Digital Politics: Pew Research findings on technology and campaign 2012

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Part of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” based in Washington, DC

PRC’s mission is to provide high quality, objective data to thought leaders and policymakers

Data for this talk is from nationally representative telephone surveys of U.S. adults (on landlines and cell phones)

For 10 years of digital politics data, see our “Politics” topic page at www.pewinternet.org
Who uses which social networks, and what do they do there?
6 in 10 American Adults use a SNS

The Landscape of Social Media Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use Any Social Networking Site</th>
<th>% of internet users who...</th>
<th>The service is especially appealing to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use Facebook</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Twitter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Women, adults ages 18-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Pinterest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, African-Americans, urban residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Instagram</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Women, adults under 50, whites, those with some college education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Tumblr</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, African-Americans, Latinos, women, urban residents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2008: 6%

2008: 33%
## SNS use by party/ideology

### Who uses social networking sites and Twitter

| % of internet users in each group who use either kind of these social media platforms |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| All internet users (n=1,873)    | Social networking sites (69%)   | Twitter (16%)                   |
| Republicans (n=449)             | 65                              | 12                              |
| Independents (n=667)            | 71                              | 18*                             |
| Democrats (n=600)               | 71                              | 18*                             |
| **Ideology**                    |                                 |                                 |
| Conservative (n=702)            | 63                              | 10                              |
| Moderate (n=631)                | 70*                             | 16*                             |
| Liberal (n=420)                 | 79**                            | 25**                            |

* indicates statistically significant difference compared with others in same grouping

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Civic Engagement Survey, conducted July 16-August 7, 2012 on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish. N for internet users=1,873.
Ideological “profile” of SNS users

- Very conservative: 8%
- Conservative: 24%
- Moderate: 36%
- Liberal: 18%
- Very liberal: 6%
- Other: 8%
### Social media engagement

60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. These are some of the civic activities they engage in on these sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% of SNS users who have done this</th>
<th>% of all adults who have done this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Like” or promote material related to political/social issues that others have posted</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage other people to vote</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post your own thoughts/comments on political or social issues</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repost content related to political/social issues</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others to take action on political/social issues that are important to you</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post links to political stories or articles for others to read</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to a group that is involved in political/social issues, or working to advance a cause</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow elected officials, candidates for office or other public figures</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.
Younger social media users are more likely to use the tools for civic activities

% of users of social networking sites or Twitter who use social media these ways

- Like / promote political material: Ages 18-29 = 44%, Ages 30-49 = 34%, Ages 50-64 = 36%, Ages 65+ = 24%
- Encourage others to vote: Ages 18-29 = 36%, Ages 30-49 = 34%, Ages 50-64 = 32%, Ages 65+ = 20%
- Post thoughts on issues: Ages 18-29 = 42%, Ages 30-49 = 34%, Ages 50-64 = 31%, Ages 65+ = 28%
- Repost political content: Ages 18-29 = 32%, Ages 30-49 = 28%, Ages 50-64 = 29%, Ages 65+ = 20%
- Encourage others to act: Ages 18-29 = 31%, Ages 30-49 = 27%, Ages 50-64 = 33%, Ages 65+ = 25%
- Post links to political stories: Ages 18-29 = 18%, Ages 30-49 = 14%, Ages 50-64 = 21%, Ages 65+ = 10%
- Belong to political group on SNS: Ages 18-29 = 25%, Ages 30-49 = 21%, Ages 50-64 = 25%, Ages 65+ = 20%
- Follow officials / candidates on social media: Ages 18-29 = 20%, Ages 30-49 = 17%, Ages 50-64 = 25%, Ages 65+ = 16%

…but among SNS users there aren’t many partisan differences

% of SNS users who did the following during the 2012 campaign…

- Belong to a political group: 25% Rep / Ln Rep, 21% Dem / Ln Dem
- Follow political figures: 24% Rep / Ln Rep, 21% Dem / Ln Dem
- Post links to political stories: 29% Rep / Ln Rep, 32% Dem / Ln Dem
- Post own thoughts on politics: 36% Rep / Ln Rep, 36% Dem / Ln Dem
- Encourage others to take action on issues: 32% Rep / Ln Rep, 36% Dem / Ln Dem
- Encourage others to vote: 36% Rep / Ln Rep, 40% Dem / Ln Dem
- Repost political content: 37% Rep / Ln Rep, 33% Dem / Ln Dem
- Like political material: 41% Rep / Ln Rep, 42% Dem / Ln Dem
Who cares? They’re not out there working for real change, man.

1. Actually, they’re doing lots of things that people have done offline for years (“vote for my candidate”, “support my issue”, “this is important”)

2. More to the point, there is a TON of overlap between online and offline political activity. Some people do political activities on social networks and nowhere else, but they are a pretty small minority.

3. People who are politically active on social networking sites are highly engaged in the political process (on a range of metrics) compared with other groups.

4. Obligatory disclaimer: correlation is not causation, and one-time surveys are not suited to uncovering directional impacts.

5. But when we ask directly, 25% of SNS users say they have gotten more involved in a political or social issue after reading about it on a social networking site.
The filter bubble* is complicated: people are learning new things about friends’ political beliefs…

Social networking site users learned via someone’s posts that a friend had different political views than they thought

% of social networking site users who say they learned someone’s views were different (among Democrats, Republicans, Independents; very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, and very liberal users)

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project January 20-February 19, 2012 tracking survey. N for social networking site users = 1,047. Survey was conducted on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish.
But ideological self-sorting is taking place, especially among the most committed.

The most ideological are the most likely to agree most often on social networking sites.

*Asked of SNS users whose friends post political content: How often do you agree with the political opinions or political content your friends post on social networking sites?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Position</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Only sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very liberal</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very conservative</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project January 20-February 19, 2012 tracking survey. N for SNS users whose friends post political content on social networking sites = 763. (Note: N for very conservative SNS users is 47.) Survey was conducted on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish.
And people are also reinforcing beliefs and content that they approve of.

### What SNS users do about political content on the sites that they appreciate

% of SNS users who respond in different ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Post</th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hit &quot;like&quot; button</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posted positive</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View Sharing</th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friended someone who</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project January 20-February 19, 2012 tracking survey. N for social networking site users = 1,047. (Note: N for very conservative SNS users is 56.) Survey was conducted on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish.
A few other notes on ideological self-sorting

1. It’s incredibly difficult to disentangle technology-driven “self-segregation” from the broader trends towards increased polarization in the culture at large.

2. We see this behavior in lots of other places, not just social networks (TV news sources, trust in different news orgs, etc etc).

3. Ordinary users have complicated views on the subject. They like how it impacts them (“I can find other people who share my views and talk to them!”) but worry about the big-picture implications for others (“It helps the loudest voices dominate the public debate!”)
Political talk in social spaces can also lead to drama and annoyance.

Have you ever blocked, unfriended, or hidden someone on a SNS because they ...?

% of SNS users who have done this

- Posted something you disagreed with: Liberal 6%, Moderate 8%, Conservative 16%
- Posted too frequently about politics: Liberal 8%, Moderate 8%, Conservative 14%
- Disagreed with something you posted: Liberal 1%, Moderate 4%, Conservative 11%
- Argued about political issues: Liberal 6%, Moderate 7%, Conservative 11%
- Posted something that you worried would offend: Liberal 3%, Moderate 5%, Conservative 8%

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project January 20-February 19, 2012 tracking survey. N for social networking site users = 1,047. Survey was conducted on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish.
Who gets the boot? Mostly (but not always) friends-of-friends

67% of those who blocked, unfriended, or hid someone on a social networking site did it to a distant friend or acquaintance.

31% did it to someone they had never met in person.

31% did it to a close personal friend.

21% did it to a coworker.

18% did it to a member of their family.
Other interesting “internet and politics” related findings
Social networks and campaign news

12% of Americans regularly got campaign news from Facebook by October 2012, up from 6% in January.

That puts Facebook roughly on par with national newspapers, NPR and late night comedy shows as a campaign news source.

Ultimately, no single platform dominates the campaign news game—just 6% of Americans say that they turn to only one source for campaign info.
55% of registered voters watched online political videos in 2012

% of internet-using registered voters who watched different campaign videos

- News reports about the campaign: 48%
- Previously recorded video of candidate speeches, press conferences or debates: 40%
- Informational video explaining political issue: 39%
- Humorous or parody video: 37%
- Political ads: 36%
- Live video of a candidate speech, press conference or debate: 28%
Political videos spread through (online and offline) word of mouth

% of internet-using registered voters who have...

- Had others recommend videos posting on SNS: 40%
- Had others recommend videos by telling them in person: 36%
- Had others recommend videos by sending an email or text message: 32%
- Have encouraged others to watch particular online political videos: 23%
- Have created own online political video for others to watch: 1%
## Mobile Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>88% of registered voters own a cell phone and…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27% of them use their phone to keep up with election news or political issues in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ of these cell owners use text messaging and…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19% texted with friends or family about the election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% signed up to get text messages directly from a candidate or campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% got unwanted political texts that they didn’t sign up to receive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half of these cell owners have a smartphone and…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% use it to read about the election on social networking sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35% use it to “fact check” statements they heard during the campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18% used it to post their own comments about the election on a SNS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dual-screen experiences

Among 18-39 year olds: 67% only on TV, 10% only on computer or mobile device, 22% on TV and other screen.

All told, half of all cell owners are “connected viewers” who use their phones to do things like fact-check things they’ve heard on TV or visit a website they heard mentioned.
Finally, a brief look at younger voters and “the social vote”

Social media and voting
% of registered voters in different age groups who have used social media like Facebook or Twitter to receive/send voting messages or announce their presidential choice

- Have been encouraged to vote by family, friends
- Have announced your vote via social media
- Have encouraged others to vote for a particular candidate

Final take-aways

Social networks are...

1. A mainstream venue for political discussion
2. A space for activism
3. A place where people go to “support the team” with other “fans”
4. Not a uniquely Democrat/Republican or liberal/conservative space (at least at the user level)

Political engagement today...

1. Is highly social
2. Takes place in real time
3. Occurs across multiple virtual and IRL spaces
4. Happens on a wide range of platforms and devices
QUESTIONS?
All data available at: pewinternet.org

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