate. The impact of social media on politics is so far reaching that people publicly celebrate the ending of relationships/friendships over politics right on the platform.

In addition, public shaming regarding views in the election also spread on Twitter during the time. Other users can attack another user for stating their support of a particular candidate, try to hurt the user over a political point they made etc. This shaming is then public for the person and all their followers and relatives on the platform to see. This ability to publicly shame becomes even more relevant to the election when the candidates use it to bash each other. Such as when Hilary Clinton tweeted that it was bad to take the risk of allowing Trump into the oval office as he would be unable to face a real crisis. She had also made a quip about how Donald should delete his Twitter to which Trump replied with the question of how long it took her staff to think that up.

Speaking to others helped with my understanding surrounding this topic. An old classmate of mine named Antoinette Mecora, who I spoke to regarding this topic, who followed the election stated that she found Trump's tweets entertaining in a "can't tell the difference between SNL jokes and Trump's real speech" way. She also stated that she knew that this would "Skew people towards Trump as it would humanize him to the voters". Which tied into my earlier research where I found that Doctor Robinson quote that said nearly the same thing. At a later time, I also broached the topic with my grandfather who frequently kept up with the election who had more of an opposing view than the one given by Doctor Robinson, he believed Trump's words and tweets were "full of hate". He also believed that Fox News which he refers to as "Trump's channel" was equally responsible for spreading Trump's rhetoric and causing the effect Robinson spoke about. I found his views interesting as it was insightful to get another view of the phenomenon.

The influence of social media has especially gone up during this period in time. With most of the world going digital due to the COVID-19 pandemic and it being another election year, many people turn to media such as Twitter in order to stay informed or even now as a primary method of communication with both friends and the outside world. People formed opinions of the pandemic based on what they saw in the news and the data given from these sources. The some on Twitter and candidate Joe Biden ,stressed the importance of staying inside and keeping six feet of distance between yourself and others. Some users and President Trump, who was running for reelection. took the opposite approach, taking the pandemic less seriously and downplaying it making claims such as the numbers are being artificially inflated. When mask wearing became a hot topic, whether or not they were effective or not. Some even claimed that masks and social distancing regulations were more harmful than the virus itself, most notably the

President himself who tried to spread anti lockdown and mask rhetoric by claiming that the economic and mental damage of the measures were the real problem. Depending on what news channels or social media sites and fellow users people followed largely can shape which viewpoint someone would take. Due to the pandemic, mail in voting also became a very popular topic, as with the pandemic, standing on line close to others for hours and laying hands on polling machines was not seen as ideal so some news outlets and social media began promoting mail in voting for safety reasons. Mail in voting is nothing new, but it's importance became inflated and it was used much more this year due to the pandemic. Other news outlets took an opposite view on mail in voting. They claimed mail in votes were unsafe too easily tampered with and would lead to fraud, a claim that was debunked several times. Several politicians still are giving the idea merit by using their social media platforms to still claim fraud about the election. The claim that the votes of the dead were being counted in the election was debunked as well as the claim that one USPS worker witnessed rampant fraud was also debunked when it was revealed he had been paid off by Republicans politicians to make the claim. Some people still believe these claims due to listening to news outlets that still credit these ideas and politicians that still make claims of fraud in order to attempt to swing the election's outcome in their favor.

Social Media became a huge phenomenon whose influence spread into the many different areas of daily life. It can affect relationships, how we communicate with others, and even how we meet others. It is a way for people to spread creativity and all different forms of it such as photographs, videos, etc. It even spread to how we vote and as such can even have a hand in how our country is run. Politicians will use it to their advantage to reach voters and voters will use it to receive the information about candidates and their views to choose who to vote for.

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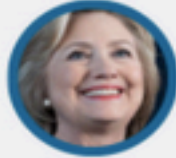


The Twitter Election

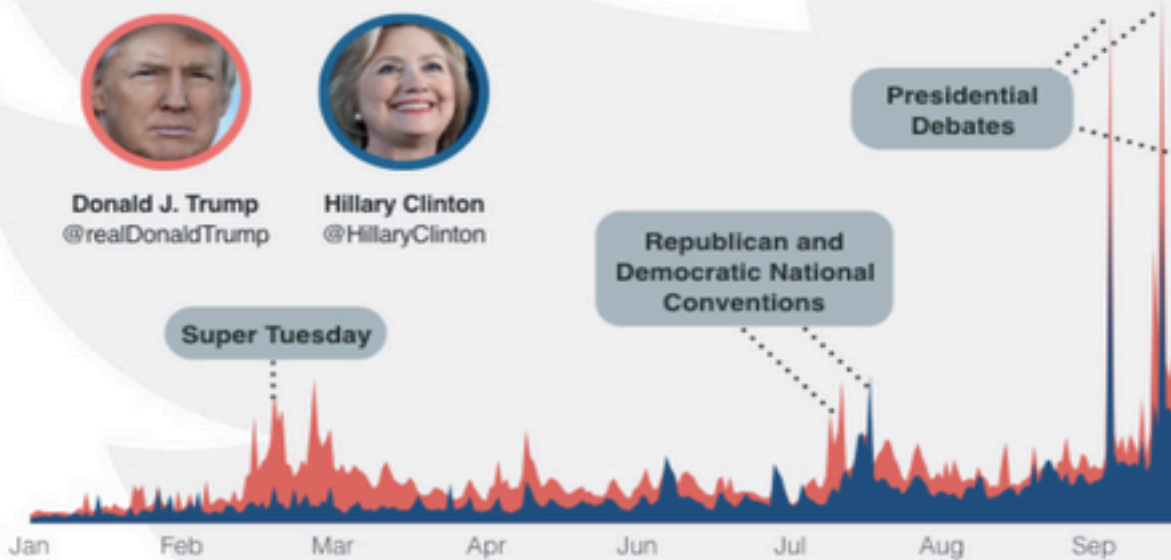
Tweets mentioning each candidate this year



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump



Hillary Clinton
@HillaryClinton



 #Election2016

Source - Twitter Internal Data 1/1/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGj134xWVFQ>

