Did Social Media Predict the 2012 Presidential Election Results?

The 2012 presidential election results are in, and it is evident that social media played a larger role than ever in the outcome. Ryan Adams, CEO of PME 360, explores whether social media analytics such as Facebook and Twitter are reliable resources for predicting election results.

Portland, Maine (PRWEB) November 09, 2012 -- The 2012 presidential election results are in, and it is evident that social media played a larger role than ever in the outcome. President Obama dominated the social media battle, and ended up winning the presidency. Despite pollsters claiming a ‘tight’ race in the final days before the election, social media statistics told another story. This divergence raises an important question; Can social media predict election results?

Social media allows people to ‘connect’ with a candidate in a tangible way by providing an open channel of communication. This is a valuable tool for a campaign, as it gives people who are interested in a candidate a way to become engaged and contribute, which is a reality that internet marketers have known for some time.

Predicting Presidential Election Results

In fact, many experts in the internet marketing industry are already aware that social media may have predictive abilities when it comes to presidential election results. Ryan Adams, CEO of PME 360 explains that, “While further studies are needed, it appears that social media analytics may be an underutilized resource for predicting presidential election results. It can be argued that social media engagement signifies an informal vote for a candidate.”

For example, StateTech magazine highlights five recent races where winners had more Twitter followers than their opponents. The recent gubernatorial races for Louisiana, California, Ohio and Texas, and the Chicago mayoral race all seem to display to power that sites like Twitter have in the election process.

Additionally, a 2011 study uses a recent Irish General Election as a case study to investigate the potential to measure political sentiment through mining of social media. The authors found that “…social analytics using both volume-based measures and sentiment analysis are predictive,” and they conclude that, “Twitter does appear to display a predictive quality which is marginally augmented by the inclusion of sentiment analysis.” The authors note also that the sheer volume of tweets about a candidate may indicate both their popularity in a group of people, and voting intention.

This backs up the argument that candidates who win the social media volume battle will win the election, and the social media volume battle was overwhelmingly won by Obama.

Analysis by Wordstream and Hootsuite Election Tracker reflects that Obama had roughly 3 times the Facebook fans, and more than 20 times the Twitter followers than Romney. Moreover, Obama had approximately 9 times Romney’s Youtube subscribers and video views.

Also, according to social media analysis firm Attention, Obama also dominated the online conversation at large, taking up 64% compared to Romney’s 36% across Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, blogs and message boards.

The Counterargument to Social Media’s Predictive Abilities
In the research paper *How (Not) To Predict Elections*, the authors note that answers to several relevant questions are needed, such as “…the actual nature of political conversation in social media, the relation between political conversation and electoral outcomes, and the way in which different ideological groups and activists engage and influence online social networks.”

For example, it cannot be assumed that all tweets are trustworthy, as political statements tend to be replete with rumors, propaganda and humor. Demographics must also be taken into account. Tweeters are overwhelmingly likely to be younger, which can bias results.

The Future of a Presidential Candidate’s Online Presence

Whether or not social media networks like Facebook and Twitter can predict presidential election results, they have certainly become a crucial aspect of any campaign. Just as businesses have come to rely on the conversation with customers that social media encourages, a presidential campaign can not afford to ignore the power of an online dialogue with their electorate. At the very least, keeping an eye on social media statistics prior to future elections could yield some very interesting results.

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