Symposium: The Internet and Campaign 2016
Jody Baumgartner, East Carolina University, Guest Editor

The Internet and campaign 2016 / Jody C Baumgartner

Resisting the opportunity for change: How Congressional campaign insiders viewed and used the web in 2016 / James N. Druckman, Martin J. Kifer, & Michael Parkin.

Abstract: This paper explores congressional campaigning on the web in 2016. What impact did the unique nature of the 2016 election have on those involved with the creation and maintenance of congressional campaign websites? Did it cause them to alter their approach to online campaigning? Using data from a survey of campaign insiders, we find that the factors that influence how congressional campaigns view and use their websites were largely impervious to the unique electoral environment. Results show that, consistent with previous election years, campaigns maintained a fairly uniform view of likely visitors and target audiences, and they tended to see their campaign websites as digital hubs, best used for capturing the campaign's overall message. We also find that, as in other years, non-incumbents continued to use their websites to campaign more aggressively than incumbents. Overall, the results suggest that congressional campaigning on the web is primarily driven by stable factors that transcend technological advancements and shifts in the political environment.

Digital advertising expenditures in the 2016 presidential election / Christine B. Williams & Girish J. Jeff Gulati.

Abstract: Using 2012 and 2016 Candidate Disbursements and Independent Expenditures filing data collected by the Federal Election Commission, this study compares how much money both the presidential campaigns and outside groups spent on digital relative to traditional media. Digital campaign expenditures have increased their share of total media outlays markedly over recent election cycles, and in the 2016 presidential election both the candidate and independent expenditures were higher than in 2012, particularly on the Republican side. This paper investigates reasons for these trends and establishes a baseline for future research on the heretofore understudied topic of digital political advertising.

College students and online political expression during the 2016 election / Kenneth W. Moffett & Laurie L. Rice.

Abstract: While college students traditionally exhibit low levels of political participation and interest in politics, they are more likely to engage in some forms of political expression than their elders. Their greater familiarity with online forms of political expression and engagement potentially lowers their barriers for political involvement. In turn, this potentially draws more young adults into the political process. We compare the precursors of expressive forms of online political engagement to those of talking to someone offline and trying to persuade them to vote for or against a candidate or party

among college students. We find that both activities are positively connected with politically-oriented activity on social media, as well as the frequency with which one reads blogs. We also discover that the mechanisms that explain online political expression are both similar to and different from those that explain offline attempts at persuasion in several key ways.

Free media and Twitter in the 2016 presidential election: The unconventional campaign of Donald Trump / Peter L. Francia.

Abstract: This paper examines the surprising outcome of the 2016 presidential election, which saw Donald Trump defy nearly all of the conventional wisdom to become the 45th president of the United States. Political commentators and experts offered several immediate post-election explanations for Trump's victory, one of which focused on how Trump was able to generate considerable unpaid or free media for himself, often directly through Twitter. This article explains the theory and rationale underlying the free media thesis (FMT) and then examines whether there is any preliminary empirical support for it. Using media tracking data and public opinion surveys, the results reveal that Trump indeed dominated the unpaid media market. Although the findings in this paper cannot make causal claims about whether Trump's advantages in free media are the primary reason for his upset victory, the results, nonetheless, suggest that some of the basic conditions necessary for the FMT were present in the 2016 election, and that the FMT offers a plausible avenue for further analysis and future research.

Twitter versus the traditional media: A survey experiment comparing public perceptions of campaign messages in the 2016 U. S. presidential election / David S. Morris.

Abstract: In the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign both the traditional media and social media platforms, like Twitter, were critical in attempts to influence voters. Prior to the 2016 presidential election the assumption was that campaign messages sent through the traditional media are perceived as more effectual by the public than those sent via Twitter. But after the election of Donald Trump there is now a sense that things may have changed. In this new era of American politics and campaign discourse do campaign messages sent via Twitter resonate equally with messages sent through the traditional media? This study attempts to address this question by utilizing a survey experiment to test whether campaign messages sent using USA Today headlines were perceived as more believable and persuasive by potential voters than messages sent via Twitter. The results suggest that campaign messages about candidates sent via Twitter-regardless of the candidate of focus-resonate just as strongly with potential voters as those sent via the traditional media. This provides a potential partial explanation for the shocking rise of Donald Trump's political fortunes.

Reassessing Twitter's agenda-building power: An analysis of intermedia agenda-setting effects during the 2016 presidential primary season / Bethany Anne Conway-Silva, Christine R. Filer, Kate Kenski, & Eric Tsetsi.

Abstract: This study examined the relationship between elite news media agendas and campaign agendas during the 2016 presidential primary season. Computer-assisted content analysis was used to assess issue emphasis within Twitter feeds of U.S. presidential primary candidates and their campaigns, as well as the nation's top

newspapers. The relationship between the overall Twitter agenda and that of newspapers, as well as the influence of frontrunners Clinton, Cruz, Sanders, and Trump, was investigated using time series analysis. Aggregate and candidate-specific findings reveal some reciprocal relationships, but overall greater influence of newspapers on the Twitter agenda was detected. Findings suggest that Twitter has the potential to break free from and influence traditional media gatekeeping.

Picture perfect?: The role of Instagram in issue agenda setting during the 2016 presidential primary campaign / Terri L. Towner & Caroline Lego Muñoz.

Abstract: Instagram emerged as a pivotal campaign tool in the 2016 presidential campaign. This study examines the agenda-setting effects between the presidential primary candidates' Instagram posts and articles published in the mainstream newspapers during the primary period. A reciprocal relationship between Democratic and Republican candidates' Instagram posts and newspaper articles is expected. A content analysis of issues recorded daily issue frequencies in each medium which were then examined using a time series analysis. Results offer evidence of a relationship between Democratic and Republican candidates' Instagram posts and newspapers on some of the top issues in the primary campaign. However, the findings also reveal that candidate Instagram posts independently predicted newspapers' issue agendas on certain issues with no reverse effects.

"Delete your account": The 2016 presidential race on Twitter / Heather K. Evans, Kayla Brown & Tiffany Wimberly

Abstract: While there has been a growth in the number of published studies about how candidates for the U.S. House and Senate use Twitter, candidates for president have been largely ignored. In this manuscript, we examine the way the two 2016 presidential candidates communicated on Twitter. Using a content analysis of all tweets sent from Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's accounts from July 1st to Election Day, we explore whether the two candidates used this social network in the same ways, stressed similar policy issues, and were equally likely to "go negative" online.