

ELECTORAL COMPETITIVENESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES;; WHO GOES NEGATIVE WHEN AND WHY?

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Abstract

Social media is becoming more integrated into every politician's career. Previous research suggests that throughout an election a challenger is the one who is more likely to use negative campaigning while running for office. I analyze what strategies are being used by challengers and incumbent candidates while running for office. The data I use is provided by Zachary Auter and Jeffrey Fine (2016). Their data looks at both the 2010 election where we began to see politicians use Facebook ads in their campaigns. I find that a challenger is more likely to adopt negative messages while they are running and are behind in the polls. I also examine several campaigns from 2018 and found similar social media strategies. This confirms the increasing importance of social media in American elections.

Introduction

This paper will look at and examine how the role of online social media has changed how campaigns and elections are being conducted with newer, riskier, and ulterior methods; from more traditional methods such as phones, mail, and in person canvassing. Over the past two decades, the growth and adaptation of the internet and social media by politicians is changing how political campaigning is being conducted to help strengthen their electoral success. (Gulati and Williams, 2007). When running for political office the incumbent already has a greater chance of electoral success over a challenger who is running. The challenger will be more likely to utilize all forms of social media to help strengthen their chances of electoral success. However, in a competitive race, both the incumbent and challenger will utilize social media. Although, they will employ different strategies to help them win an election. (Foot and Schneider, 2006; Herrnson et al., 2007; Kamarck, 2002; Xenos and Foot, 2005) With the integration of a more web-based political campaign and advertisement, we are starting to see a more level playing field among political adversaries. (Gulati and Williams, 2007) Politicians and their political parties will start, if they have not already, to integrate social network sites, into their campaign where it will become easier, cheaper, more effective, and efficient. (Heaney et al., 2011) (D'Alessio 2000) (Vergeer et al. 2013) Social media was first adopted by politicians in what was known as Web 1.0, and it has changed drastically into what we now see today which is known as Web 2.0. Some of the first web-based campaigning in Web 1.0, came in forms of blogs and out-reach emails, using grass-roots based campaigning tactics. The main differences we see from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is integration and interaction, as well as the strategies politicians are starting to use on Web 2.0 in the form of social media (i.e. Facebook Twitter, etc.). (e.g., Gibson 2010; Lilleker & Jackson 2010; Vergeer et al. 2013) “To contextualize the utilization of newest

Web 2.0 applications in today's campaigns it is necessary to understand how political campaigning developed over time." (Norris 2000).

How integration and adaptation has changed from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

People are generally slow to integrate new technology into practice, this can be seen time and time again throughout history. When the World Wide Web first came out it was a new form of communication with endless potential. The early use for a web-based platform for a candidate came in the form of blogs and message boards where politicians began to integrate the web. Web 1.0 as it was known, gave political candidates something that they never had before, it gave them the ability to control their message cheaply and efficiently compared to other forms of media. The reasons why there wasn't as much use of this form of internet was its lack of circulation and availability, unlike the internet that is in use today where the majority of the United States population has some sort of access to the internet. The web we see today Web 2.0 has been immensely integrated into political campaigning with the rise of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. The ability to adapt and integrate social network strategies into political campaigns has proven to help politicians gain name recognition along with helping them achieve greater electoral success. Less-competitive candidates are more likely to adopt social media outlets into their campaigns compared to a more established candidate who might already have a name recognition. This will change how candidate will use certain strategies to increase their chances of electoral success.

Campaign integration of social media

When looking at a political race, the first thing to look at is what type of race its going to be. Is it a competitive, or non-competitive race? Will it be an open-seat race? Candidates in each

will employ different social media tactics and strategies to help strengthen their chances of achieving electoral success. Social media outlets, such as Facebook, are becoming more common in political campaigning. Looking at what strategy's politicians are starting to employ that will help them to become more personal in their political messages as well as their campaign (Van Os et al., 2007b). One social media outlet that is becoming more popular is Twitter; Twitter is a website that allows its user to send a message up to 140 characters long about anything. This is mostly used by politicians for something that is upcoming or is currently happening in their campaign, or while they are in office that they want to talk about. They might also use it for social interaction to become more relatable by talking about sports, entertainment, religion, or national news. That includes their personal perspectives about how they feel about something and why it matters to them. By doing so, Twitter shows how the politician feels about certain events and attempts to become more relatable to the public and who they are trying to represent (Caprara et al., 1999). Other forms of online tactics that politicians might use could be something as simple as telling the public something about themselves and who they are. This tactic has already been used many times over from past elections, politicians try to become relatable to voters by taking photos of them doing something that people do in everyday life such as dining, hunting, reading, etc., and by doing so it creates a stronger bond between politicians and the people they represent (Caprara et al., 1999).

Political Engagement on Social Media.

With social media becoming more commonplace in political platforms, what are politicians saying in their social media use; and is it helping them get likes, shares, comments, retweets etc. Does this help them get their message across for this we should look at how politicians are using Twitter in their political career. The politicians I looked at are Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez also known as “A.O.C” she is a Democrat from New York’s 14th congressional district who has been making headway on Twitter with her unexpected win over a ten-time incumbent Joseph Crowley. Next is Elise Stefanik a Republican from New York’s 21st congressional district. She is the current youngest member of congress at 35 years old. After that is Sam Johnson a Republican from Texas 3rd congressional district who is the oldest serving member of congress at 88 years old. And last is Dean Philips from Minnesota’s 3rd congressional district who was just recently elected to office in 2018. Looking at these four politicians we can start to see how each one of them uses Twitter differently in what they say in a tweet. Looking at our first politician A.O.C and what she is saying on Twitter. Looking at her Twitter page you can see right away what her slogan is, her location, direct link to her webpage. As well as how many people or groups currently follower her on Twitter which is 2.6 million, this gives her a huge advantage with name recognition. looking at what AOC says on Twitter will help people understand her message as well as what she stands for in what she conveys in her tweet.



The issues A.O.C talks about in her Twitter are issues about Republicans and their unwillingness to reopen after a government shutdown and how they should be worried for their reelection in 2020. Looking at A.O.C Twitter she tells us her views on her ideas and thoughts on what's going on in government. Being able to do this has given her a large group of followers who are interested in what she has to say and has become very famous by doing so. Next Elise Stefanik, she is the youngest serving member of congress. Like other younger people who have also turned to Twitter. Elise Stefanik, like others, have started to use Twitter to help deliver their message. Some of the things that Elise has talking about in Twitter consists of the committees she is a part of and is working in or how she feels about issues that conflict with her view. In one of her tweets she disagrees with the emergency funding for "THE WALL" that Donald Trump wants to build. She also expresses that by posting her thoughts about "THE WALL" she is asks Democrats for help to make sure that "THE WALL" does not pass and posts a link to her article.



Rep. Elise Stefanik @Rep... · 16h

I believe the President declaring a national emergency that will take funding from military construction projects is the wrong decision. I voted in support of today's resolution disapproving of the national emergency with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. (1/3)

Rep. Elise Stefanik @RepStefanik

I will continue to negotiate in good faith to fully fund securing the border, and I urge my Democrat colleagues to commit to doing the same. Read my full statement (3/3)

Rep. Elise Stefanik @Rep... · 16h

As a Constitutional conservative, I consistently criticized President Obama's executive overreach. No matter the party, I will stand up against executive action that circumvents Congress. (2/3)

Stefanik Votes in Support of the National Emergency Declaratio...
stefanik.house.gov

Rep. Elise Stefanik @RepStefanik

Official Twitter Account for Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, proudly representing New York's 21st District.
stefanik.house.gov Joined January 2015
244 Following 20.8K Followers
Not followed by anyone you're following

The oldest serving member of congress is Sam Johnson. He is 86 years old and he also has twitter. However, Sam Johnson does not use Twitter like the other member of congress. His

Twitter is just his profile with his slogan and a link to his website. This show that even the older people are starting to adopt Twitter into their political career. The last politician I looked at was Dean Philips from Minnesota who got elected in 2018. He is using Twitter to help him become more relatable to his constituents. In one of his tweets Dean's talking about his dog Henry. This tweet could get likes, comments, shares, or retweets that might help them win or secure votes for office by explaining what they plan to do while in office or help them become more reliable.

(Bimber and Davis, 2003; Druckman et al., 2009; Foot and Schneider, 2006; Gulati and



Williams, 2007; Vergeer, 2012; Xenos and Foot, 2005). When posting online Politicians try to use social media to reach out to everyone and gain “networked influence”. (Gruzd and Wellman, 2014) By having are network influence they gain more followers on social media sites such as Facebook,



and Twitter being the main two sites. With this influence of social media people are able to message, post, comment, or tweet at their politician this can be both beneficial or negative about what the message someone posts on the social media site if it gains traction.



Candidates have always looked for a new way to let people know who they are, what their message is, and what they stand for, while trying to be efficient, and effective. To maximize effectiveness politicians have started to cast a wide net with web-based mobilization. By doing so scholars have suggested that an integral relationship exists between social network sites and political campaigns as both rely on

constant communication and encourage mobilization of supporters (Slotnick, 2009). A newer

application, that we began to see in the 2016 election, was the use of Snapchat. This helped gain

publicity among politicians who were running for the first time and trying to get name recognition during the primaries. By seeming more like an average person who are more approachable this can help change voter and public opinion about any politician running for office.

Political Advertising and Campaign Strategies

While Twitter is becoming a popular platform for social media campaigning, Facebook boasted the highest usage rates by politicians and candidates in the 2010 and 2012 elections. Facebook use is nearly universal among members of both the House and Senate (Smith 2011; Stromer-Galley 2014). Gainous and Wagner (2014) “find that challenger candidates, candidates in competitive House districts—*ceteris paribus*—are more likely to use Twitter for negative campaigning.” Trailing candidates and leading candidates post in different ways. The trailing candidates are more likely to employ negative campaigning strategies on social media along with attack ads. The two main types of negative campaigning strategies are issue-based attacks and personal attacks (Geer 2006; Kahn and Kenney 1999) and both types can be seen on Facebook and Twitter with direct and indirect messages aimed at both candidates. These are both cheap and quick unlike television ads that are costly to produce and air, especially in large media markets. Frontrunner candidates, however, have little incentive to use negative ads while campaigning for office. The strategies of frontrunning candidates is generally to be more focused on their message and what they plan to do in office and stay positive. However, all candidates are more likely to use negative campaigning if it is a competitive race or an open seat race. Incumbents and challengers face distinct political realities. Incumbents have a more established voter bases, Incumbents are also much safer electorally. Challengers face a serious disadvantage on this front. (e.g., Abramowitz 1991; Gelman and King 1990; Krehbiel and Wright 1983).

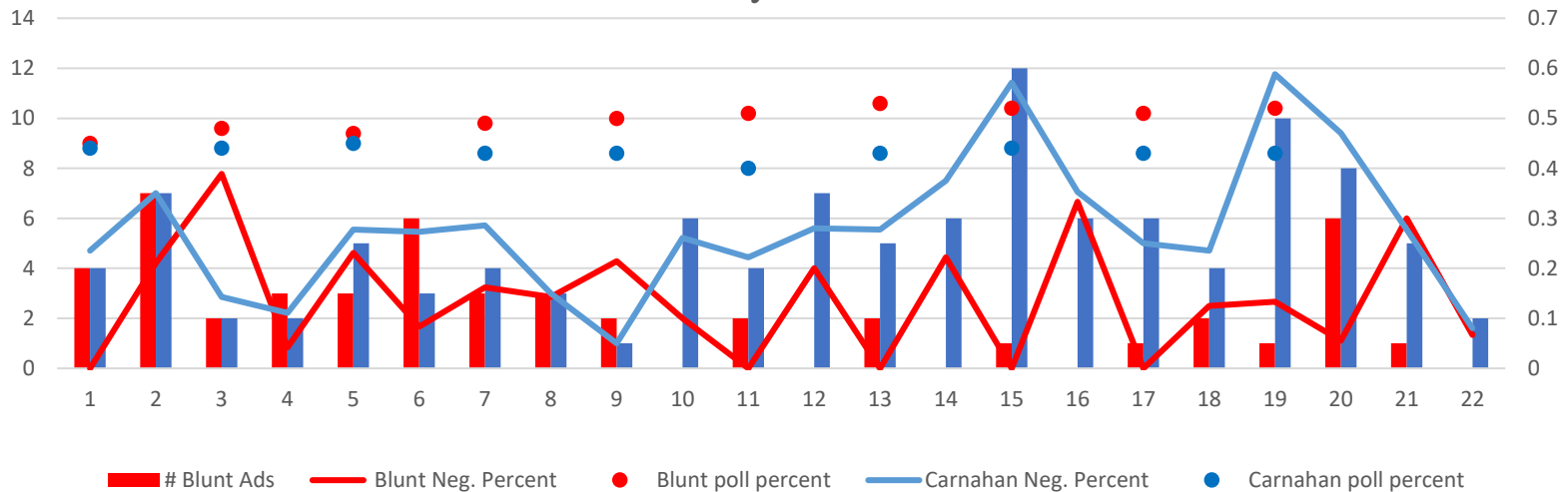
Methods and Analysis

As previously stated, social media is becoming more prevalent in how we interact with our politicians and how they interact with us. The data I used was provided by Zachary Auter and Jeffrey Fine (2016). Their data looks at the 2010 election where we began to see politicians use Facebook ads in their campaigns. This shows us how every candidate in the 2010 Senate election used negative Facebook ads throughout the election. Each race I looked at was examined by the amount of negativity in each ad they posted on Facebook this was measured by tone and rhetoric of the ads and categorized according from non-negative to extremely negative. I also looked at how frequently they posted an ad in a week. I started collecting data on June first and stop on November second.

Throughout each campaign you can start to see the trends and tendencies of each candidate in each one of their races. To find out which races had the highest levels of negative ads and negative campaign strategies. The first thing I looked at was the very competitive races that were also rated toss-up. Every senate race that took place in 2010 was given a race rating on who was more likely to win given by the Cook Political Report along with a race rating on how competitive it was going to be. Lastly, I used the Rasmussen Reports to find out what the polling percentages were in each race from week one till week 23 to see if there was any connection between polling a negative campaigning. I first looked at races that were rated as toss up and very competitive. The next type of races I looked at were races that had had an incumbent candidate but still were rated as a toss-up. Lastly, I looked at races had a favored candidate and that were less competitive analysis.

Figure 1

Polling Data and Negative Social Media used in 2010 Missouri Senate race by week



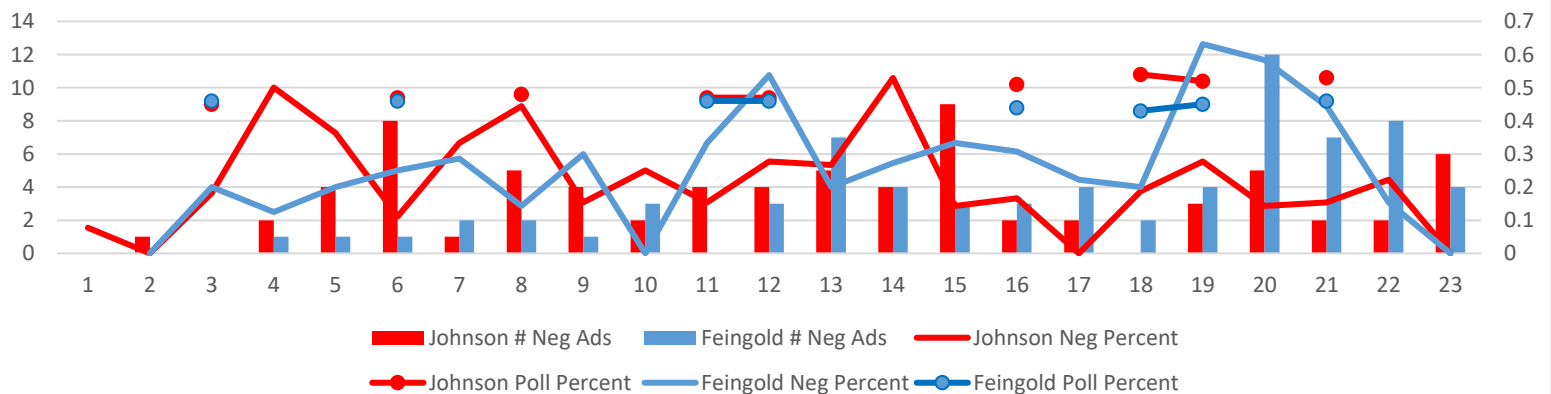
The first race I looked at was the Missouri Senate race which was an open seat race between Roy Blunt(R) and Robin Carnahan(D). Roy Blunt was the Missouri Secretary of State from 1985 to 1993. After that, he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives for Missouri's 7th Congressional District in 1996 where he won. He served as Republican Whip from 2003 to 2009. And decided to run for Senator in 2010 after the previous senator Kit Bond(R) decided to retire. Robin Carnahan(D) served as Missouri's 38th Secretary of State where she was elected in 2003.

According to the Cook Political Report this race was leaning Republican but would be very competitive race. Looking at this race you can see how each one of the candidates use social media to help give them the edge. Looking at Roy Blunt(R) you can see that from week one to 11 Blunt starts out with lots of negative ads with four in the first week, and seven in the second week. Blunt decided to not go very negative in the third, fourth, and fifth week. He decided to post six negative ads in the sixth week after the Rasmussen report shows that he is only ahead by a small margin in the polls in week five. Throughout the second half of the campaign Blunt decided to not go very negative due to how well he was doing in the polls after the seventh week.

The other candidate Robin Carnahan, like Blunt, starts out very negative throughout the first few weeks until the ninth week where she hardly goes negative at all. In the ninth week after the Rasmussen report that Carnahan was starting to trail in the polls, she started to use more negative ads to try to help her out throughout the second half of the campaign. However, this did not work for her. Roy Blunt won the election with 54% of the vote while Carnahan only got 40% of the vote.

Figure 2

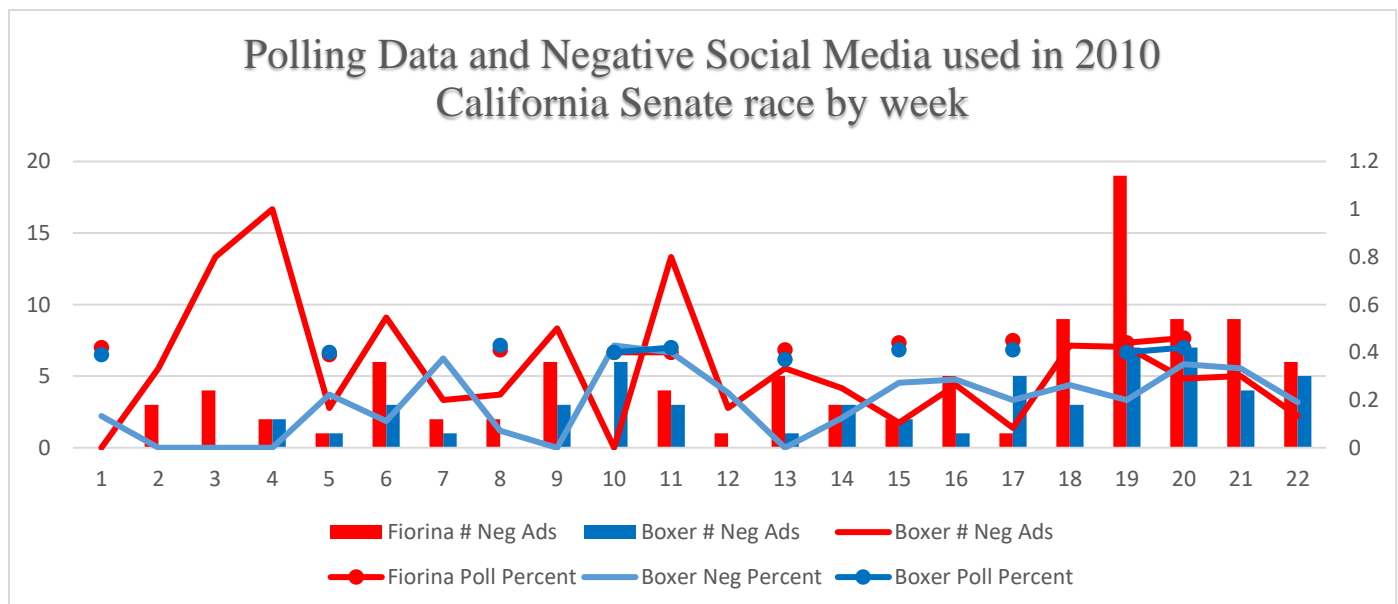
Polling Data and Negative Social Media used in 2010 Wisconsin Senate by week



The second race I looked at is the Wisconsin Senate race between Russ Feingold(D) and Ron Johnson(R). Russ Feingold was the incumbent candidate who was seeking his fourth term as Senator. While his challenger Ron Johnson was a businessman who had no political experience. Going into this race the Cook Political Report had it as leaning Republican and somewhat competitive. The first thing you see in this race is that Ron Johnson decides to go negative in the fourth week and continues to use negative ads till the 16th week where the Rasmussen Report comes out and has him with over 50% of the vote. After that he decides to not go negative in the

last part of the election. Russ Feingold, who was the incumbent candidate, does not start to go negative in his campaign till the 13th week where he decides to post negative ads because in week 12 the Rasmussen Report came out both of them polling around 45%. After that you can see the Russ Feingold goes more negative in his ads and continues to do so. In week 19 you can see that his negative ads help him out in the polls. after that Feingold still goes more negative in the last few weeks of the election where he peaks in week 20 and after that decides not to go negative in the closing weeks of the election. Ron Johnson ends up winning the election with 51% of the vote while Russ Feingold gets 47% of the vote.

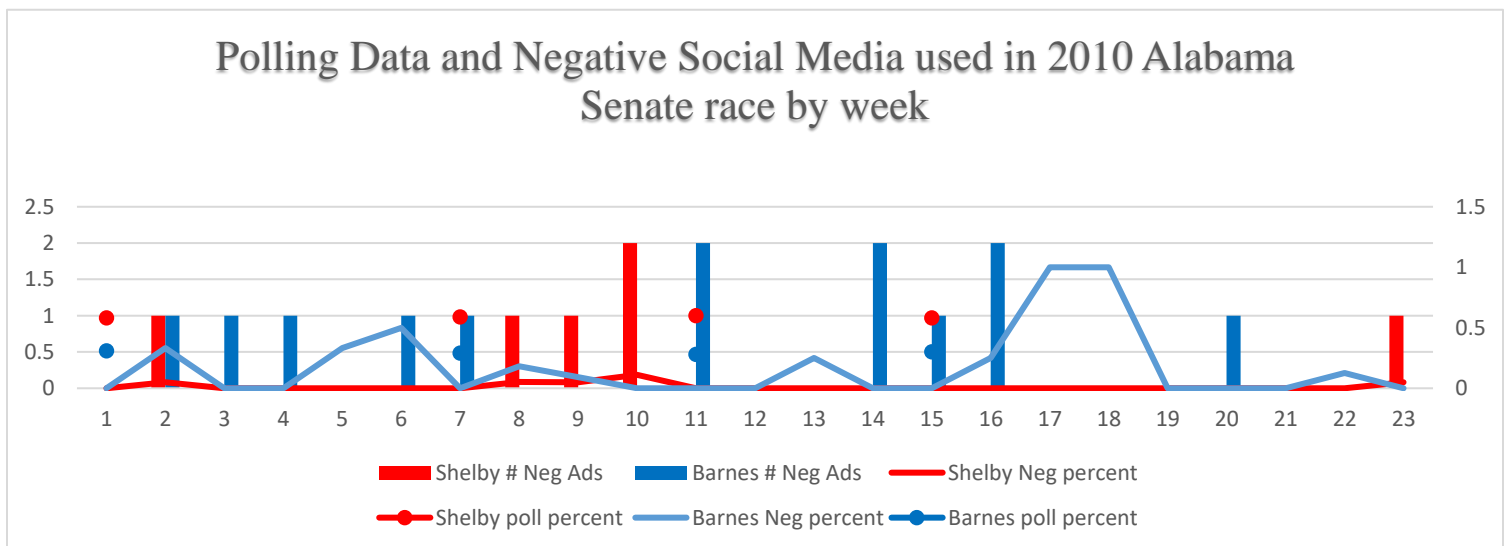
Figure 3



The third race I looked at is the California Senate race between Carly Fiorina(R) and Barbara Boxer(D). Barbara Boxer(D) the incumbent candidate was seeking her fourth term as the senator of California. Her opponent Carly Fiorina was a businesswoman who had not held any political office. Going into this race the Cook Political Report had it rated as toss-up and very-competitive. Right away in week one when the Rasmussen Report did their first poll, they had

Fiorina ahead in the polls. Fiorina decides to keep going negative in her campaign till week four where she only ran one ad that wasn't very negative. In that week The Rasmussen Report did another round of polling where they had Boxer ahead in the polls. After that Fiorina decides to start going more negative for the rest of her campaign to try to get ahead in the polls. Boxer in her campaign only uses negative ads in the middle of her election in the ninth week until the 11th week but decides not to go as negative because she was ahead in the polls. Boxer only starts to go negative in the last few weeks from week 17 until 20 where she decides not to go negative in the last two weeks going into the election. Boxer ended up winning the election with 52% of the vote, while Fiorina only got 42% of the vote.

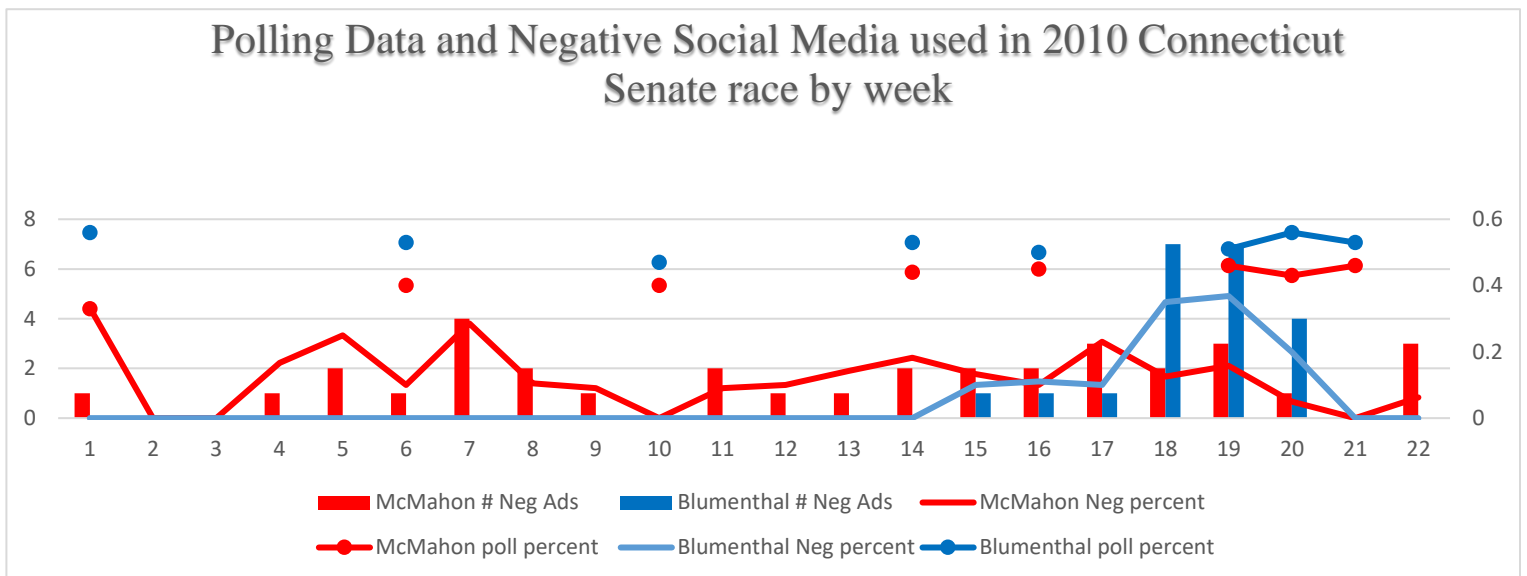
Figure 4



The fourth race I looked at was the Alabama Senate race between Richard Shelby(R) and William Barnes(D). Richard Shelby the incumbent who was seeking his fifth term as Alabama senator. While his opponent William Barnes was a lawyer with no prior political experience. Going into this race the Cook Political Report had this race rated as Safe Republican as well as non-competitive. The Rasmussen Report did its polling in week one and it had Shelby polling

around 60% while Barnes was polling around 30%. Barnes decides to go negative right away to try to help him the in polls and posts negative ads every week till around week 16 then he decides that going negative is not going to work for him. Shelby doesn't go negative till week eight and only posts negative ads till week 10. In week 11 after the Rasmussen Report comes out with him polling around 60% Shelby decides that he doesn't need to go negative for the rest of the election and ends up winning the race with 65% of the vote while Barnes only gets 32%.

Figure 5



The fifth and final race I looked at was the Connecticut Senate race between Linda McMahon(R) and Richard Blumenthal(D). Blumenthal was the state attorney general before deciding to run for the senate seat. Linda McMahon was a CEO who had no political experience before deciding to run. This was a open seat race because Senator Chris Dodd decided to retire. Going into this race the Cook Political Report had this race leaning Democratic and somewhat competitive. In week one the Rasmussen Report comes out with its poll having Blumenthal polling around 55% while McMahon was polling at 35%. McMahon decides she needs to go negative in her campaign and starts posting negative ads and continues to do so for the rest of her campaign to try to help her

win the election. Blumenthal doesn't use negative ads till week 15. After the Rasmussen Report comes out with him polling at 55% and McMahan polling at 45% Blumenthal decides he needs to go negative to help him in the last few weeks to help his chances of winning. In the end this ended up working for him. Blumenthal got 55% of the vote while McMahan got 43% of the vote.

Discussion

As previously stated, social media is becoming more prevalent in how we interact with our politicians and how they interact with each other. As early as 2010 we can start to see Politicians using social media to help them in their campaigns and elections to try to help them win office. With this being said we can also see the negative campaigning can sometimes help out candidates in their campaign to help get them elected to office. I believe that politicians who are more willing to use social media sites will help better chance of winning office while being able to express and communicate with there constituents. Future research will need to be done to investigate to show how social media will play into there choices and interactions.

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