

# A roadmap for the successful use of social media in electoral campaigns

Awanda S. S. Pratama <sup>a,1,\*</sup>, Elloy Y. M. S. Danan <sup>a,2</sup>, Grace Angeline <sup>a,3</sup>, Irfan Z. Abdillah <sup>a,4</sup>, Jevin A. Prayoga <sup>a,5</sup>, Nedal A. M. Jabari <sup>b,6</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Electrical Engineering, Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Department of Electrical Engineering, Palestine Technical University, Tulkarm, Palestine

<sup>1</sup> awanda.setya.1805356@students.um.ac.id\*; <sup>2</sup> elloyyabest.1805356@students.um.ac.id; <sup>3</sup> grace.angeline.1805356@students.um.ac.id;

<sup>4</sup> irfan.zuhdi.1805356@students.um.ac.id; <sup>5</sup> jevin.arda.1805356@students.um.ac.id; <sup>6</sup> njabari@ptca.edu.ps

\* corresponding author

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## ABSTRACT

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Over the last few years, social media has become important for many people and can affect many aspects of life. In terms of politics, social media can help candidates and political parties do their political campaign. The use of social media in politics and during political campaigns has become a vital part for every political party and candidate. This paper describes the current social media and its characteristics, how campaigns were conducted in the past and how modern campaign activities were conducted. Case studies from several countries regarding how political campaigns were carried out are also written in this paper. The authors explore the factors available in social media that can affect and change the political process and campaign. Strong and weak factors of using social media in electoral campaigns are also discussed in this paper. This paper further addresses the author's point of view about how candidates should use social media during elections.

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## 1. Introduction

The internet's inspiring growth has paved the way for politicians to use social media strategy. Politicians and political parties are turning to social media for a new way to engage with voters due to the changes brought on by social media [1]. Before the existence of the internet, political campaigns were carried out through broadcasting through advertisements on television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. In contrast to pre-internet methods such as television, social media use in political campaigns has risen considerably. However, this does not imply that traditional media should be abandoned immediately, such as television or radio. The internet has developed communication networks that play an essential role in the flow of information, and social media can transform not just the message but also the nature of ideals and conflict dynamics of politics. To win the election, they must implement creative campaign communication strategies aimed toward supporters and recognize how this can be accomplished by implementing messaging strategies to promote the candidate and their political ideals [2].

Social media has become essential for many people. In less than two decades, social media can affect many aspects of life. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram makes it easier to exchange information. Social media is increasingly recognized as an essential source of information about a wide range of issues. Not all information from social media is correct. This time the information is often met with false and misleading information. This false information has different purposes, shapes, and targets. Among the strategic tools used by perpetrators

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are fake news, propaganda, hateful speech, astroturfing, colluding users (e.g., paid trolls), and automation [3].

In terms of politics, social media can help the campaign or interact between candidates, political parties, and users. Many advantages of doing campaigns on social media, for example, less money spent and increasing popularity. In campaigning, candidates or political parties must determine targets so that the campaign runs efficiently. Each social media platform has different characteristics. Facebook is probably the biggest social media platform, with monthly active users up to 2.7 billion. Facebook users can share personal information, join groups and establish connections with friends or acquaintances. Twitter is a social media microblogging platform that allows users to send and receive text-based messages of 280 characters. Twitter users can also define the kind of information and topic that will be received [4]. Twitter also provides a trending topic feature. Instagram is a social media that uses images as its main content, provides a feature so that the user profile looks like a gallery. Instagram users have to post images or videos if they want to post, which does not allow them to post without pictures or videos.

Social media is now crucial for election campaigns as more and more people use social media in their daily lives. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are widely used social media platforms for political campaigns. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of social media in electoral campaigns. This paper explains how social media will influence and alter the political process and campaign. The advantages and disadvantages of using social media in political campaigns and how politicians can use social media during elections will be discussed.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Election Campaign Before the Internet**

Before the existence of the internet, political campaigns were carried out using broadcasting through advertisements on television, radio, magazines, and newspapers. If we see, there were lots of advertisements on television. Television advertising campaigns had the most significant influence on the selection of candidates [5]. Television had an impact on how politicians communicate with voters. Such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, who used television as his political advertisement in the United States to reach the broader community at a low cost [6].

To this day, social media has become a new method of political campaigning. Compared to pre-internet methods such as using television, social media is considered more effective because currently, more and more people are using social media in their daily lives. However, that does not mean that old media such as television is immediately abandoned. According to Voolvert & Noort, social media can complement campaigns because television cannot be abandoned [7].

### **2.2. International Modern Campaign Activities Stories**

Before campaigning is the most critical process in the general election. In a campaign, a party or candidate announces his vision and mission to the public. Currently, campaigns can be carried out using internet facilities. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are widely used platforms for campaign implementation. By utilizing social media, candidates can interact directly with the community. The existence of social media will undoubtedly increase the closeness between candidates and the public. This closeness will attract the hearts of the public so that people will support the candidate.

The modern campaign was first used in the United States in 2000 by Al Gore and George W. They created a personal website containing their biographies. In 2008, Barack Obama linked his campaign site with his Facebook account. This was done to increase his online presence [8]. Obama's opponent, John McCain regularly releases his television ads on YouTube and his personal web campaigns [9]. Obama's success in the 2008 election led to social media being used again in 2012. Obama and Romney used social media and expanded their platforms. The use of social media aims to attract teenagers. In 2016, Donald Trump made headlines on social media, especially Twitter. Trump uses social media to provoke his opponents and criticize his challengers [8]. This makes Trump's popularity even higher. Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton also used social media for her campaign but not as well as Trump. Trump with his sensationalist style won the election.

In Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan is seen by the public as an enemy of democracy because he suppresses the circulation of newspapers [10]. Due to the limited circulation of newspapers, the opposing camp took advantage of the existing loopholes. Muhammadu Buhari uses social media as a campaign tool. The use of social media was effective, leading Buhari to victory. In 2016, two candidates from the Ghana election also used social media. John Mahama took advantage of social media by uploading videos of the infrastructure development [11]. Nana Akufo-Addo hired a grub who had won candidates in Nigeria before [11]. His strategy, making Nana Akufo-Addo won the election of Ghana.

### 2.3. Case Studies

In the U.S, more than 5 million campaign advertisements appeared on television in 2020, more than double as many as in 2016. Nearly \$8 billion is spent on broadcast and digital advertisements [12]. All candidates widely used social media during the 2020 Presidential Election. On Twitter, almost 87 million people follow Donald Trump, while 11 million people follow Vice President Joe Biden. Despite the large distance between the two, Biden's top tweets outperformed Donald Trump's top tweets by almost a factor of two [13]. The Pew Research Center finds that almost one-fourth of all Americans learn something about the candidates from an internet outlet such as Facebook [14]. During the campaigning season, the youth's participation on social media often sparks rallies and movement [15]. Despite the rise of the internet as a source of campaign news, television remains the public's primary source. However, television is not as dominant as at once was [14].

The Central Election Commission (CEC) defined a schedule for allocating airtime for Russian presidential candidates on February 14 2018. Debates were broadcast on five federal television channels and three radio stations [16]. For campaigning, each candidate has to do a collection of signatures. Candidates nominated by political parties with factions in the State Duma are exempt from collecting signatures [17]. In Russia, traditional media are widely controlled by the state. However, the internet still offers the possibility of free speech [18]. There has been a rise in social media use for politics and campaigning in Russia in the last few years. YouTube has established itself as an alternative to state television in Russia, with a high degree of political content within trending videos [19]. Media company RBC states that the primary focus of Vladimir Putin's presidential campaign of 2018 was on his promotion in social media [20]. Despite the growth of using social media for politics and campaigning, there is also a trend of tightening internet control in Russia in recent years [21]. Because of that, the primary tool for campaigning in Russia right now is traditional mass media such as TV and radio.

The last official campaign in Indonesia lasted about six months, beginning on September 23, 2018 and ending on April 13, 2019 [22]. Both parties sent their campaign teams to the KPU prior to the launch of the campaign. The KPU planned five debates for 2019, the same number as in 2014 [23]. With millennials responsible for about two-fifths of Indonesia's population, both parties made substantial attempts to cater to the age demographic. One significant social media-centered initiative, called #2019GantiPresiden, was launched by PKS politician Mardani Ali Sera. It involved organising rallies in many cities until they were prohibited due to clashes with Jokowi supporters [24]. Before the campaign started, it had been anticipated that there would be a flood of hoaxes and false news on social media and WhatsApp. However, one observer mentioned that the government's influence in dealing with the issue was minimal because it could be framed as favoring the incumbent [25]. To counterattack issues regarding false news on social media, both sides formed dedicated anti-hoax organizations [26], [27], with the Indonesian government hosting weekly false news briefings [28].

Compared to the hugely costly, multi-channel extravaganza that voters in other advanced democracies are exposed to, Japan's regulated and very conservative elections seem to originate from another age altogether. Japan's election laws have been interpreted to ban online advertising and to limit online voter participation during the official campaign time before an election [29]. Japan's Public Offices Election Law (POEL) strictly limits candidates' paid television advertisements and radio spots. While political parties are free to purchase television or newspaper advertisements, politicians are not entitled to purchase personal television or radio time [30]. During the official campaign time, candidates are permitted to produce a certain number of pamphlets and leaflets [31]. Strict campaigning laws make politicians go out and visit the voters they are meant to represent. That kind of direct interaction with people, albeit fleeting and brief, is something that many countries' political campaigns have missed. The election rules were amended in 2013 to allow social media

campaigning, but political parties are resistant to change [32]. Table 1 compares the countries mentioned above in terms of the main campaigning media and campaign time before election.

**Table.1** Comparison Among Country

Difference	Country			
	<i>U. S.</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Indonesia</i>	<i>Japan</i>
Main Campaigning Style/Media	Television, Digital Advertising & Social Media	Traditional Mass Media (TV/Radio)	Television Debate & Social Media	Old Media (Print Media) & On-site In Person Visit
Campaigning Time Period Before Election	Different for each candidate. The U.S. doesn't have laws dictating how long a campaign period is.	Around 2 months February 2018 - March 2018	Around 7 months 23 September 2018 - 13 April 2019	12 Days - Lower House Election 17 Days - Upper House Election

#### 2.4. Political Advertising for Multi-Purpose

In an open and accountable modern political competition, candidates need a mechanism for distributing political goods to the electorate, such as innovative approaches, problems, party ideology, policies, and leadership styles. To win the election, they must adopt innovative campaign communication strategies geared toward supporters and realize how this can be done by introducing messaging strategies to support the individual and their political ideals. The new democratic age has brought about significant changes in the political world, especially in political communication practices. There has been a significant shift in how candidates plan and devise political advertising strategies to gain popular trust in electoral campaigns. As a result, many political players, including the government, parties, politicians, and interest groups, adopted and regularly used political marketing in their political campaigning [2]. Political marketing and political communication are the most important aspects of producing effective political advertisements.

Political marketing is a relatively recent area of research within political science and communication that investigates the application of marketing methods in the political process. The use of targeting, tactics, and approaches in the political sphere is referred to as campaign marketing. It represents marketing's invasion of the political space as an enterprise and tool. Political advertisements, celebrity endorsements, specialist marketers and campaign management, internet campaigning, cell phone canvassing, segmentation, and micro-targeting are all common approaches of political marketing [2]. The information revolution and globalization have played critical roles in transforming conventional election campaigning into the most professional and sophisticated targeting techniques [33]. Before that, political marketing was presumed to have a unique role in achieving the goal of political activities by strategic planning, preparation, design, and packaging of political topics, which is the dissemination of political knowledge focused on audience segmentation. The ultimate aim is to establish an equally satisfying and harmonious state with political parties and voters [2].

Political communication is related to spreading and impacting information in politics, politicians, media, and people. The media plays a strategic role in promoting and introducing modern political relations strategies such as political advertising. This is because advertisement is the most powerful method of constructing and producing an image. It is effective because of the structure, which encourages political actors to deliver their messages directly to the public, without the need for journalists to mediate. Political messaging is used in various ways, including television, radio, newspapers, banners, and cinemas [34]. Furthermore, in an ideal democratic society, the media should play a variety of roles, including providing information, educating people, serving as a forum for national political debate, providing publicity to the government as the society's watchdog, and serving as a channel for the advocacy of political views [35].

### 3. Political Factors Used in Social Media

The use of online social media platforms in political systems and activities is called social media use in politics. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WeChat, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, LINE, Snapchat, and Pinterest are social media platforms. The internet has developed communication networks that play an essential role in the flow of information, and social media can transform the message and the

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nature of political corruption, ideals, and conflict dynamics of politics. Diplomacy around the globe has become less private and more susceptible to public opinion due to the use of social media in election systems, global strife, and radical politics [36]. There are seven factors available in social media that can influence the political process and campaign.

The first factor is social media as a news source. Adults in the United States with internet access rapidly obtain political news and information from social media platforms. In 2019, the Pew Research Center discovered that more than half of Americans received their news from social media, with Facebook being the most prominent social media source where American adults got their news [37]. So social media platforms are central to campaigns' communicative strategies. Unlike in the days before the internet, where people had to wait for the next newspaper or TV news show to get the latest stuff, online news in social media is available at every moment. Even though news can be found on many websites, most people devote more time to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter than to relevant news or political websites [38].

Secondly is the poll's influence in social media. Political surveys are an essential component of any campaign. Like most forms of political coverage, the internet and social media have massively expanded the number of poll results we see each day. Opinion polls are an essential source of information for voters and candidates, providing the latter with data that can be used to guide strategic communication. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the specific wording of a published poll and the corresponding report on it by a specific news or media source may impact the outlet's audience perceptions about two running presidential candidates and affect how people vote [39].

The next factor is demographics and targeting. Social media platforms enable campaigns with new and creative opportunities to reach out to the public, craft the best message, and target specific audiences. Candidates can now adapt their messages to meet the needs of women, college students, retirees, or any other group of voters. Each social media platform caters to different demographics and has unique affordances [40]. Candidates can tailor their strategies to the platforms that they use. During the U.S. 2016 presidential elections, social media was critical in helping candidates to target their audiences [41].

Direct interaction is the next factor available in social media. Previously, if we were to see a politician or a candidate, we had to go to a live show. Now it is possible to attend virtual gatherings where we can partake in live streaming events and connect with politicians and candidates. Presidential political campaigns now regularly and actively use social media to reach, engage, and mobilize voters. According to some scholars, social media is a game-changer for politicians in informing, recruiting, and interacting with citizens [42].

The next factor is fake news and rumors in social media. There is an increasing divergence of opinion that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter play a role in spreading misinformation during election campaigns [43]. It is becoming more difficult to distinguish between real and fake news on the internet. This distinction is particularly perplexing in the age of social media. Though false news has some value for users, such as confirming far-right views and distributing propaganda to support a presidential candidate, it also has private and social costs. One social cost to users, for example, is the distribution of disinformation, which can make it more difficult for people to seek the reality and, in the case of the 2016 U.S. election, to select an electoral candidate [44].

Confirmation bias is one of the unseen factors that work on social media. Individuals form opinions over various economic, political, and social issues based on information they get from both media and acquaintances [45]. Most people will have the same outlook with their majority of friends and followers on social media. An experiment involving 60 million Facebook users before the 2010 US elections showed that they could generate 340,000 additional votes using a social message that informed a user about friends that had voted, compared to an informational message without social network information [46]. Social media may reinforce our opinions and make it more difficult to entertain alternative points of view. In politics, confirmation bias can help to make people more opinionated and less tolerant of others. On the other hand, if we make an effort to connect with an assortment of people with diverse viewpoints, we can overcome confirmation bias and use social media to make us more open-minded.

The last factor is the attention economy. Social media contributes to the concept of the attention economy. The attention economy concept emphasizes that content that garners more attention is more

likely to be viewed, shared, and circulated than news content that does not garner as much attention or interest from the general public [47]. Because of the multitude of concepts, feelings, and viewpoints flowing via the social media platform, it often works to alter or sway opinions regarding political beliefs. It has been discovered that news consumption contributes to political persuasion; therefore, the more people use social media platforms for news sources, the more their political views will be influenced [48]. The use of “news” leads to political persuasion. The more people use social media platforms as their primary source of news, the more social media acts as the primary catalyst in shaping their political opinions, and the more this “attention economy” will be able to harbored, manipulated, and often shaped.

## **4. Strength and Weakness Factors in the Use of Social Media in Electoral Campaigns**

### **4.1. Strength Factors**

Using social media for electoral campaigns has its strong and weak factors. The substantial factor in using social media for campaigning is that disseminating information from the candidates who will be elected can reach the wider community, unlike in the past, which only reached a few areas because there are many people. By using social media, voters can find out the views of the candidates to be elected. In terms of impact on political engagement, the findings reinforce the idea that increased use of new media contributes to increased political engagement among the general population. Along with political engagement and previous offline activity, one of the best predictors of involvement was using social media for political purposes.

Another supporting factor is that the costs incurred can be kept to a minimum so as not to incur large campaign advertising costs, such as in the USA in 2020, which spent nearly \$ 8 billion with a total cost of up to \$ 14 billion [12]. In the USA 2016 election, both Clinton and Trump have said that there are factors of using social media in campaigning that were instrumental in the 2016 election outcome, as has Barack Obama [49]. As Trump's new media chief at the time, Brad Parscale, put it that Facebook and Twitter were the reason we won this thing. Mr. Trump's platform is Twitter, and his fundraising platform is Facebook [50].

Because of their massive user bases, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can also be used as advertising media. Facebook is the most popular social media website; the number of daily active users has surpassed 2.7 billion [51]. Facebook can also share content, communicate with others, and join communities to engage with others. This is where Facebook can be valid as a marketing tool. Twitter, on the other hand, is a popular social media website with a large user base. Messaging on Twitter should be handled in the same way as reading or posting messages is done. Twitter can also decide trends using hashtags; if many more people use the hashtag, trending topics will appear; but, if there are other hashtags with many people, the trending subject will shift.

In comparison, Instagram is a social media platform whose primary content is photographs and videos. It can also be used as a campaign platform for posted photos and videos. Based on the comparisons made, it can be inferred that Facebook is now the most powerful social media platform for campaigning.

### **4.2. Weakness Factors**

Controversies have dominated much of the current public conversation over the position of social media sites. There is an increasing concern that social media platforms play in spreading misinformation during election campaigns. This is concerning because online media networks have increasingly spread political misinformation, both about candidates and essential campaign issues [52]. Exposure to partisan online news, which is widely spread through social media, has also led to misperceptions [53].

There is no doubt that a vast amount of falsehoods were spread during the previous two U.S. Presidential elections and that millions of Americans were exposed to inaccurate messages via social media. However, panel results obtained during the 2012 and 2016 U.S. Presidential elections show that, considering the prevalence of falsehoods on these networks, their effect on voters' beliefs remains reasonably minor. These findings show that social media may influence citizens' ability to accept falsehoods during elections, although the results are primarily minor [43].

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## 5. A Roadmap For The Successful Use of Social Media in Electoral Campaigns

There are three things that politicians need to do to use social media in electoral campaigns successfully. In using social media, politicians must show their true personalities. Like Trump, he uses his social media to criticize his political opponents and challengers [8], is following his personality, so that Trump's social media shows his behavior in the real world. The result is that Trump is superior to his opponent, Hillary Clinton. Clinton's social media did not show her character. She is too meticulous in using his social media. Clinton tends to post messages that will please everyone [8]. Because of his behavior, the public began to doubt the real character of Clinton. In other words, to successfully use social media in electoral campaigns, politicians must show their true selves.

The following important part of campaigning is how candidates talk to the voters. More frequent interactions with supporters and challengers on social media will increase closeness and the chances of winning the election. Use polite and straightforward language so social media users can understand easily. If a politician is positively perceived on social media, more people will write a complementary post about them. So during campaigning, the next thing that candidates need to do is be friendly when using their social media.

To attract the attention of teenagers, politicians can use chat forums [54]. Politicians can use it for political discussion. In the EU27 in 2010, people aged 16-24 used the internet to post messages on chat sites, social networking sites, and blogs. This amount is as much as 80%. While the age 25-45 as much as 42% and the age 55-74 as much as 18% [55]. In addition, politicians can make news online. Political participation among adolescents is positively related to their consumption of online news [56]. Next, listen to what the teenagers think. Teenagers often feel that their opinions are not heard, so they are no longer interested in elections. Do not compare teenagers to parents because teens do not like being compared.

Offline participation increases with age, the tendency to choose traditional media is increasing. The use of social media to attract parents' attention is not following their characteristics. A more effective way to get their attention is to use traditional media such as television, newspapers, and radio. Males have more political efficacy, that is, political awareness, than females [57]. In order to attract women's attention, candidates should give their views on specific topics about women, such as women's rights. Educational background influences the 2016 United States presidential election. White non-college voters chose more Trump [58]. It shows that Trump's strategies and ideologies primarily work on white non-college voters. Trump's ideology and strategy are considered immature for some white college voters. Lastly, to successfully use social media for campaigns, politicians must first know their target audience and then use it to their advantage.

## 6. Conclusion

There are some factors as to why social media plays such an important part in political campaigns. Social media is used as a news outlet and a means for candidates to communicate with voters directly. However, there is a chance that the news on social media is inaccurate. Polls on social media can also support candidates by providing data that can be used to direct strategic communication. Demographics in social media will also assist politicians in crafting their best message and targeting their audiences. There are also unseen factors such as confirmation bias and the attention economy that operates on social media influence political campaigning.

Due to their vast user bases, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can also be used as advertising media to spread campaign information; this is a substantial factor in social media usage for political campaigns. The weakness of using social media for campaigning is that there is a possibility that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter play in spreading misinformation during election campaigns. However, there is no problem using social media for political campaigns unless it is appropriately used. There are several strategies for the use of social media in the election campaign. These strategies include being yourself, being friendly to anyone and knowing who the campaign target is. Campaign targets can be seen based on age, gender, and educational background. Different targets mean different social media usage.

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