The California Governor’s Race: the Social Media Perspective

Presented by:
Ben Tulchin
President, Tulchin Research

June 16, 2011
Research Methodology

This research project was a joint effort by:

- Bryan Merica – President – IDM Communications
- Ben Tulchin – President and Founder – Tulchin Research
- Paul Wittenberg – President – PWSMC Social Media Consulting

We conducted a comprehensive analysis of social media on the California governor’s race:

- Social Media includes Blogs, Forums and Traditional Media;
- The primary tool used was the Sysomos MAP application;
- Election conversations were tracked from 1/1/10 to 11/2/10;
- For polling data, publically available information was used.

Twitter: 261,670 (53%)
News: 57,220 (15%)
Forums: 101,641 (20%)
Blogs: 59,765 (12%)

Total N = 480,296
Executive Summary

We analyzed the impact of social media on the California Governor’s Race;

Specifically, we looked at:

- The overall “volume” – how often the race was mentioned in social media;
- Compared the favorability ratings of Brown and Whitman in social media and polling.
- Looked at the favorability ratings of Jerry Brown and Meg Whitman in social media;
Executive Summary (cont’d)

We then focused on one major event – “Nanny-gate,” when Whitman’s former housekeeper came forward and attacked Whitman for firing her;

• We measured the volume of comments of this event as well as its share of the overall gubernatorial conversation;
• We measured the impact this event had on the campaign, particularly on Meg Whitman;
• We compared the impact on Meg Whitman in social media with polling.
Jerry Brown’s Overall Favorability Rating

Is your opinion of Jerry Brown generally favorable or unfavorable?

Polling Data

- Neutral: 16%
- Favorable: 44%
- Unfavorable: 40%

Social Media

- Neutral: 42%
- Favorable: 30%
- Unfavorable: 28%

1.0 : 0.9 ← Ratio of Favorable to Unfavorable → 1.0 : 0.9

Data from Field Poll averaged over time
Meg Whitman’s Overall Favorability Rating

Is your opinion of Meg Whitman generally favorable or unfavorable?

Polling Data

- Neutral: 26%
- Favorable: 37%
- Unfavorable: 37%

Social Media

- Neutral: 41%
- Favorable: 28%
- Unfavorable: 31%

1.0 : 1.0 ← Ratio of Favorable to Unfavorable → 1.0 : 1.1

Data from Field Poll averaged over time
Social Media Volumes for 2010 CA Gov Race

3 major events accounted for the spikes in online conversation:

- Jerry Brown announces his candidacy for Governor on March 2nd, 2010;
- Primary election night, especially the Republican primary battle;
- “Nanny-gate:” Meg Whitman’s housekeeper’s press conference where she described her firing and treatment.
Measuring the Volume of Social Media in Governor Races

(CA, FL, IL, NY and TX)

This chart provides a comparison across 5 states of the volume of conversation associated with the governor’s races in 2010: “Nanny-gate” helped propel California into the lead when it came to social media commentary.
Polling Showed Nanny-gate’s Impact Was Minimal

Does hearing that Meg Whitman hired an undocumented worker make you more likely or less likely to vote for her or does it make no difference?

- More Likely: 6%
- Less Likely: 19%
- Makes No Difference: 72%

Data from Ipsos Public Affairs/Reuters, October 2-4, 2010
But Social Media Assessment of Candidate Sentiment from Nanny-gate Found *Massive* Negative Spike for Whitman
Conclusions

What we learned from our analysis and what this means for campaigns:

• Social Media can provide a basic measurement of public opinion;

• Social Media can serve as an “early warning system” for a campaign, especially in a crisis;

• Social Media can measure basic reactions to a major event more quickly than polling – and perhaps provide a more accurate picture of the event’s impact;
Conclusions (cont’d)

What we learned from our analysis and what this means for campaigns (continued):

- Campaigns need to invest in a Social Media strategy – have people in Social Media promote and defend their candidate and attack their opponent;
  - Can’t just “flip a switch” and make this happen overnight;
  - These postings matter – they represent public opinion, can shape opinions and influence the debate;

- **Twitter sucks** – very hard to decipher meaning from tweets – hopefully, they provide more guidelines to make data more usable;

- In Search of The Holy Grail – Facebook is not yet “open”