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The Consequences of Digitally Driven Changes in Political Campaigning for Democratic Societies: A Case Study of the 2020 US Presidential Election

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Abstract
The effect from COVID-19 pandemic has changed how presidential candidates do their political campaigns. The restriction to do social distancing makes the usual campaign not doable. That's why presidential candidates need to find another way for their political campaign, which is by doing things digitally. This digitally driven changes can have its advantages and disadvantages. In this paper we discuss about the consequences of the changes in political campaigns in digital form or through social media for democratic societies in US presidential election. We use qualitative descriptive with case study method. In this paper we use secondary data such as research journals that's related to this topic, documentation and articles. We find that the changes to digital campaigning have its own pros and cons that can affect how politicians do their campaigns on their social media platforms.

Keywords: Political Campaign, US Presidential Election, COVID-19, Social Media

1. Introduction

Political campaigns are among the most expensive and sophisticated marketing efforts in United States (Petrova et al., 2020). Democratic candidates and groups have spent $6.9 billion, compared to $3.8 billion for Republicans in the 2020 electoral cycle (OpenSecrets.org, 2020). To inform and persuade voters, candidates rely on campaign strategies, advertising, and speeches along the campaign trail. But in 2020 there is COVID-19 pandemic which disturbs every activity in many aspects, including in politics.

According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) between 21 January and 31 October 2020, the United States reported 9,105,230 cases and 229,932 deaths. Unlike many western and central European countries, in US the COVID-19 curve has spiked during the summer months. The increased cases of

COVID-19 meant that electoral administrators and their political stakeholders had to plan accordingly in pandemic conditions. This affects how politicians do their political campaigning and make them change their usual campaign strategies. Since social distancing was implemented, politicians need to turn their focus and efforts into their social media. In this paper, we discuss about the consequences of the digitally driven changes in the US 2020 political campaign for democratic societies based on literature that's related to this topic.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literature approach. Literature research has the following characteristics: the researcher is dealing directly with text in the form of documents or numerical data, the data is "ready to use" because the sources are already available from the documents used and the data used is secondary data.

The data used in this research is secondary data from research journals, documentation, articles and written archives that are relevant to the research material. The research data obtained will then be processed in steps: data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. COVID-19 and the United States 2020 Presidential Election

The year 2020 has been defined by the COVID pandemic that has swept across the world, infecting more than 26 million and killing more than 860,000 (as of the start of September) .In addition to affecting social and economic life, COVID has also affected political life in many countries New Zealand's national election due to take place 19 September has been rescheduled for 17 October (BBC, 2020); a constitutional referenda in Chile that was a key demand of protests in late 2019 was delayed from 26 April to 25 October (McGowan, 2020) and, in the midst of a rapid and ongoing encroachment on democracy, elections for the Hong Kong city legislature were postponed for a year until 5 September 2021 (Cheshire, 2020). It was clear from the early days of the pandemic's spread into the United States that the November election could be affected.
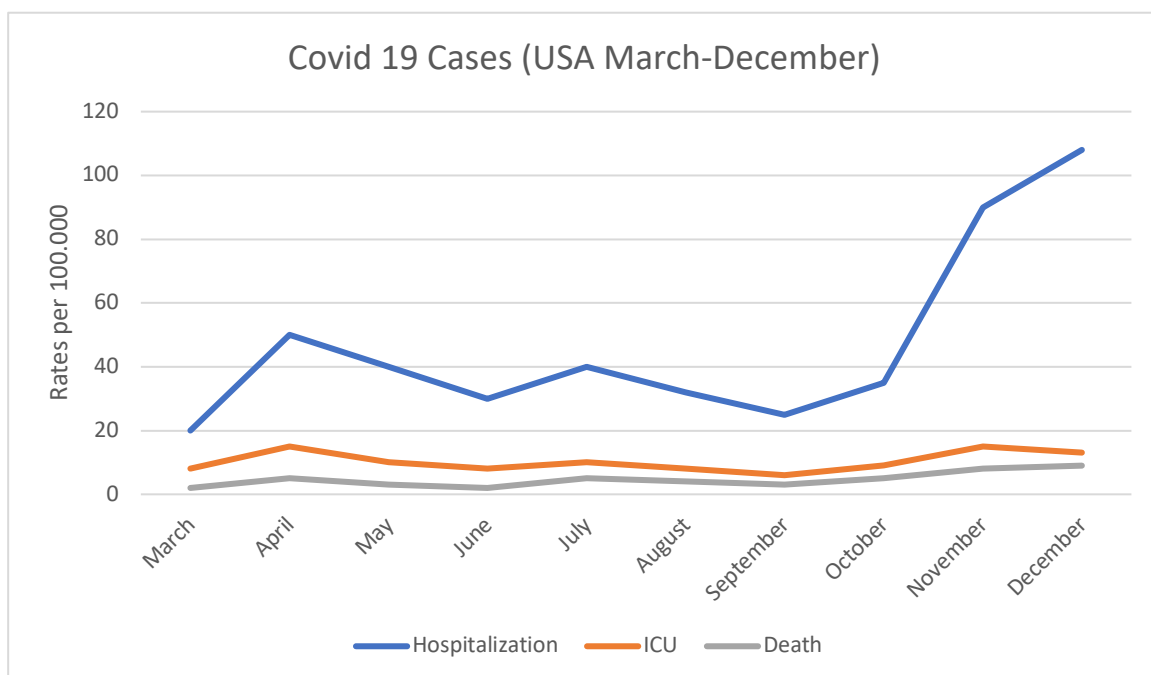

Figure 1: USA Covid 19 Graph

On 3 November, US citizens will vote for their president, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives, 35 of 100 seats in the Senate, 11 state and 2 territorial governorships, and numerous other state and local elections and ballots. there was no serious discussion of rescheduling the presidential election in USA, even though President Trump did suggest on Twitter in July 2020 to considering the election date, on the other hand, moving a presidential election date would require action by the US Congress, and the Republican leader of the Senate was quick to dismiss the suggestion as unacceptable.

Even if in case the decision date were to have been moved, there's no instrument for changing the expiry of the presidential term as set out within the Constitution, so a race would still have to be held and settled by that due date (20 January 2021). Within the conclusion, electoral administrators proceeded their arrangements for the November race, with wide political back, indeed as the virus spread across the nation.

The US campaign was customarily considered to begin after Labour Day, the open occasion that marks the conclusion of the US summer excursion (in 2020, this fell on 2 September). Whereas numerous states "loose" their COVID-related limitations over the summer months, by September the rate of contamination was rising within the USA. This driven to a diminish in traditional face-to-face campaigning, such as door-knocking, open occasions and expansive energizes.

In any case, as September and October unfurled, the two fundamental campaigns diverged considerably in their approach. That of Mr. Trump returned to the holding of expansive, public rallies that had been a highlight of his fruitful 2016 campaign. Instead of indoor arenas, however, the 2020 Trump campaign generally made utilize of exterior settings, and regularly airfields where Mr. Trump would fly in on Discuss Constrain One, hold the rally and withdraw. Reports demonstrate that Mr. Trump was decided to send such energizes in 2020, indeed at brief take note and with little planning. The revives reflected Mr. Trump's own irresolute relationship with COVID safeguards, insofar because it was common to see large crowds without veils and not watching social separating. A later consider of 18 such revives held by Mr. Trump between June and September 2020 estimated that they 'ultimately resulted' in more than 30,000 incremental affirmed COVID-19 cases and 'likely driven to' more than 700 passings (Bernheim et al., 2020).

Mr. Biden's campaign was slower to return to the street but in October started holding 'drive-in' energizes where supporters remained in their cars at a stopping region or sports ground to hear from Mr. Biden and his campaigners. The far-off nature of the swarms at such rallies contrasted ineffectively with tv pictures of enlivened swarms at Trump revives, but this may have been a ponder campaign message of security and restraint (Sullivan, 2020).

Both campaigns proceeded the utilize of online campaign instruments that have been a highlight of recent US races. The utilize of video-conferencing computer programs that got to be common amid the pandemic lockdowns has too entered the appointive circle, with the Biden campaign utilizing the Democrats' associations with the amusement industry to mobilize and propel voters (Chaney, 2020), additionally blending ancient and modern apparatuses to deliver campaigning a individual touch (Hensley-Clancy, 2020).

Promoting, a conventional pillar of cutting-edge US campaigning, delighted in higher screen audiences than regular due to the widespread. More individuals are at domestic observing television, listening to radio and podcasts, surfing the internet—and subsequently accepting campaign advertisements. One appraises is that political promoting investing amid the complete 2020 campaign cycle would approach USD 7 billion, an anticipated increment of 63 percent over the comparable presidential race cycle in 2015-2016 (Mandase, 2020). Advanced campaign advertising has too seen enormous development in 2020, with a USD 1 billion spend included in the predictions for promoting spend generally.

3.2. Social Media and Politics

COVID-19 pandemic push people to normalize social distancing which further increases the usage of internet

and social media to prevent physical contacts and the spread of the disease. The internet has advanced since its beginnings to give public a new digital platform to express themselves. The appearance of social media has revolutionized further the capability to connect many individuals, allowing constant interaction and discussions to bring their voices to the public. It is commonly expected that social media play a key role in spreading information and the claims of political groups (Chadwick, 2013). It is an important channel of communication through which political communities or any individual can provide information about their activities, share their opinions on specific topics, share information coming from multiple different sources, and sharing about issues they encounter.

In January 2007, John Edwards announces his candidacy via a video broadcast on YouTube. This was the first ever presidential candidate to announce their candidacy with social media. The American presidential campaigns in 2008 were the first campaigns where the presidential candidates Obama and McCain used social media (Calderaro, 2018). The use of Social Media has most conspicuously made its mark during more recent American presidential campaigns (Kreiss, 2016). Diffusing information on politics and politicians has become easier with the help of internet and social media.

Empirical research led by the Pew Research Center confirms that people consuming online news are more likely to have better knowledge on political issues than someone who only uses traditional media (Pew Research Center, 2008). Social media usage also stimulates political conversation and debates between individuals (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). With social media, people have more platforms to create open spaces for political debate in flexible and fast communication. According to Thomas the use of internet increases political knowledge more than format-like newspapers because news from the internet is more accessible to people (Thomas, 2003). Political knowledge is more likely to generate political discussion thanks to the possibilities of interactivity offered by social media (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). Furthermore, compared to traditional media, social media facilitates reception of information from a wider range of points of view.

Until as of late, traditional media was the primary information platform for politicians, so having coverage in newspapers and TV outlets has been crucial for electoral success (Petrova et al., 2020). Candidates further disseminate information about their candidacy and policy goals through speeches they give along the campaign trail and through public appearances. A reported 80% of heads of state around the world use Twitter to communicate with their constituencies (Dugan, 2014). Compared to campaign messages, the content of this communication is more personal and includes information about politicians' lives and activities outside of politics. While politicians who are well-known and hold high-level positions typically reach out to several million followers on Twitter, lesser-known politicians communicate with several hundred to several thousand individuals.

Social media allow public to spread information, receive information, helping them to form a voting preference, inspire others to join some campaign or participate in demonstrations, create more debate on politics, form affinity groups, and run grass-roots campaigns (Calderaro, 2018). Internet offers more opportunities than traditional media to circulate information among voters, creating new channels for self-publicity (Ward & Vedel, 2006). The strategy with digital communication is to support direct communication between political party leaderships and the public (Zittel, 2009). With social media as a platform for political campaigns, it offers more than just a campaign because it can serve as a 'permanent campaign' during periods of post-election governance since it's on the internet.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of technology right now, social media has become more crucial. New technologies have fragmented the media offerings, with the consequence of diversification of the audience and information consumption. Social media can give people more personal information that's tailor made for their personal needs depending on their personal background. This digital media landscape has forced politicians to diversify their communication strategies accordingly. Social media have pushed this tendency further, finally changing the older centralized campaign strategies typical with traditional media into a new more customized campaign able to fit the multiple new digital channels of communication (Gibson, 2015). At the

same time, social media also allows candidates to constantly spread information about their activities, establishing a direct contact with voters, conditions that facilitate candidates to engage supporters in their campaigns.

The concept of democracy is not only about the effective organization of executive and legislation power (Bart, 2021). Another important aspect of democracy is the mass public participation in the formal political process (Luyt, 2003). Social media open more political discussion and even allowing people in restrictive media environments to speak their minds that would otherwise not have been possible (Goldstein & Rotich, 2008).

3.3. The Pros and Cons of Social Media Usage in Political Campaign

Over the past century, the means by which politicians communicate with the people of this country have changed greatly. Initially, politicians would physically meet with people and give speeches in front of large crowds of people. However, as new communication mediums took hold, politicians gained more power in terms of how they could reach people. With the emerging of COVID-19, physical engagement is strictly limited to all interactions. The candidate of the US presidency needs a means to interact and "promote" themselves to attract voters from a lot of people. As for this case, social media campaigning will take a very important role. The advent of social media in the USA political arena has drastically impacted the politicians and voters alike.

One aspect that makes social media such a powerful communication tool is the feedback aspect. Unlike the days of old, anyone can participate in dialogue and let their voice be heard. One popular method for engaging with users is the live video feature. Live video is unique in the sense that it allows users to interact with the person streaming the live video in real time. Social media allows politicians to reach voters in an intimate way.

The internet has sped up the circulation of information while at the same time produces an enormous amount of information, and social media helps to rapidly disseminate and turn information into a cacophony. Professional journalists are forced to adapt to this scenario by collecting information at the same speed. As the main sources of information nowadays, social media still has the risk of circulating fake information that can be hard to verify. Furthermore, any mistake in the information narrative is quickly amplified by the interconnected structure of the internet. In this quick process, professional journalists cannot spend sufficient time to make the information accurate (Currah, 2009). Davis gives as an example an event that took place during the 2008 American presidential campaign. A photo of the presidential candidate at that time, Barack Obama, wearing a traditional Kenyan dress, circulated over the internet. Some people considered that photo alone as the proof that Obama was Muslim, which is not the truth. Journalists reporting the news did not mention the Blog which first published the picture. This has much to do with the fact that online sources have become a competitor of sorts in the news-making process, but also a source of groundless news (Davis, 2009).

On the voter's side, there will be more information distributed to each individual. According to the Pew Research Centre approximately 66% of American adults are getting a portion of their news from social media (Shearer, 2021). Prior to the rise of social media, the only people who would get the news were the people who took the initiative to seek news sources. However, in the age of social media, the news is right in front of you. Whether it's a friend sharing news, or seeing what's in the "trending" sidebar on Facebook, people who are on social media sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, cannot avoid seeing the news. Staying informed an updated is important for voters who are deciding who to vote for.

In the past few weeks leading up to Election Day, there has been a unique rise in cases of video manipulation where video clips are edited to make candidates appear to be making mis-steps that they didn't commit, slurring words or appearing less competent, and some deep fakes, a technique using artificial intelligence to fabricate images and videos most often used for malicious purposes, where videos are computer generated to show false footage. The "inhumane" nature of artificial intelligence feature also polluting the campaign, the idea of bots affecting the outcome of elections has recently become a mainstream topic (Ferrara et al., 2020). Bots are fake profiles on social media platforms that sew divide between people and political parties. Bots are being used to spread dissension and news from untrustworthy sources. Facebook and Twitter are the two largest platforms under scrutiny. In the recent elections, the candidates could allegedly influence the election by using bots on

popular social media platforms, with Facebook being at the forefront. Twitter, a platform used mainly for news and discussion is estimated to have up to 48 million bots operating on the platform according to University of Southern California and Indiana University. Although the problem of bots is a complicated one, we do believe that social media sites can do more to prevent the problem from growing. Bots, are already dangerous, and will undoubtedly become a greater danger in the future.

The intent of social media is to connect people with other people who they like and agree with. Most of the reaction buttons on social media are centered around agreement, whether it is a heart icon on Twitter, or a thumbs up icon on Facebook. Users will mainly see content and people who they agree with when they scroll down their news feed. This makes it unlikely that voters will ever have to sincerely defend their political stance unless they actively seek people and media outlets with opposing political views. Echo chambers create a cult-like following, meaning that politicians will need to exert less effort to reel in certain segments of the voter base. On top of that voters will care less about the policies their candidate wants to institute and more about which side of the political spectrum the candidate is on. Social media exacerbates the problem of echo chambers, with everyone feeling the need to be on one side or the other.

Social media has given more power to politicians in terms of how they distribute information, and how they gain support. Ultimately, it is not an exaggeration to say that social media is a powerful communication medium in history that ever existed, and it will continue to influence and change the way campaigns are run and won.

4. Conclusion

In the middle of COVID-19 pandemic, every aspect of life is affected, be it socials, economics or politics. During 2020 US presidential election even with pandemics still going on, the election is still held. This situation forced the candidates to switch their political campaign strategy from the usual campaign into digitally driven campaign. With the use of social media for political campaign, it will create a wider discussion from different individuals with different background and different political preferences. It also helps the candidates to communicate in more personal way to their supporters. Social media has also given opportunities for politicians to gain more supports and various ways to do their political campaign, which will be a 'permanent campaign' as long as internet exists. But social media has its downside, which is the fast-circulating information that can't get verified quickly if it's a fake news or not. Moreover, the usage of bots on social media is making the spreading of untrustworthy news more common. Even with some cons that are already discussed in this paper, we still believe that social media is a powerful communication medium that will continue to influence and change the way campaigns are run and won.

Acknowledgment

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