Enli, Gunn and Anja Naper (2016):

Social Media Incumbent Advantage: Barack Obama and Mitt Romney's Tweets in the 2012 US Presidential Election Campaign

Introduction

Recent US presidential campaigns have been symbolic for social media and politics on a global scale. In particular, the 2008 Obama campaign marked a shift from the old paradigm of information dissemination and persuasion via the mass media to a new paradigm of controlled interactivity via digital media (Stromer-Galley 2014:14). The social media element of the 2008 Obama campaign became a global phenomenon, and inspired politicians and staffers around the world to engage with voters through user-generated content and interactive features.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how US presidential candidates used Twitter when the first phase of novelty had passed and 'the dust had settled' after the 2008 Obama campaign. Focusing on the theory of the incumbent advantage, which is one of the most well documented features of US. elections (Erickson 1995; Ansolabehere, Snowberg, and Snyder 2006; Jamieson 2013), this chapter will investigate to what degree the theory has relevance when transferred to social media. What kind of incumbency advantages did Obama have in relation to his challengers in the context

of social media? To what degree is this advantage in social media comparable with the incumbency advantage resulting from coverage in mass media?

The analysis draws on a quantitative content analysis of the 3420 tweets posted during the US election campaign 2012 on the Twitter accounts of Democrat President Barack Obama, and Republican candidate Mitt Romney. Among the two teams' several accounts, the accounts chosen for this study are @BarackObama and @MittRomney, because they can be classified as *candidate-accounts,* opposed to *team-accounts* such as for example @Obama2012 and @TeamRomney. Importantly, however, the distinction between candidate-accounts and team-accounts must not be confused with indication of authorship, as none of the accounts published tweets on a regular basis written by the candidates. Staffers as a rule wrote the tweets posted on both types of accounts, and the candidates themselves wrote only a fragment of the updates, and they were particularly promoted as 'authentic' (Enli 2015). The analysed material was collected over the course of the election year, from the primaries to Election Day.

This chapter has five main parts. The first discusses characteristics of US the political system, and politics in the US and the implications of these characteristics for the relations between the media and politics. The second part reviews research literature on political communication and social media. The third part outlines the historical development of online campaigning and social media campaigning in the US. The fourth part will present the key findings in the comparative study of the tweets posted on the candidate accounts for Obama and Romney, while the last part concludes and pinpoints key arguments.

Political Marketing and the US political system

The United States is the heartland of political marketing. This is the nation where political spin, political advertising, and branding of politicians originated and have their main foundation. According to Maarek (2011: 7), "There can be no doubt that the genesis of modern political marketing is entirely rooted in the history of political communication in the United States". Maarek defines political marketing as a form of political communication that has migrated from the US to other parts of the world. The terms 'political marketing' and 'political communication' are often used with overlapping meanings however there are distinctions. Political communication may best be defined as an umbrella term that includes political marketing, but also other forms of communication outside the realm of commercial sales logics. A key aspect in definitions of political marketing is that tools and strategies from commercial marketing are transferred to the political arena, such as the idea of elections as analogue to commercial sales, and that politicians resemble salesmen (Scammell, 1999; Street 2003; Ormrod et al, 2013).

The US' dominant role in political marketing can be explained by the political system and the media system as well as by economic factors: First, the election system in the USA is characterized by primaries in the early stages of presidential election campaigns. The presidential primaries run from January to June every four years, whereas the actual campaign starts only mid-July after the appointment of the candidates by their party conventions, and runs until the first Thursday in November. In contrast to for example the party-centred West-European style of campaigning, the U.S. style is remarkably candidate-centred as the campaign organization is built on the individual candidate, almost from scratch (Plasser and Plasser 2002). Because the

politicians need a full-scale campaign to launch their candidacies already in the primaries, this system encourages the production of enormous amounts of political marketing in the USA. In turn, this over-flow of content produced to promote political candidates results in an innovative development of new methods for political marketing.

Second, the USA is characterized by a tradition of election for all public offices, which roots back to its origins as an independent country: "As soon as the United states came into existence, it became routine to hold elections for most major public offices, from the local sheriff, major, or judge, to the president" (Maarek 2011: 9). For this reason, as soon as railroad tracks were laid across the country, potential presidents entered trains to meet their voters. For example, Abraham Lincoln delivered speeches from the rear platform of the campaign train. The third reason for USA's leading role in political marketing is related to the fact that mass media, primarily TV, was spread significantly faster in North America than in other parts of the world. Likewise, the Internet was also launched in the USA, and North Americans were among the key groups of early adopters of the new technology in the early 1990s (Winston and Walton 1996:79). In the context of an election campaign, the Internet was first taken into use in 1996 and, since then, its share of political communication has never ceased to grow (Chadwick 2006: 151; Maarek 2011: 11; Stromer Galley 2014: 14).

The media's impact on election campaigns is often discussed with reference to US politicians' performances in the media. The TV-debates between presidential candidates Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy in 1960 have for instance become

emblematic for the 'television age' of politics (Polsby and Wildavsky 2002; Donaldson 2007; Maarek 2011). In the next section, we will discuss to what degree the US has also become a point of reference in the more recent field of social media and politics.

Social Media and Politics in the USA

The USA is the second largest democracy in the world after India, and the most influential one. The USA's influence in world politics has historical and political reasons, but also the media and cultural industries have contributed to making the USA powerful. Being a global exporter of film and TV, the USA has been accused of cultural imperialism, meaning that its cultural values and political ideas have been exported via mediated representations (Schiller 1976). Ideas of US politics has not least been exported through film and TV-series about US presidents, celebrity endorsements, and the portrayal of politics in TV series such as *The President*, *The Good Wife*, and *House of Cards* (see e.g. van Zoonen 2005). After his 2008 election campaign, President Obama had status as a celebrity politician, a status that was also used against his candidacy in a TV commercial promoting an opponent, Republican candidate John McCain, with the catchphrase: "He's the biggest celebrity in the world. But is he ready to lead?" (quoted in Plouffe 2009: 279).

A large share of currently successful social media networking sites have their origins in the USA, and dominant social media firms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have their headquarters and major ownership interests located to the US. Since 2009, Facebook is by far the most used social media site in the US. In 2014, the number of users had reached seventy-one per cent of the online adult US population and fifty-

eight per cent of the total adult population. The equivalent numbers for Twitter is twenty-three and nineteen per cent, and although more than half of the users utilize multiple social media sites, Facebook acts as 'home base' (Pew Report 2015 "Social Media Update" http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014).

The demographics of social media use is much debated, and the usage was originally associated with young people. A recent trend in the US is that Facebook use among seniors (65 and older) is increasing, and that women are more likely to use Facebook compared to men (Pew report 2015 "Demographics of key social networking platforms"http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2) A parallel trend is that Twitter use is still most popular amongst young adults, and that the use increases in several demographic groups: men, whites, college graduates, high-income, and urbanites (Pew report 2015 "Demographics of key social networking platforms" http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2). In terms of the relationship between social media, politics and engagement, these groups are politically more engaged than the average population.

The growth in social media use was noticed by marketers and PR consultants, as well as by political communication strategists. The web was included in political campaigns already from mid-1995, however, in hindsight, both the 1996 and the 2000 US election campaigns was more 'false starts' than full-blown online campaigns. For example, the presidential websites in 1996 included only simple feedback options such as signing up to volunteer and registering to vote, which is a prerequisite for participation in US elections, and the websites were infrequently updated. In fact, the

websites were simply digital versions of campaign literature produced for the offline campaign, and levels of interactions between candidates and voters were very limited and restricted. In addition, the 2000 campaign was an experimental phase in digital media strategies, and the insurgent campaigns with less to lose but much to gain was spearheads in this phase (Stromer-Galley 2014). Front-runner campaigns, however, were reluctant to include citizen-driven efforts, and the 2000 was campaign was a TV-politics as usual-event. Only one in ten Americans used the Internet for information about the campaign (Chadwick 2006:152-155).

The shift towards online campaigns in the USA was the 2004 presidential election cycle, represented by the Democrat candidate Howard Dean's innovative use of digital media, and blogs in particular. The Internet usage for news and information had doubled since 2000, and reached two-thirds per cent of American adults, according to Pew Research (2015 "Internet use over time" http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/internet-use-over-time). The campaign represented a shift in fundraising, by using online tools to enable supporters to donate small amounts, often repeatedly. Still, the Dean campaign had weighty flaws and particularly failed to structure the enthusiasm of the supporters into a productive work for the campaign (Kreiss 2012).

The 2008 presidential campaigns expanded the paradigm of digital technology-driven campaigning, not least because of the ten per cent increase in Internet adoption since the 2004 election, the launch of the first iPhone in 2007, and the 'participatory turn' resulting partly from new interactive technology (Enli 2008; Stromer-Galley 2014). In the 2008 US presidential election cycle, strategies for online campaigning and social

media had become elementary across every campaign. The Obama campaign nevertheless went a step further than the Clinton campaign, as Obama's highest paid employee was the e-campaign strategist, and the campaign was networked and not compartmentalized (Stromer-Galley 2014:110). The Obama campaign tapped into a participatory culture, by establishing an image of the candidate as tech-savvy and cutting-edge through YouTube, Facebook, and the organization site MyBo (my.BarackObama.com). The 2008 Obama campaign is often regarded as a breakthrough for social media and politics, because it efficiently created enthusiasm and massively involved supporters. In the next section, we will build on this historical backdrop and investigate the role of social media in the 2012 US presidential election campaigns, where Republican Mitt Romney challenged the incumbent candidate Barack Obama.

The Incumbent Advantage in Social Media

Part of the explanation for the 2008 Obama campaign's success in social media was the candidate's appeal as an outsider, an insurgent, and an unlikely winner. This anti-establishment appeal was compatible with the image of social media as an alternative to mainstream media, and the candidate image and the social media image seemed to be interconnected. The outsider image was however less prominent both for the candidate and the medium in the 2012 campaign. Obama had lost some of his appeal as fresh and different, while social media had become an integrated part of the media system, and an obligatory part of the campaigns.

In spite of social media's character as a standard and conventional part of a campaign, there were significant differences between the Obama team and the Romney team in

their social media performance. The Obama campaign had *incumbent advantage*, not only as an elected politician, but also as a 'social media politician'. Previous research has investigated the impact of television on the incumbent advantage, with diverging results. Erikson (1995) argued that "the entrenching of incumbency seems to have coincided with the rise of television (…)", and in general, incumbents receive more media coverage than their opponents do. Recent studies are reluctant to single out TV as the key cause of incumbent advantage, but argue that campaigns have an effect on the incumbency advantage (Ansolabehere, Snowberg, and Snyder (2005). In relation to social media, incumbency advantage has been debated, and several studies have pointed to the opposite effect; that the challenger benefits from new campaign tool, as they change the rules of the game (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Druckman et al., 2007; Larsson and Kalsnes 2014). However, none of these studies have analysed the US presidential elections.

This study is primarily based on an analysis of empirical data, but as a supplement, we will draw on insights from existing research. One crucial insight is that the 2012 Obama campaign benefitted from experiences and resources from past campaigning. First, according to a comparative study of the two candidates' Twitter use during the 2012 US Presidential election cycle, the Obama campaign was significantly more efficient and professionalized than the Romney campaign (Bruns and Highfield, 2013). Second, several studies have pinpointed that the staffers in the Obama campaign had more a autonomy in relation to the political leadership, compared to Romney's staffers, and were thus able to respond more quickly, and even in real time, to unfolding commentary, to more efficiently micro-target voters, and to adjust campaign strategies according to recent developments (Jamieson 2013; Kreiss 2014).

A third relevant finding in previous research is that the Obama campaign benefitted from the cumulated numbers of fans and followers from one campaign – and political term, to the next campaign. While Romney's account had 1.8 million followers, Obama's had 22 million followers on 6 November 2012 (Bimber 2014:138). An explanation for this remarkable difference is that Obama's supporters were considerably more likely, according to demographic measures such as age, lifestyle, and ethnicity, than Romney's supporters, to be using Twitter regularly.

Method

This study is based on a pilot study where we compared data collected manually and automatically over a limited period (one week). During the same period, about 30 % more relevant tweets were collected with the manual method than the automatic API-based methods. For this chapter, we rely on the manually collected tweets from the above-mentioned twitter accounts, BarackObama and MittRomney.

There are advantages and limitations of both the manual and the automatic collection methods. A limitation with the most common APIs for collecting tweets automatically is that they are unable to collect the total universe, and the studies using this method are thus designed to capture a comprehensive (if not representative) sample of tweets which relate to the event under investigation (Bruns 2012). Because of the massive amount of tweets posted during the US presidential election campaign in 2012, the automatic collection of data would most likely not provide a sufficient sample. As the

manual collection turned out to capture a more refined sample, we chose this method for this particular analysis.

Consequently, we collected tweets manually, in spite of its limitations. First, the risk of missing individual tweets from the dataset because of occasionally selective display of tweets, and that the collector is inattentive. Yet, in this study, the manual collection of tweets was reliable according to the inter-coder reliability test (89 per cent correspondence). Second, manual collection of tweets is time-consuming; the researcher monitored the Twitter accounts in real time, minimum twice every day, and systematically archived the material.

Findings

Identical dramaturgy, but different volume

In total, the research period encompasses the entire campaign cycle, from 1 January to election day on 6 November 2012; divided into four research periods: (1) the primaries (1 – 31 January (2) the convention (1 – 15 May) (3) the summertime (15 June – 15 July), and (4) the get-out-the-vote phase (1 September – 6 November). Although the four periods are not symmetrical, they are valid because the collected data are weighted to be statistically comparative. During this election cycle, the two campaigns followed an identical dramaturgy, but as seen in figure 1, the number of tweets posted on @Obama (3095) was significantly higher than that posted on @Romney (325) throughout the election cycle. The average difference was 1:9, with a peek in the last month before the election:
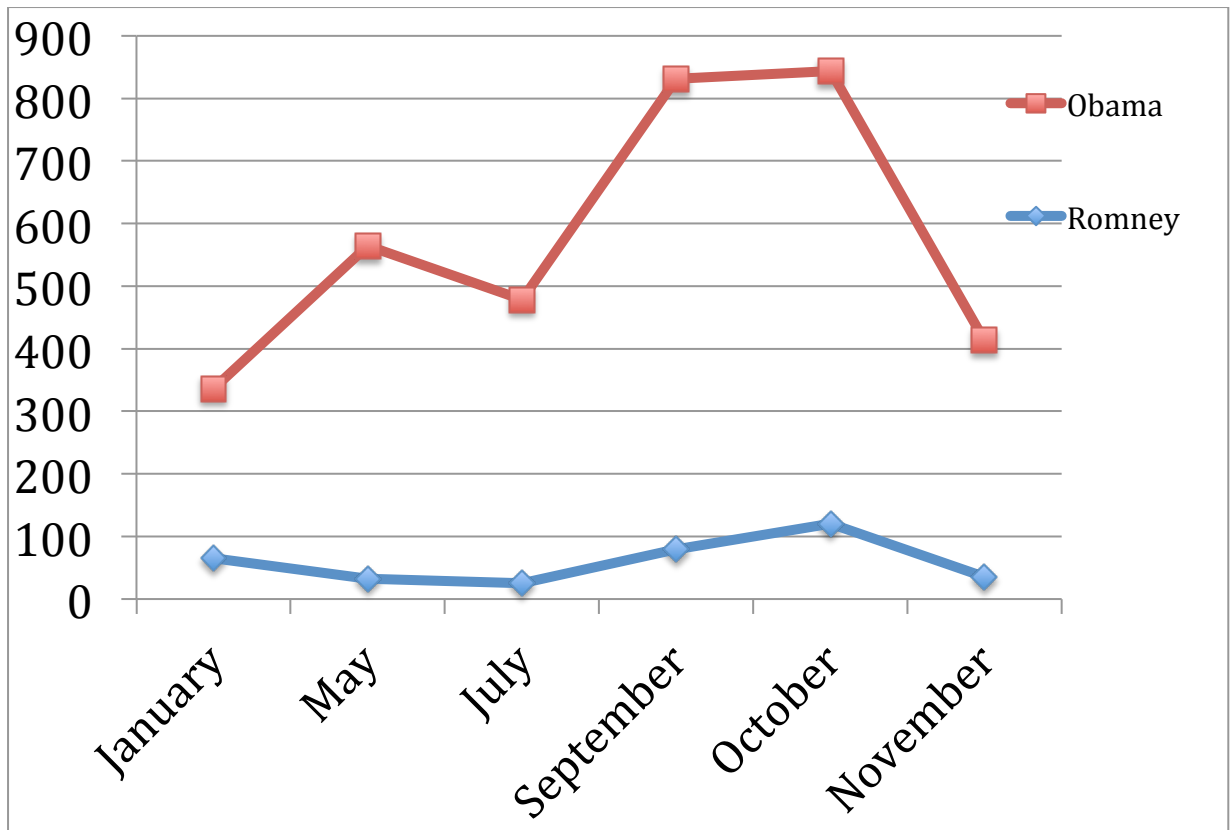
Figure 1: Tweets posted on the accounts @Obama and @Romney in the 2012 election campaign. Absolute figures.

After Obama's victory in the 2008 election, the Republicans claimed to have heightened their awareness around the importance of social media (Bimber 2014). Still, the amount of tweets indeed was higher in the Democrat Obama's account than in the account of Republican Romney. This does not contest the Republicans claim, as the Romney campaign posted more tweets on the *team account* than *candidate account*. However, they presumably failed to optimize the number of users reached, as the team accounts for both candidates had considerably fewer followers than the candidate accounts. Moreover, the Obama campaign generated more synergy effects between the related accounts, such as @Obama2012, @Obama For America, @Truth Team, @Michelle Obama, and @Joe Biden by extensive retweeting and use of mentions, compared to the Mitt Romney campaign (Bruns and Highfield 2013).

The fact that updating the candidate's social media accounts was outsourced, in line with a range of other campaign activities, was made explicit when tweets posted on @BarackObama refers to Obama in third person, as 'him' or 'Obama'. In contrast, the Mitt Romney account refers to the candidate in first person, as for instance in this tweet: "@BarackObama wants to raise taxes on the middle class. I want to bring tax rates down to put people back to work" (10.10.12). In general, the tweets posted on Mitt Romney's account were written in a more personal and intimate tone than tweets posted on Barack Obama's account, characterized by a more distant and public voice, as for example: "President Obama is fighting to double U.S. exports" (12.09.12). The different rhetoric and linguistic style is clearly related to Obama's role as the incumbent, which enables him to tweet with more authority and status than his opponent.

The status as the incumbent president also increased the appeal of the, very few and thus exclusive, tweets posted on Obama's account that were actually authored by the president himself. The signature 'bo' identifies the exclusive tweets, and as explained in the account profile, these tweets are signed to prove that Barack Obama and not staff members wrote them. In our study, we found that 'bo- tweets' only make up about 1 per cent of the total tweets posted on the Obama account. Yet, this exclusiveness and the paradox that the US president is expressing himself in a mundane format, brings a certain appeal – or aura - to the tweets. As a result, both the formal and distanced staffer-tweets, and the folksy and personal 'bo' tweets potentially had a unique appeal because they were posted on the account of the incumbent president.

Common internal linking practises, but various inter-media linking

The candidate accounts @BarackObama and @MittRomney included a significant share of links. On the total number of tweets, 63 per cent of tweets posted on the @BarackObama and 66 per cent of tweets posted on the @MittRomney account contained links. A common feature of the linking practises was that they promoted the candidates rather than engaging in the public debate, for example by linking to news stories or public information. Rather, the linking practises were introvert, pointing the users primarily to the teams' own campaign websites, where they were encouraged to sign up to vote, volunteer, or donate money. The aim might have been to turn user engagement into action, in support of the candidate. The challenger's account almost exclusively linked to the campaign website (91 per cent of links), while the incumbent account, more moderately linked to the campaign website (54 per cent of links), and thus had a more mixed linking practise:
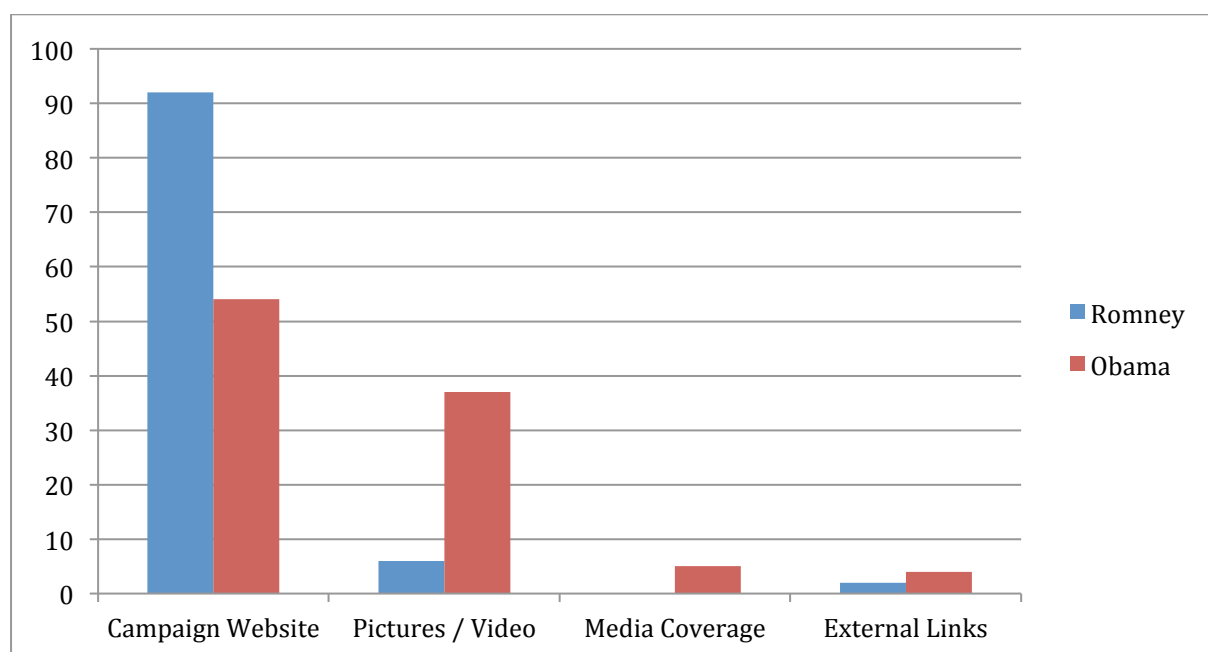
Figure 2: Links in tweets posted on @MittRomney and @BarackObama January–November 2012. Per cent.

The second largest category for both accounts was the links to pictures and videos, which more specifically included the campaigns' social media channels; for instance Twitpic, YouTube or Instagram. This category demonstrated a significant difference between the incumbent and the challenger account, as @BarackObama directed the users to the campaign's other social media content more than five times as often as @MittRomney. This shows that the Obama campaign was more focused on multi-directional and network effects of social media than of the more one-sided focus in the campaign website.

The linking practise coded as 'media coverage', which includes links to mainstream media' coverage of the campaign and the candidate, was used only to a limited degree and only by the incumbent candidate. Among the links on @BarackObama, four per cent directed the users to for example online news and TV shows, typically, when the candidate appeared on live shows on CNN or MSNBC. The finding that no equivalent links were posted on @MittRomney in the studied period, might indicate that the president were given more opportunities to promote his candidacy than the opponent, or that the social media staffers in the Romney campaign did not recognize the potential in intermedia agenda setting.

Lack of dialogue, but incumbent-centred

The main features for dialogue in Twitter are mentions (@), requests for reply, and to some degree hashtags (#). Related to the distinction between political communication and political marketing, we could categorize one-way-communication of campaign

tweets as a marketing tool, and the dialogic use of twitter as a communication tool. Yet, there would always be overlaps between the two, and to initiate dialogue might be a marketing strategy to build symbolical alliances with the users more than an aim to initiate a deliberative political debate.

Neither of the candidates' accounts gave much priority to initiating dialogue, whether for marketing or deliberative purposes. As we see in figure 3, requests for replies were almost non-existing. To the degree that they were used, it was by the incumbent account; however, less than one per cent the tweets posted on @BarackObama asked for replies. All of these were posted in the first phases of the election cycle, indicating that an early motivation for dialogue, faded away as the campaign intensified.
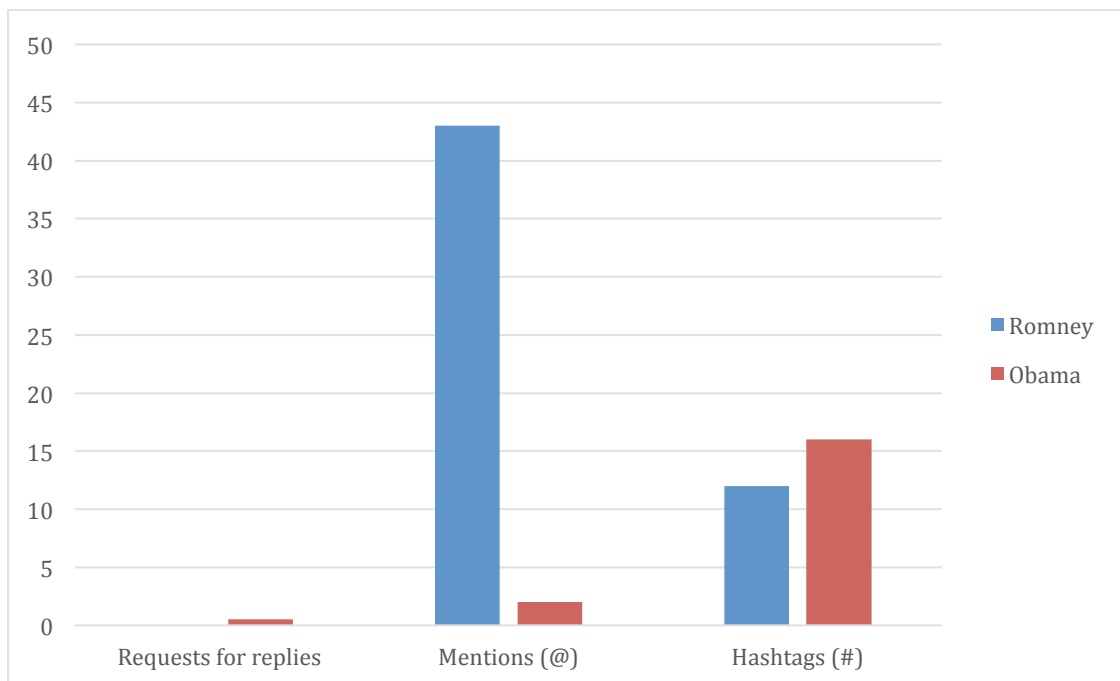

Figure 3: Use of common Twitter features by presidential candidate in election campaign 2012. Percent. N=3420

Typically, the Obama team requested replies by urging users to "share your story", that is to relate their private stories to issues currently on the public agenda. This way,

the replies indirectly served as adverts, because the shared stories featured by the campaign mainly commented on the president's accomplishments.

There are, as demonstrated in figure 3, large differences between incumbent's and the challenger's use of the feature '@-mentions', which implies the degree to which they mentioned other Twitter users. The @-mentions used by the @BarackObama account were limited to addressing the Twitter accounts ran by the campaign team, and were thus introvert and self-promoting. As for the challenger, the use of mentions was strikingly high in comparison; the candidate account of Mitt Romney used mentions in a little less than half the tweets posted in the period, and of these, the majority were mentions of @BarackObama. Accordingly, the incumbent candidate was the centre of attention, and the object for many of the tweets posted on the challenger's account, while the incumbent seemingly ignored the attacks from the opponent. That way the Obama team could focus on promoting their candidate, rather than being distracted by confrontations with the Romney team.

A Twitter feature which was fairly equally used by both presidential candidates was hashtags (#), which links tweets together in a thematically oriented thread. Still, only sixteen per cent of the Obama account's tweets included this feature, and none included multiple hashtags, which is a common practise among Twitter users. The majority of the hashtags posted in the incumbent's account was generic related to the election or to political issues, and #MarriageEquality was for example frequently used during the debates about gay marriages. Romney's account included fewer hashtags than Obama's account, but they were more polemic and often critical towards the incumbent candidate, as for example the hashtag #CantAfford4More.

In sum, the reluctant use of Twitter features indicates that both campaigns aimed for accessible tweets as they serve the purpose of political marketing better than complex tweets. The avoidance of dialogue also supported the clear-cut and unambiguous style preferred by marketing, and served the purpose of securing campaign staffers control of the account without time-consuming engagement.

Attacking the incumbent

The focus in each tweet selected for this study was analysed, and tweets were coded according to a predefined codebook. The results are visualized in figure 4 below, which shows that the main difference between the Obama account and the Romney account can be explained by their positions as incumbent and challenger.
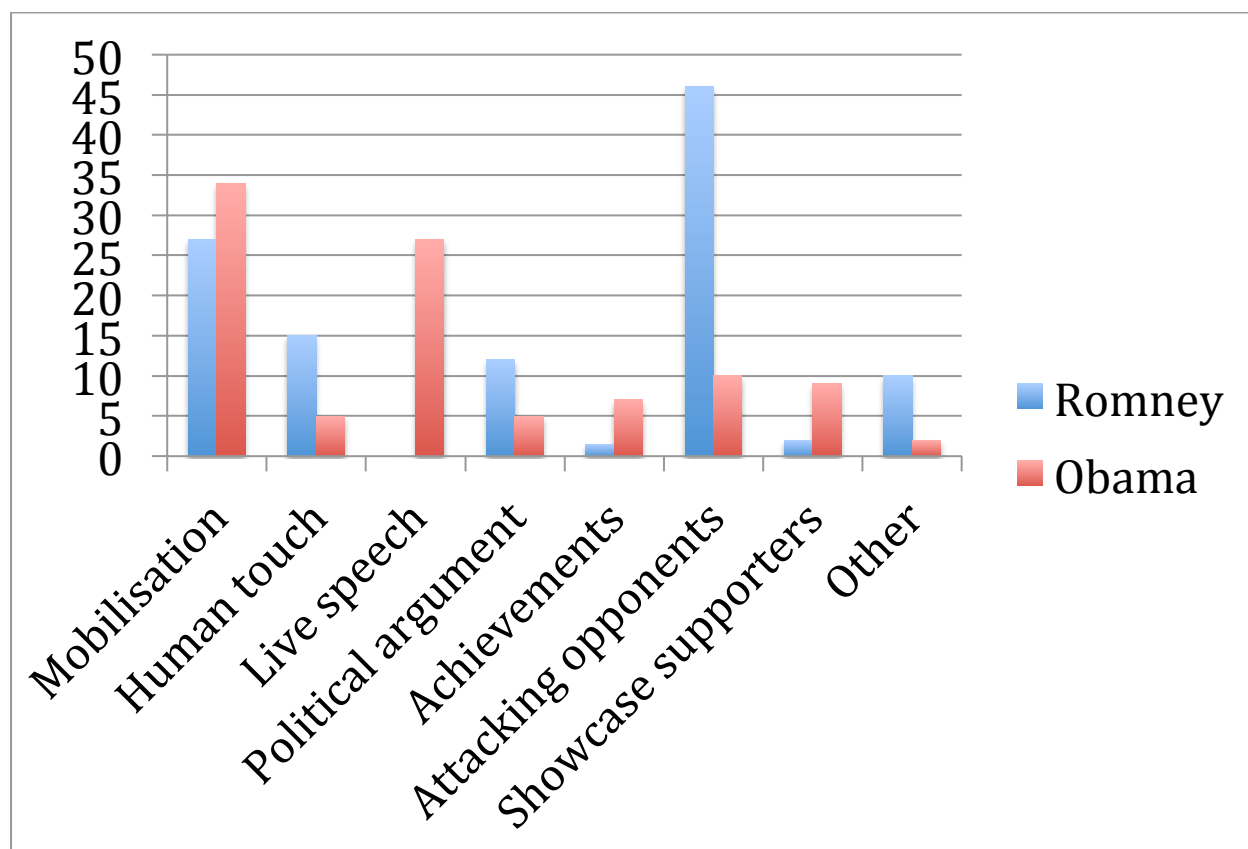

Figure 4: Tweets posted on @BarackObama and @MittRomney, by theme. Election campaign January-November 2012. Per cent. N=3420.

First, nearly half of tweets posted on the @MittRomney account were concerned with 'attacking opponents', meaning that tweets were attacking Obama's leadership. Examples of tweets in this category are "bringing America back on track" (05.11.2012), and "I have a clear and unequivocal message: With the right leadership, America is coming roaring back" (03.11.2012). In comparison, the tweets attacking opponents posted on the Obama account were primarily directed at Mitt Romney and made up ten per cent of the total amount. Nearly five times as many attacks directed at the incumbent were posted compared to attacks on the challenger.

Second, about one third of all tweets posted on the Obama account were categorised as 'mobilization', meaning that the tweets encourages actions in the line of donating, supporting, voting, or volunteering. The clearly most important objective of these tweets is encouragements to vote or to register to vote (39 per cent of tweets coded as 'mobilization'). Likewise, encouragements to volunteer for the campaign were frequent, and among these tweets, individual voter mobilization on the ground was emphasized. This included hosting election events in private houses, signing up to connect with other Obama supporters in your neighbourhood, or arranging low scale election events. Even though the Mitt Romney account also tweeted to mobilize votes, the focus were less oriented towards mobilizing grass root actors.

Donations from supporters are essential for US presidential candidates. Presidential campaigns have become progressively more expensive, and the 2012 campaigns were the, until then, most costly in history with a total spending estimated to $6 billion. In both the Obama campaign and the Romney campaign, more than $1 billion were

raised and spent. Twitter was actively used for generating donations by both campaigns, but their strategies were different; the @BarackObama account frequently encouraged the followers to donate specific and small amounts, such as this tweet: "If you pitched in $5 or $10, it helped. 97.77% of donations in August were $250 or less, for an average of $58.31" (10.09.12). Emphasizing that even small contributions count, the threshold for donating was lowered and supporters with average or low income could easily contribute. In contrast, the @MittRomney' account appealed to donators less frequently, and never referred to specific amounts, or argued that even small amounts mattered. This strategy is reflected in the donations to the 2012 presidential election campaigns; donations under $200 made up over two-thirds of the total donations to Obama and a quarter of the donations to Romney (Bimber 2014; Gerodimos and Justinussen 2014). Moreover, the divergent strategies demonstrated that Obama had a more adjusted strategy for the social media logics of donations, which is typically oriented at maximising the number of small-scale donations rather than to appeal to exclusive elites of big-spender donators.

A third finding in the thematic content analysis is that the Obama team used Twitter as platform for 'live tweeting' of the President's speeches. Just over a quarter of the tweets posted on Barack Obama's account in contrast to no tweets posted on Mitt Romney's account were coded as 'live speech'. The difference demonstrates that the incumbent candidate included official performances and political speeches in the twitter feed, and thus transferred status in a traditional arena to a new arena. Still, because one political speech is divided into a high number of tweets, users who were not particularly interested might regard the number of 'live speech' tweets as spam.

Lastly, the Mitt Romney account posted more tweets in the categories 'human touch' and 'political arguments' than the Barack Obama account. The first of these categories included tweets about the candidates' families and their colleagues, as well as promoting the candidates as 'ordinary people'. The second category included the tweets about the candidate's political platform and ambitions for the United States. The overrepresentation of tweets by the Romney team (12 per cent, more than the double of the Obama team) in this category might be explained by his role as an opponent who needed to come across as an alternative to the incumbent. Still, neither of the candidates' accounts were dominated by political arguments, and in general, the tweets rather promoted the campaign itself, while political issues were not particularly salient. Together with the above findings regarding the lack of dialogue, and focus on branding, this might indicate that Twitter has more in common with political adverts, than being an arena for political debate.

Conclusion: Social Media Incumbent Advantage

This chapter asked to what degree the incumbent candidates has advantages in social media election campaigns, by comparing the Twitter presence of incumbent Barack Obama and challenger Mitt Romney during the 2012 presidential election campaigns in the USA. The article draws on a quantitative content analysis of 3420 tweets posted on the candidate accounts @BarackObama and @MittRomney.

The comparative analysis pinpointed that although there were significant similarities between the two candidate accounts, there were also prominent differences. First, the most obvious difference was related to *the accounts' volume and potential impact*. The Obama account posted 9 times as many tweets as the Romney account, and

(potentially) reached over ten times as many followers with each tweet. The potential impact of a high volume of tweets and a high user reach on actual voting behaviour is very hard to measure, not least because it would depend on the user's political preference before they were exposed to the tweets. We know that young people are more active on twitter, and that Democrats and Independents are more active users than Republicans are, so it is likely that the tweets posted by the Obama campaign simply confirmed the preferences of the users exposed to the tweets rather than convincing new voters.

Second, the analysis documented that the use of social media has become a standard element in US presidential election campaigns from 2008 onwards, and that the political campaigns use social media for *marketing and branding purposes*. In turn, this implies that the interactive features are used primarily to promote the candidate and to spread the campaign messages. However, social media's potential for political debate and dialogue between users is not prioritized by the campaign, and the aspect of message control still seems to be a key aim for the campaigners.

A third key finding was a tendency of *social media incumbency advantage,* meaning that the sitting President had a number of advantages within the hierarchy of Twitter that served to Obama campaign's advantage. Even though the incumbency advantage resulting from social media is of a very different character the one related to the mass media such as TV, this analysis found that the sitting president had a set of advantages within the logic of social media. For example, while airing-time for TV commercials can be bought, the social media requires an additional type of "capital", namely user-engagement networked communication that requires a critical mass of

followers and a prominent place in the power hierarchy on Twitter. The incumbency advantage in social media to some degree contradicts the idea of social media as the underdog-friendly arena where David can beat Goliath. Rather, in the attention economy of social media, the incumbent will often have the upper hand.

References

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Eric C. Snowberg, and James M. Snyder (2006) "Television and the Incumbent Advantage in U.S. Elections" *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Volume 31, Issue 4: 469 – 490.

Bimber, Bruce 2014 "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment" in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 11:2, 130 – 135, Routledge, London

Bruns, Axel and Tim Highfield (2013). "May the Best Tweeter Win: The Twitter Strategies of Key Campaign Accounts in the 2012 US Election", in C. Bieber and K. Kamps (eds.) *The United States Presidential Election 2012: Perspectives from Election Studies, Political and Communication Sciences*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Chadwick, Andrew (2006) *Internet Politics. States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davies, R. (1999). *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Donaldson, Gary A. (2007) *The First Modern Campaign. Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* Laham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Druckman JN, Kifer MJ and Parkin M (2007) "The technological development of congressional candidate web sites" *Social Science Computer Review* 25(4): 425–442.

Erikson, Stephen C. (1995) "The Entrenching of Incumbency: Reelections in the U.S. House of Representatives 1790-1994. *The Cato Journal*. Vol 14 (Winter).

Gerodimos, R. and Justinussen, J. (2014) "Obama's 2012 Facebook Campaign: Political Communication in the Age of the Like Button", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*.

Hendricks, John Allen and Robert E. Denton, JR. (2010) *Communicator-in-Chief. How Barack Obama Used New Media to Win the White House* Laham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Kreiss, Daniel (2012): *Taking Our Country Back. The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean To Barack Obama* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Larsson, A. O, and Kalsnes, B. (2014) "'Of course we are on Facebook': Use and non-use of social media among Swedish and Norwegian politicians," *European Journal of Communication* 29(6), pp. 653-667.

Jackson NA and Lilleker DG (2009) "Building an architecture of participation? Political parties and Web 2.0 in Britain," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 6(3), pp. 232–250.

Jamieson, K.H. (2013) *Electing the President: 2012 Insiders' View,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Polsby, N.W. and Wildavsky, A.B. (2002) *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics,* Laham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefireld.

Maarek, P. (2011) *Campaign Communication and Political Marketing*, Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Scammel, M (1999) "Political Marketing: lessons for political science," *Political Studies*, 47(4), pp. 718-39.

Schiller, H. I. (1976) *Communication and cultural domination*. New York: International Arts and Sciences Press.

Stayner, J. (2013) *Intimate Politics. Publicity, Privacy, and the Personal Lives of Politicians in Media-Saturated Democracies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Stromer-Galley, Jennifer (2000) "On-line Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid it",
in *Journal of Communication,* Autumn 2000, pp. 11-132.

Stromer-Galley, Jennifer (2013) *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Street, J (2003): "The Celebrity politician: political style and popular culture", in J.
Corner and D. Pels (eds.) *Media and the Restyling of Politics*. London: Sage, pp. 85-
98.

Ormrod, R. P., Henneberg, S.C.M and O'Shaughnessy, N. (2013) *Political
Marketing. Theory and Concepts*, Los Angeles and London: Sage.

Pew Research Center (2012) *How the Presidential Candidates Use the Web and
Social Media*, Analysis August 15, 2012. Retrieved from
http://www.journalism.org/2012/08/15/how-presidential-candidates-use-web-and-
social-media/, May 26 2015.

Plasser, F. and Plasser, G. (2002) *Global Political Campaigning: A Worldwide
Analysis of Campaign Professionals and their Practises,* New York: Praeger.

Plouffe, D. (2009) *The Audacity to Win. How Obama Won and How We Can Beat the
Party of Limbaugh, Beck, and Palin.* New York: Penguin Books

Trippi, J. (2004) *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, the Internet, and
the Overthrow of Everything*. New York: Regan Books.

Van Zoonen, L. (2005) *Entertaining the Citizen. When Political and Popular Culture Converge*. Laham and New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Winston, B. and Walton, P (1996) "Netscape. Virtually free", *Index of Censorship*, 25(1), January/February.