

# **The Use of Family Strategy and Social Media in the 2012 Presidential Election**

An essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from  
the  
**Honors College at the College of Charleston**  
with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication

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April 2013

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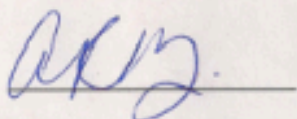
Secondary Reader 2: Dr. Leigh Moscovitz

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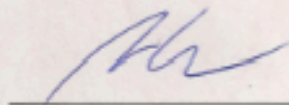
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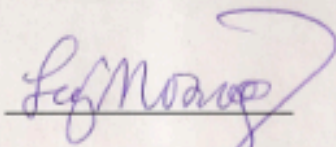
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### **Abstract**

The present study examines the 2012 presidential candidates Barack Obama (D) and Mitt Romney (R) use of social media to incorporate their families into their campaign strategy. Throughout the study, reference to “family” or “family values” signifies the candidates’ personal families rather than family ideology.

Content analysis was used to examine both candidates use of social media from November 2011 to November 2012 and 469 items from different social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and Tumblr, were analyzed.

It was found that Obama had more frequency in posts that included his family, as well as more frequency in framing policy and issue-based messages through the use of his family. Overall, this gave Obama a more personalized campaign due to his ability to relate to viewers.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the year leading up to a United States presidential election, the incumbent candidate and challenging candidates spend millions of dollars on campaign advertisements and campaign communication. Since the conception of American political parties, it has been common practice for candidates to stress their strengths, downplay their weaknesses, and attack their opponent(s) through their campaigns. Although these campaign strategies have been used for decades, recent studies show that highlighting candidates' families through campaign material is considered effective strategy for today's political candidate. It is important to note that in the present study, any reference to "family" or "family values" refers to the candidates' personal family lives, not ideological perspectives.

The 2012 presidential election between Democratic Incumbent Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney was one of the most contentious to date. Candidates employed a variety of strategies to out-campaign one another, with both candidates utilizing family members to portray a family image and communicate a personal touch. For example, Richter (2012) provided a non-scientific analysis of the Romney and Obama websites and from her analysis she suggested that Obama's website was more effective because "Obama's pages have a more personal touch, with the use of family photos, story telling, and inspiring quotes."

Both candidates also employed family strategy through social media, which is new to the campaign field. Both candidates and their spouses used popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to advocate their platforms, and

Obama's daughters used their personal Twitter accounts to show their support for their dad, creating a cohesive family unit; this may not have been a planned strategy by the Obama camp, however a family image is still portrayed to those constituents who are socially active.

During the 2012 election, Romney faced criticism regarding his inability to relate to the average American. In order to counteract the robot image that Democrats were happily painting, commercials and interviews including his family began airing on primetime networks as an attempt to humanize him. Murse (N.D.) analyzed Ann Romney's role in the 2012 election and wrote that Mrs. Romney "was seen as an effective campaigner who helped break the ice between voters and her husband, who faced criticism that he was aloof and out of touch with middle-class Americans" (Murse, N.D.). Murse stated that Mrs. Romney was the campaign's "secret weapon" and that her speech at the National Convention, which included intimate details about her marriage and her battle with breast cancer, helped make the Romney family seem less like an out of touch, unrealistically wealthy family, and more like your next-door neighbors.

Although Obama never faced the criticism over his "humanness" as Romney did, he continued to use his family as a strategic component of his campaign. In addition to his family's social media presence, Mrs. Obama's support of her husband is evident throughout the political community. According to Kantor (2012), "Mrs. Obama's advocacy for her husband can be so forceful that speechwriters have had to tone it down over the years for public presentation," (Kantor, 2012). The article, which describes Mrs. Obama's famously compassionate hugs as a metaphor for how

she approaches the campaign, states that her advisers encourage her to portray a non-partisan image: “she is most potent when she does not appear overtly political and that she comes across best as a gracious noncombatant in the red-and-blue wars,” (Kantor, 2012).

According to Kantor (2012), Mrs. Obama’s hugs narrow the gap in the same way Mrs. Romney’s story telling does. Though the means are different, the end result is the same for both parties and both families: they present a unified family front to show America that they can unify the country. Voters care about the unity of politicians’ families because it is seen as a direct reflection of their leadership skills. As Mrs. Obama stated in a campaign speech in 2008, “if you can’t run your own house, you certainly can’t run the White House.”

Family image and family values are not only important to candidate campaigns but also to voter decisions. For example, A Gallup Poll conducted in 2007 revealed that, “the vast majority of Americans say that candidates’ positions [on family values] will be extremely (36%) or very (39%) important to their vote” (Carroll, 2007). Family values were defined by 32% of participants as some variation of the word “family” such as family unit, family structure, and strong families (Carroll, 2007). This study also found that family values resonate more with “Republicans, self-described conservatives, and women” and that “eighty-eight percent of conservatives say the candidates’ positions on family values will be extremely or very important to their vote, much higher than the 75% of moderates and especially the 58% of liberals who say this” (Carroll, 2007).

Further, van Zoonen et al. (2007) conducted a study that used a Dr. Phil segment to examine how family life and personal experience of political candidates influence the political decisions of others. van Zoonen et al. (2007) found that “the personal and family life of the posters themselves appeared as a main source of knowledge. In addition the concept of ‘the family’ was often evoked as a rhetorical instrument (327).” However, this is only one example of the way candidates use their families as strategic campaign components.

In fact, Mitt Romney’s oldest son, Tagg, quit his job as the chief marketing officer of the L.A. Dodgers to work full-time on the 2008 campaign, and two other Romney sons (Josh and Craig) worked on it part time (Burr, 2007). During that campaign season, Romney did “his best to show off a traditional family as he campaigns as a conservative with values the American people want in a president. His campaign launched a new Web site, [fivebrothers.mittromney.com](http://fivebrothers.mittromney.com), which features a blog by Romney's five sons, along with links to their Myspace.com profiles,” (Burr, 2007). Burr (2007) suggests the following:

Family members have been a common sight on the campaign trail for many presidential candidates. Al Gore's daughters, Kristin and Karenn, joined him on the stump in 2000, as did John Kerry's kids in his 2004 White House bid. President Bush's twin girls, Jenna and Barbara, were prominently featured in both his presidential campaigns.

Gil Troy, a professor of history at McGill University claims candidates’ kids and wives are “valuable props” that convey “that the candidate stands for goodness and family values and the American way of life,” (Burr, 2007).



The purpose of this study is to discover how Mitt Romney and Barack Obama used social media to incorporate family rhetoric into their 2012 strategic campaign strategy. Based on previous findings mentioned in this section, it is evident that voters are turning more attention to social media outlets and that voters respond well to family rhetoric; what has not been analyzed however, is how well candidates are using this information to run their campaigns. This study will examine specific social media channels for both candidates' use of family rhetoric throughout the campaign season and based on the winner of the election, make conclusions about each candidate's success at reaching said combination of social media and family rhetoric.

According to Allott (2012), the 2012 presidential race was between two candidates who equally represented family values. "Though they differ in many ways, President Obama and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney both are loyal husbands, fiercely devoted fathers and all around role models as family men" (Allott, *Washington Post*, 2012). Based on this assertion, the present study will utilize framing theory as the basis for the investigation in order to examine the use of family in the campaigns of challenger Mitt Romney (R) and incumbent Barack Obama (D). Therefore, the present study assumes that the way in which a candidates' family is framed influences election outcomes and it therefore merits further investigation.

The following chapter (2) will provide a comprehensive review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 will outline the methods employed to answer the research questions, while Chapter 4 will provide the results from the framing analysis.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the significant of the findings and the implications that follow.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### *Social Media and Politics*

In the Digital Age, communication campaigns are no longer limited to traditional news sources such as newspapers and news television programs. According to Bimber and Davis (2003), online campaigning primarily reinforces messages found in traditional news sources (as cited in Herrnson, P., Stokes-Brown, A., & Hindman, M., 2007); however, the online environment has also made campaigning more complex in that it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between news and opinion (Manovich, 2009, p. 326). Further, most campaigns find the Internet “more helpful than traditional media” (Herrnson et al., p. 33). Herrnson et al. (2007) found that many variables influence how much a candidate uses the Internet for campaigning including “voter demographics, candidate characteristics, and strategic and structural variables” (p. 39). Regardless of the level of use, social web platforms play an integral role in the success of today’s campaign for everything from soliciting donations to posting videos (Jerpi, 2012). Wortham (2012) wrote that the 2008 campaign, notorious for Obama’s extensive social media campaign, was just the beginning:

If the presidential campaigns of 2008 were dipping a toe into social media like Facebook and Twitter, their 2012 versions are well into the deep end. They are taking to fields of online battle that might seem obscure to the non-Internet-obsessed — sharing song playlists on Spotify, adding frosted pumpkin bread recipes to Pinterest and posting the candidates’ moments at home with the children on Instagram.

Another clear benefit that new media sources offer campaigns is the ability to transcend time and location barriers that traditional media presents (Manovich, 2009, p. 327). Further, a study conducted on the 2011 Canadian election found that social media attracted young voters, a previously hard to reach demographic (Reilly, 2011, p. 504). Wortham (2012) stated that candidates believe that votes from young supporters are at stake and that they can reach those constituents by using new media: The campaigns want to inject themselves into the conversation on services like Tumblr, where political dialogue often takes the form of remixed photos and quirky videos.

Reilly (2011) argues that satire also attracts these young voters and that the two working together is an ideal campaign strategy. Wortham (2012) cites an example of this: “to remind Tumblr users about the first presidential debate on Wednesday, Mr. Obama’s team used an obscure clip of Lindsay Lohan, saying ‘It’s October 3’ in the comedy ‘Mean Girls.’ And on Twitter, Mitt Romney’s bodyguard posted a picture of the candidate’s family playing Jenga before the debate” (Wortham, 2012).

#### *The Value of Family as Campaign Strategy*

van Zoonen et. al. (2007) revealed that “the concept of ‘the family’ was often used as a rhetorical instrument” in political campaigns as strategy (p. 327). In fact, social media has furthered the use of family as campaign strategy by allowing constituents a glimpse into the personal lives of politicians. To be clear, this study uses terms such as “family” and “family values” as they relate to the candidates’ personal lives, not family ideology. In the 2012 presidential election, both Obama

and Romney campaigns used sites like Tumblr and YouTube to post user-generated GIFS that “might show the president high-fiving children or hugging his wife and daughters” (Wortham, 2012). Not only is campaign staff using the social media channels to reach voters, both of the candidates’ wives had personal Pinterest accounts which they posted a variety of images from campaign material to recipes. In the same way, Michelle Obama posts use her initials — “mo” — to differentiate her communication from the campaign staff on her Twitter account.

According to van Zoonen et al. (2007), voters care what about candidates’ family structure and personal lives. An analysis of a 2004 episode of Dr. Phil, in which the candidates were interviewed, supports this claim. van Zoonen et. al (2007) found that, “the candidates and their wives were asked about how they grew up, how they raised their children, and whether they managed to maintain a normal family life” (p. 323). Further, the segment was described as examining the candidates as potential role models for American families, which is an example of how the American public, regardless of political party, values the idea of a strong first family. In addition, two message boards captured viewers’ perceptions of Bush and Kerry following the Dr. Phil interview with the candidates. Although the topics discussed were highly political (foreign policy, abortion, deficit, etc.), upon the viewer analysis, “the personal and family life of the posters themselves appeared as a main source of knowledge. In addition the concept of ‘the family’ was often evoked as a rhetorical instrument ” (van Zoonen al., p. 327).

The overall important conclusion from this study was that discussion board participants debated the significance of the candidates’ family lives in relation to

their politics with some arguing the importance and others arguing the insignificance. However, “using one’s own family and personal experience or those of others to make sense of concrete political issues was common and uncontroversial” (van Zoonen et. al., p. 328). Although Dr. Phil attempted to keep the interviews family centered, both candidates managed to incorporate political issues, thus blurring the line between family life and political life.

Similarly, a study on the 2000 Bush/Gore campaigns revealed that the number of times candidates are photographed with their family affects the election outcome due to their perceived relation to family values (German, 2010). The study found that Bush “received more overall coverage and appeared in more photos with his family,” and that “each sought to put forth images that compensated for perceived weakness” (German, 2010, p 48). It was found that informal family pictures indicate a caring person, while a more formal shot may indicate leadership skills. Interestingly, Gore was photographed twice as many times with non-family members as Bush, and Bush almost always appeared with his family or political advisors if the photo was informal, reinforcing Bush’s “family man” image (German, 2010).

In the same way, in the 2008 election, the McCain campaign tried to take Palin’s damaged family image (the unplanned pregnancy of her unwed 17 year-old daughter) and spin it into something positive by promoting a pre-election wedding of Bristol Palin and the father of her unborn child (Marshall, 2008). The wedding never happened and McCain lost the election, perhaps due in part to Palin’s tarnished image, yet the strategy of using family values in the campaign was

employed; the strategy appeared to play on the values and emotions of the Republican party by promoting the wedding of two teenagers because it is “the right thing to do” when a pregnancy occurs out of wedlock.

The aforementioned studies corroborate the suggestions by Cloud (n.d.) in a study conducted on different politicians’ use of family value rhetoric. Specifically, the study focuses on the rhetoric of family values in the 1992 presidential election and found that “much of the subsequent coverage of the campaign ties the family values rhetoric to issues of race, racism, and poverty” (Cloud, n.d., p. 281). According to Cloud’s article,

Family values served in the documents of the 1992 Presidential campaign such as an ideographic slogan, becoming a locus of rhetorical struggle over issues of race, gender, and class. However, an irony of family values as an ideograph is that its use constructs not a public—but rather a privatized set of identifications and commitments.” (p. 283)

Both Clinton and Bush’s use of family value rhetoric is analyzed in this study, and as such, Cloud (n.d.) found that, “Bill Clinton’s alleged marital infidelity and Hilary Clinton’s liberal feminist stance and assertive public role put the family credential of the prospective first family into question” (p. 287). On the other hand, Barbara Bush was praised as being “a gracious lady, a devoted wife, a dedicated mother, and a caring grandmother,” (p. 285); thus, enforcing the Bush’s potential of being the perfect First Family. Supporting this claim, Cloud (n.d.) posits that Barbara Bush was integral to the success of the campaign; “her role as den mother

was to facilitate wonder and decency, just as her role in the campaign was to facilitate Republican victory on themes of the utopian family” (p. 286).

Although most would view the family values campaign strategy as effective and necessary, Cloud (n.d.) argues that the focus on family values is actually negative. “When they hail the traditional family, politicians and pundits also put forward a compelling social critique of a society stratified by race, gender, and class and raying at the multicultural edges” (p. 281). Further, Cloud (n.d.) states that, “the current political obsession with the family is disabling to the public space insofar as it undermines its audiences’ ability to understand our world in structural, collective, political ways” (p. 288).

Similar to the use of spouses as campaigning strategy, the use of children as strategic campaign components is also a fairly common occurrence. An article featured in *The Observer* examined the use of 2012 presidential candidates’ use of their children as strategic campaign components. Harris (2012) claims that Mitt Romney was most successful in strategically using his children to promote family values. “As their father has campaigned in Iowa and New Hampshire, four of the Romney boys – Josh, Tagg, Matt and Craig – have made regular appearances at events and in front of the TV cameras, helped by the chiseled good looks that they share with their parents” (Harris, 2012). Harris also claims that “private virtues translated as public virtues” is becoming a theme in political campaigns. “Experts say that putting family members into the public eye – especially large numbers of good-looking children – sends a clear political message, especially to Republicans. It



is making an unsaid promise that the happy and fertile private life on display will translate into a virtuous period in office” (Harris, 2012).

The aforementioned studies provide support to the argument that political parties, regardless of affiliation, use family value rhetoric to send and support their messaging regarding social issues. In addition, contemporary literature supports the notion that candidates used their entire families, not just their spouses, for strategic campaign purposes to portray to the public that they are the most suitable individual to assume the highest office in United States politics.

#### *Selective Exposure to Campaign Communication*

It is evident that messages and images that communicate family values are a rhetorical instrument commonly used as strategy in political campaigns; however, the success of that strategy, many times, will lie in the hands of the media consumer and the media outlet. With that said, two major communication concepts are at play: selective exposure and media balance. First, selective exposure is when people select information that matches or supports their own beliefs (Stroud, 2008). In relations to politics, Stroud (2008) found that people’s political beliefs are related to their level of media exposure, and that selective exposure occurs across all mediums. It does not seem unusual that people would prefer to listen to information that confirms their already held beliefs, however, several scholars suggest that selective exposure can actually be destructive to a democratic society. According to Stroud (2008), “without a shared base of information, it is difficult to imagine citizens agreeing on matters of public policy and it is easy to envision citizens

developing highly polarized attitudes toward political matters” when they are exposed to single perspective sources (p. 342).

In the 2012 election, partisan reporting was increasingly evident as FOX News rallied their conservative base and MSNBC rallied their liberal base, both unapologetically. This type of selective exposure is known as partisan selective exposure, or “the selection of media sharing one’s political predispositions” (Stroud, 2008). Stroud’s study found that people increasingly select congenial outlets as an election approaches because partisanship tends to be emphasized during elections. Evidence supporting this theory was found during the 2000 election when visitors to the Bush and Gore websites shared the political outlook advanced by the website (Stroud, 2008). The pattern continued in the 2004 election; an individual’s media selections were “increasingly related to their political beliefs” (Stroud, 2008, p. 359).

It can be assumed that this pattern of selective exposure has not diminished since 2004. If the availability of cable in 2000 increased selective exposure, the availability of the Internet and social media in 2012 as well as future elections will only increase exposure to partisan news and political information. On one hand, access to a variety of media sources has increased participation in the political process; however, the public is becoming increasingly polarized into partisan groups due in part to the to the pervasive media partisanship (Stroud, 2008).

Although scholars appear to agree on partisan selective exposure, debate exists regarding the level of media bias that truly exists. A study by Eveland and Shah (2003) found that Republicans are more likely to believe that a bias exists in media, although other studies show little evidence of consistent bias in one direction

or another. Based on research on the 1984 through 1996 presidential elections, the authors specifically found that “news media coverage may simply be ‘biased’ in favor of candidates who are doing well in public opinion polls” rather than biased toward an entire political party (Eveland & Shah, 2003, p. 103). This finding challenges the hostile-media phenomenon (Vallone et al., 1985, as cited in Eveland & Shah, 2003), which suggests that those who believe a bias exists believe that bias is against their position. This perception has been found true particularly true among Republicans (Stroud, 2008).

Though a belief in media bias exists, a 1988 newsmagazine study found that magazines tried to provide balanced visual coverage of the presidential candidates in the 1988 campaign (Moriarty & Popovich, 1989). They did find, however, that “the Republican candidates, who were also the winners, did receive larger play,” which supports Stroud’s (2007) hypothesis that candidates who are doing well in the polls receive increased coverage simply due to popularity.

The Moriarty and Popovich (1989) study also suggests another important factor in the political communication process; visuals are a critical element of political campaigning. According to Moriarty and Popovich (1989), “people have learned to draw inferences from physical appearance and movements and that this is particularly valuable at election time when judgments need to be made about a candidate’s character, trustworthiness, mental acuity, and physical vigor.” This emphasizes the importance of creating a positive family image for candidates’ through campaign messaging, both visual and print, regardless of the fairness of their coverage or the partisan diversity of their viewers. According to Moriarty and

Popovich (1989), “the presentation of a candidate’s self through media is similar to an actor playing a political role and . . .the role playing projects a characteristic style that reflects how the candidate wants his or her performance and personal qualities to be perceived.” In fact, candidates use a variety of tools to create positive perceptions within and among their constituent base, and visual images are just one of those many tools.

### *Framing Theory and Strategic Campaigning*

Political elections are intense competitions, and strategy is used as fiercely as in any athletic game or challenge. Candidates communicate messages to potential voters through specific, targeted communication strategy that employs the process of message framing. According to *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of Social World*, frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Hertog & McLeod, p. 142). Framing an issue influences how audiences think about the issues by invoking interpretative schemas that influence their interpretation of incoming information (Goffman, 1974). According to Carlson and Kowal’s (2007) findings, frames “are used by media and can influence how an individual makes sense of political issues” (p. 13). In regard to political campaigns, many times the following holds true:

[T]he goal is to frame one’s opponent as out of touch, or behind the times, or out to lunch, or willfully ignorant, while framing one’s self as holding the views that best reflect the majority of Americans, or American ideals, or

American interests in the world. The power of definition and framing is truly awesome, and candidates ignore it at their peril. (Medhurst, 2005, pg. 27)

According to a study on campaign rhetoric, “citizens routinely rely on their feelings when evaluating political stimuli . . . political elites who speak the language of emotion have a better chance of connecting with the electorate than those who do not . . . [and] emotional appeals allow candidates to capitalize on the time-honored strategy of emphasizing widely shared, or consensual, values and goals” (Jerit, 2004, p. 566). Jerit also found that a political election is a survival of the fittest scenario and that the candidates who most accurately connect with potential voters on an emotional level will be the winner; employing family members as part of a campaign strategy aligns with this theory of emoting shared values.

These ads are directed to tug on the heartstrings of Americans and to prime them in a fashion that forces them to think beyond the issues and concentrate on the characteristics and personalities of the candidates. Image advertising tends to focus on emotionally charged content such as trust, character, and competence. (Carlson, Kowal, McGloin, 2009, p. 13)

In this way, it is important for political strategists to frame advertisements and other campaign material in a way that will captivate and emotionally connect with the viewer, and as established, a contemporary way of doing this is by incorporating family into campaign communication. Essentially, research on political framing suggests that if candidates can successfully be framed as a family-oriented individual through their campaign materials, then the public will assume they share the value of family without doing much research past that message

exposure (advertisement) (Carlson & Koval, 2007). It is important, then, for a campaign strategy to frame a candidate as family oriented if that is a value deemed important by voters. A 2007 Gallup Poll analyzing voters opinions found that, “Republicans (86% extremely or very important) are more likely than independents or Democrats to say the family values issue will be important to their vote for president next year; still, a strong majority of both independents (71%) and Democrats (72%) say this issue will be important.” As such, the present study will investigate how Romney and Obama used their families to strategically frame their images in their campaign materials during the 2012 presidential election season using social media.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Due to the limited amount of existing research about the use of family and family values rhetoric as political campaign strategy, the present exploratory study utilized content analysis to investigate the role that family played throughout the 2012 presidential campaign season. By using framing theory as the foundation for the investigation and content analysis as the method to analyze campaign content, the researcher was able to ascertain not only how frequent family was used as campaign strategy but also the way in which family was communicated through campaign messages.

Content analysis was considered the most appropriate method for the present investigation because of its ability to categorize and classify communication content, like campaign messages. "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). There are five distinct steps associated with the web-based content analysis method: 1) develop research questions, 2) select a sample from which to gather data, 3) operationalize the coding units, 4) code the data, and 5) analyze and interpret the data gathered (McMillan, 2000). Since the research questions were presented at the end of Chapter 2, only steps two through five are discussed below.

#### *Sample Selection*

Considering the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which family was used as a strategic campaign component as well as how candidates framed the family message during the 2012 Presidential Election Season, the social

media accounts for the Obama and Romney campaigns served as the medium for the content analysis for several reasons. First, unlike traditional campaign material, social media allows candidates to be more candid and personal with their messaging thus creating an environment conducive for family-related content . Second, social media proved the most convenient as well as comprehensive for the analysis due to its accessibility and availability to the researcher. Third, the social media accounts of each candidate were believed to have higher viewership/readership in sum than traditional media outlets. Finally, existing literature supports the notion that social media platforms have changed the face of political campaigning by playing an integral role in the communication (and ultimate) success of a candidate; therefore, the researcher believed social media would provide the best content to accurately answer the research questions.

Although all major social media outlets employed by the 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns were intended to provide content for the present study, the specific social media outlets used were Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr, and YouTube. Although the researcher does consider Twitter to be an important, and major, social media platform, the Twitter posts for the Obama campaign were not archived making it impossible to analyze the Twitter accounts for both candidates. However, both candidates have archived content on Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr and YouTube covering the period of the analysis; therefore, content from November 1, 2011 to November 30, 2012 was gathered and analyzed. The researcher felt that the year time frame was appropriate for the analysis because it allowed representation from both primary and general election campaigning. The start date of November 1, 2011



provided a picture of the campaign landscape during the primary election period while the end date of November 30, 2012 provided campaign content through the end of the general election.

Due to the sheer amount of content on the social media sites analyzed – according to a Pew Research study, a two-week period (June 4-17, 2012) totaled 512 posts across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter between Romney and Obama combined (Journalism.org, 2012)—a purposive sampling strategy was used to select the posts for the analysis. According to Reinhard (2006), purposive sampling involves collecting a sample selected deliberately by researchers, usually because they think certain characteristics are typical or representative of the population. For this study, posts were selected if they contained anything pertaining to family and/or family values. This included any pictures of candidates and their family members, any mention of “family” or specific family members in the content or captions, any family language (“wife”, “husband”, “mother”, “father”, “daughter”, “son”, etc.), any pictures of constituent families, and any posts including language that referred to “family.” With that said, the purposive sampling strategy for YouTube was different than the strategy used for the other social outlets due to the large number of videos and varying length of videos. For each candidate’s YouTube site, one video per month was analyzed from November 2011 to November 2012, resulting in a total of 26 videos analyzed. The videos were chosen based on their likeliness to contain anything regarding family issues; for example, a video discussing tax reform is more likely to discuss family issues than a video discussing foreign policies because tax reform directly affects families and foreign policy typically does not.

The initial query of each social media account yielded the following results:

**Obama Campaign**

- 136 Facebook posts
- 24 Obama Pinterest posts
- 152 Tumblr posts
- 13 You Tube videos

**Romney Campaign**

- 101 Facebook posts
- 15 Pinterest posts
- 15 Tumblr posts
- 13 You Tube video

A total of 469 posts/items were gathered and analyzed from the social media outlets selected.

### *Operationalization*

Using the content analysis method, the researcher was able to determine the frequency with which each candidate used the concept of family as a campaign message (RQ1). In order for counts to take place, the family-related content needed to be identified. Therefore, the researcher counted all references to family if any of the following elements were included in the post: a photograph was considered to contain family content if the picture contained a candidate with any member of his family, any of the candidates' family members without the candidate, voters with one or more of their family members, or the mention of any of the above in the caption.

The researcher was also able to identify dominant "family" frames used by each of the candidates by searching for central, organizing ideas in the content, allowing the researcher to interpret the meaning associated with text or a picture (RQ2 and RQ3). According to *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of Social World*, frames are "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Hertog & McLeod, p. 142). Although criticized for its subjective and abstract nature, framing "has powerful implications for the way individuals and organizations act toward the election and governance in general" (p. 143). Based on this notion, the dominant frames communicated through the pictures and posts on Obama and Romney's social media outlets could influence voters' perception of each

candidate. Further, Hertog and McLeod (2003) also state that fram[ing] “is the deliberative attempt of individuals or groups to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them” (p. 147), and one could argue that this is particularly true in elections.

Generated from an initial review of campaign material as well as a review of the literature, the following are the generic frames that the researcher identified and used for the content analysis: 1) personal/family, 2) military, 3) healthcare, 4) education, 5) women’s issues, 6) voting/campaign, and 7) tax reform. Frames “determine what content is relevant to discussion of a social concern” (Hertog & McLeod, 2003, p. 144) and this is true of the 2012 election. All of the mentioned items were heavily discussed in policy debate, ads, and campaign material, which is reflective of what the public views to be important. The frames were defined as follows:

1) **Personal/Family**: Any reference to the candidate in regard to their family role as father, grandfather, husband, son, brother, etc. This could also include the citation of personal family values and/or beliefs related to the family unit. This frame helps define the candidate in relation to all things family.

2) **Military**: Any reference to our troops, men and women serving our country, etc. in regard to family. This included posts of family members of military men and women and candidates mentioning the military or military men and women and their families.

3) **Healthcare**: Any reference to healthcare and the effect it has on families. This included posts by candidates regarding how healthcare policy will affect

voters' families and posts made by voters that included personal testimonies regarding their family members and how Obama's healthcare policy has affected their lives.

4) **Education:** Any reference to student loans affecting families or higher education for "our" children.

5) **Women's Issues:** Any reference to equal pay, Women for Obama, or healthcare for women. This included posts made by candidates, as well as posts that had personal testimonies of voters and how the issues affect their family members.

6) **Voting/Campaign:** Any visual or verbal reference to the campaign, voting, or the election, that also included family. This included primarily the candidates and their spouses promoting primary elections and voter registration, in addition to pictures of the couples at campaign events.

7) **Tax Reform:** Any reference to tax reform affecting families or posts including voters and how tax reform affects them and their families.

### *Coding Method*

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher created a code sheet that included the specific categories that supported the analysis. When a picture or post met the mentioned criteria, thus falling into a category, it was documented on the code sheet. A category is "a covering term for an array of general phenomena: concepts, constructs, themes, and other types of 'bins' in which to put items that are similar" (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002, p. 214). Coding for each category was a way for the researcher to recognize common themes in a

quantitative manner. According to Lindolf and Taylor (2002), “the core purpose of coding is to mark the units of text as they relate meaningfully to categories” (p. 216).

Coupled with the presence or absence of the “family” reference in images or text, the code sheet also included the following categories: source, caption/title, date, prominent frames (family, military, healthcare, education, equal rights, voting/campaign, tax reform, and other), family imagery (personal), family imagery (issues-oriented), reference to family values, length (for videos), and relevant notes. The coding process took place between March 15, 2013 and April 5, 2013 and consisted of coding all 469 items.

Following the coding process, the researcher clustered and compared the collected data to reveal the themes/dominant frames that emerged as well as employed descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of those frames.

## Chapter 4: Results

The present study seeks to examine how presidential candidates, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, used social media to promote family values throughout the 2012 presidential election campaign season. Each candidate's social media channels were examined for images and language incorporating family and family values from November 2011 and November 2012. More specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** To what extent (how often) did the 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns use family as strategic campaign components?

**RQ2:** How was family used as strategic campaign components during the 2012 Presidential Election?

**RQ3:** What were the dominant frames used to by the 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns to communicate family and family values?

### *Results*

Several different social media channels for both the Obama and Romney campaigns were analyzed for references to family, images of family, and allusions to family values. Figure 1 displays the total number of items analyzed (n=469) as well as the breakdown of those items by candidate and social media channel.

Figure 1: Total Number of Items

|                  | <b>Total</b> | <b>YouTube</b> | <b>Facebook</b> | <b>Pinterest</b> | <b>Tumblr</b> |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Candidate</b> |              |                |                 |                  |               |
| Barack Obama     | 325          | 13             | 136             | 24               | 152           |
| Mitt Romney      | 144          | 13             | 101             | 15               | 15            |

**RQ1:** *“To what extent (how often) did the 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns use family as strategic campaign components?”*

On average, there were 25 posts per month across the Obama social media channels and 11 posts per month across the Romney social media channels that included references to family/family values at least once; however, many posts included the same references to family/family values multiple times. Figure 2 below includes the total number of family/family values references by each campaign over each social media channel.

Figure 2: Reference to Family/Family Values

|                  | <b>Total</b>  | <b>YouTube</b> | <b>Facebook</b> | <b>Pinterest</b> | <b>Tumblr</b> |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Candidate</b> |               |                |                 |                  |               |
| Barack Obama     | 667<br>(205%) | 52             | 230             | 34               | 351           |
| Mitt Romney      | 301<br>(209%) | 52             | 166             | 51               | 32            |

The frequency counts of family-related content reveals that the Obama campaign utilized this strategy to a much greater extent than the Romney campaign. In fact, the Obama campaign referenced family and/or family values more than double the amount than the Romney campaign did throughout the period of analysis.



In addition to the total references to family and/or family values by each campaign, the varied results across social media channels is also important to note. Facebook and Tumblr appear to be the primary channels used to communicate a family image and focus on family values for the Obama campaign, while Facebook was the only channel used in a significant way for the same purpose by the Romney campaign.

*RQ2: How was family used as strategic campaign components during the 2012 Presidential Election?* To answer the second research question, it was necessary to examine the way in which references to family as well as family images were used on each social media channel. In addition, the type of family images that were portrayed was analyzed.

Overall, the results revealed that references and images involving family could be divided into two categories: 1) voter families, and 2) candidate families.

| Family Imagery (Voters) |              |                |                 |                  |               |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
|                         | <b>Total</b> | <b>YouTube</b> | <b>Facebook</b> | <b>Pinterest</b> | <b>Tumblr</b> |
| <b>Candidate</b>        |              |                |                 |                  |               |
| Barack Obama            | 72<br>(22%)  | 25             | 16              | 2                | 29            |
| Mitt Romney             | 13<br>(9%)   | 11             | 1               | 0                | 1             |

Figure 3

Figure 3 gives a detailed breakdown of the use of family images/language involving voters. Overall, the results suggest that the Obama campaign used references and images of voters and their families most, comprising 22% of the total number of family-related items across the social media analyzed. An example of an item that was coded as “voter family” could have been a post on Tumblr from a voter that references their family or family values or a posted picture of one of the candidates with voters and their families, as seen in Figure 4.



As mentioned, the analysis revealed that 22% of the items involving family/family values from the Obama campaign included voters' families. On the other hand, the Romney campaign included voters' families in only 9% of the items examined. Further, Romney used his YouTube channel as a primary source for appealing to voters' families whereas Obama used Tumblr the most.

Although it was not a focus of this study, it was noticed that Obama (much more than Romney) used his Tumblr account to personalize his campaign; for

Figure 6: Family Imagery (Candidates)

|                  | Total         | YouTube | Facebook | Pinterest | Tumblr |
|------------------|---------------|---------|----------|-----------|--------|
| <b>Candidate</b> |               |         |          |           |        |
| Barack Obama     | 290<br>(89%)  | 91      | 110      | 22        | 67     |
| Mitt Romney      | 230<br>(160%) | 123     | 76       | 16        | 15     |

Figure 6

example, he commonly included personal testimonies from supporters to promote his campaign message(s) and call attention to important issues.

Figure 6 above presents the second category of results, “candidate families”. Evident in the data was Romney’s, substantial use of social media to promote his campaign message(s) using images of his own family. Romney referenced or posted images of his family multiple times in many items, especially in YouTube videos. The YouTube videos that focused on his family were usually specific to an important family event such as an anniversary, Mothers’ Day, or Fathers’ Day. On the contrary, when Obama promoted his own family through social media, it was commonly in a candid manner through photographs on Facebook and or casual videos of him and Michelle Obama laughing and talking. The photos in Figure 7 Figure 8 show the difference between the family images shared by both candidates; Obama primarily posting candid shots while Romney posting staged photos in traditional family settings.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Also noteworthy is each candidates' use of social media in regard to their preference for using one outlet over another. YouTube cannot be discussed in this section due to the sampling method of one video per month; however, the other outlets were analyzed in their entirety from November 2011 to November 2012. As detailed in Figure 1, there is clear evidence that Obama was significantly more active in promoting family and family values through social media, especially Tumblr. When Romney promoted family and family values, it was primarily through Facebook, which is more of a traditional social media channel than Tumblr. Obama's second most used channel to communicate family/family values was Facebook, which could have increased his reach in relation to the number of users. Further, both candidates used YouTube to promote their family situations and ideals with the same frequency; however, Romney predominantly posted videos on YouTube that pertained to his own family, while Obama used YouTube as a means to promote his stance on policy rather than personal, familial content. Finally, both candidates used Pinterest in identical ways - to promote their campaign message(s) as well as their families through recipes, photos and even personal passages.

Another important aspect concerning *how* the two candidates used social media channels is the way in which they publicized and even framed their marriages, . Figure 9 shows that on the surface both Romney (25%) and Obama (30%) had almost the same percentage of items where affection towards their spouses was present.. However, a deeper analysis revealed that again the Obama campaign used candid shots, i.e. dancing, laughing, kiss on the cheek, while the Romney campaign used professional images where the couple was holding hands, standing on stage in a partial embrace, or hugging. Although there were certainly exceptions to both of these findings, the norm was for the Obama campaign to project a “couple next door” image (example provided in Figure 10), while the Romney campaign to project a business professional, team image (example provided in Figure 11).

Figure 9: Physical Affection Towards Spouse

|                  | <b>Total</b> | <b>YouTube</b> | <b>Facebook</b> | <b>Pinterest</b> | <b>Tumblr</b> |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Candidate</b> |              |                |                 |                  |               |
| Barack Obama     | 98<br>(30%)  | 38             | 37              | 8                | 15            |
| Mitt Romney      | 36<br>(25%)  | 16             | 16              | 3                | 1             |

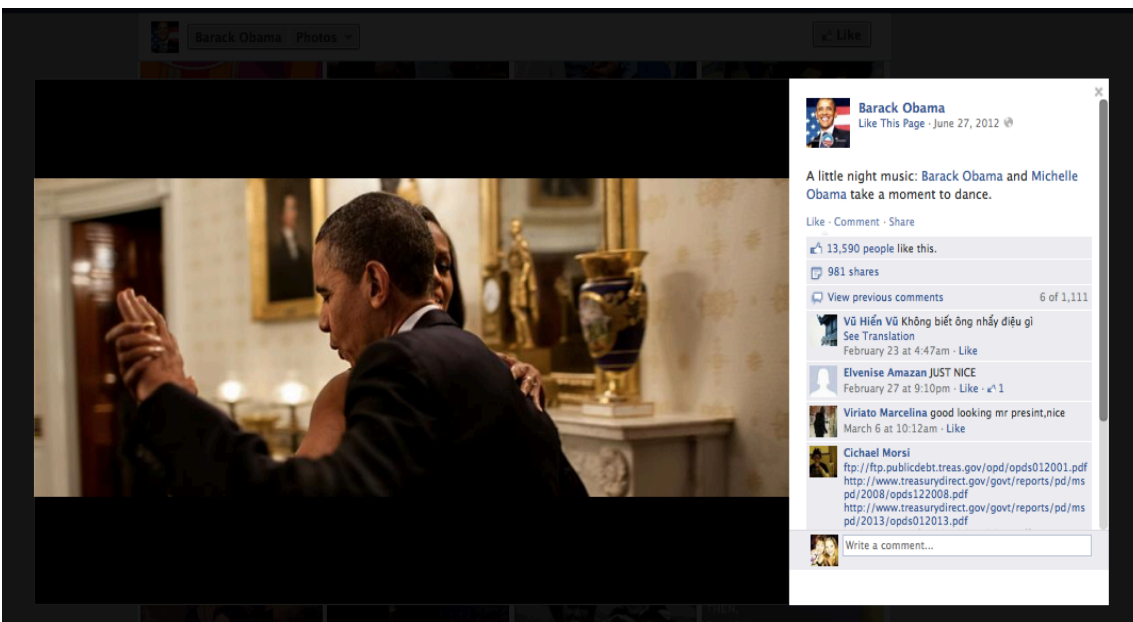


Figure 10

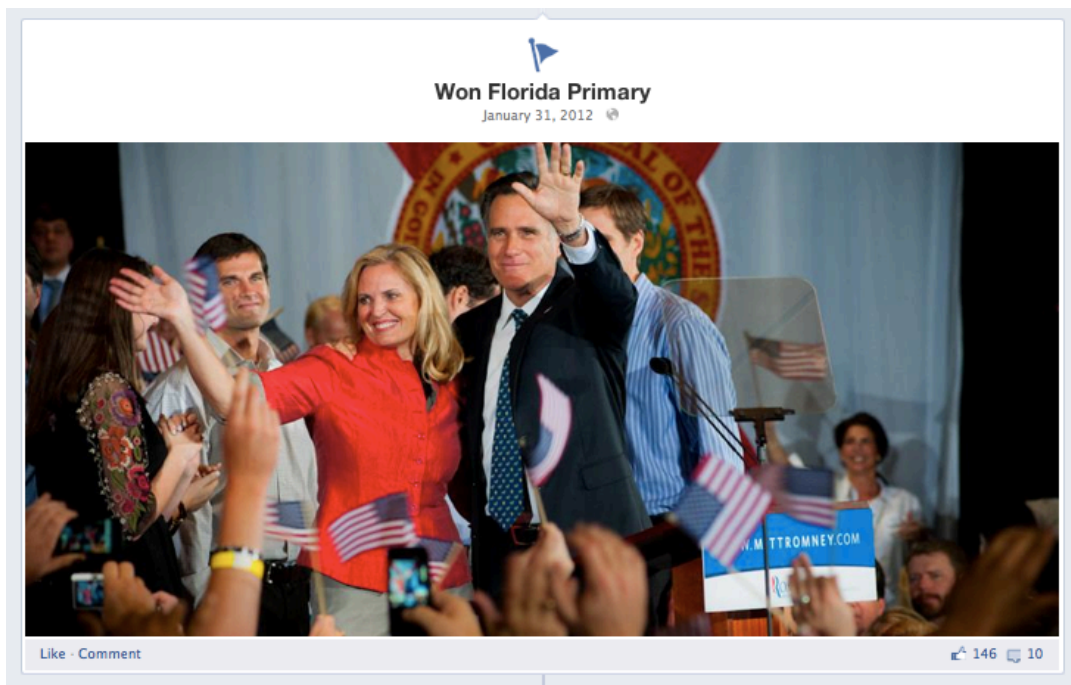


Figure 11

Figure 12: Dominant Frames Present

|                  | Education | Voting/Campaign | Equal Rights/Women's Issues | Family | Healthcare Reform | Tax Reform | Military |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------|------------|----------|
| <b>Candidate</b> |           |                 |                             |        |                   |            |          |
| Barack Obama     | 25        | 159             | 11                          | 163    | 32                | 17         |          |
| Mitt Romney      | 1         | 111             | 1                           | 79     | 0                 | 1          |          |

*RQ3: What were the dominant frames used to by the 2012 Obama and Romney campaigns to communicate family and family values?*

As previously noted, items were only coded in this analysis if they included references to family/family values. Each item identified was analyzed for the context in which it was presented. Prior to the coding phase, general frames were identified from the literature that have been commonly associated with family rhetoric in political campaigns; those frames include voter stories in relation to the election, equal rights/women's issues, personal/family references, healthcare, tax reform, military, and education.

Figure 12 reveals that the Romney campaign used references to family in regard to voters more than references to his own family, whereas Obama used references to his own family slightly more frequently than family in reference to voters.

Another trend worth noting is that Obama incorporated family rhetoric into policy issues much more frequently than Romney. Figure 12 shows that in addition to using personal references to family, Obama incorporated family stories and



family values rhetoric into posts that referenced women's issues, healthcare reform (Figure 13), tax reform, and military with relative frequency. Obama also used family/family values in posts regarding higher education, particularly when discussing student loans. Romney, however, rarely incorporated family/family values into posts relating to anything other than his campaign efforts. These findings again support the claim that Obama portrays an image of a family man concerned for family-friendly policies, while Romney appears to lack attempts at being relatable to voters. It was primarily Obama's use of personal testimonies from voters that humanize his efforts, while Romney only included his own personal statements on policy, disregarding voter sentiments.

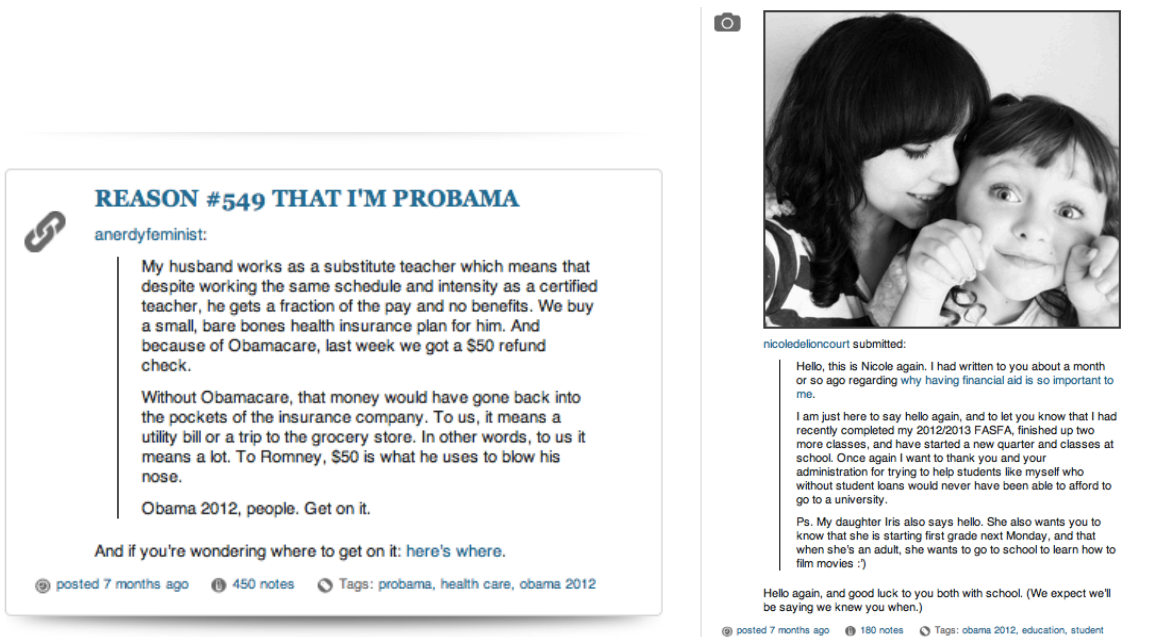


Figure 13

Further, the Obama campaign also used Michelle Obama (wife of President Barack Obama) as an advocate for women's issues and other issues impacting

female voters. In many of the posts that referenced these issues, Michelle was the focal point either through a quote, a picture, or a link to a video of her speaking about the issue. On several occasions it was implied that Michelle Obama was treated as an equal in her marriage to Obama as well as her in her contribution to the campaign, whereas Ann Romney was presented as a supporter of the campaign; she was rarely featured alone in posts or videos, and was instead commonly featured as Mitt Romney's cheerleader, always by his side or behind him.

Through this study, it is evident that both politicians used family rhetoric to frame campaign messages. Out of the 325 total posts that included family rhetoric, the Obama campaign used family to frame messages dealing with his personal life, values, and experiences 163 times and messages dealing with the election and his campaign 159 times. On the contrary, the Romney campaign used family to frame to messages dealing with his personal life, values, and experiences 79 times and messages dealing with the election and his campaign 111 times.

Another major finding regarding the frames used by the candidates was that Romney's use of family rhetoric to frame issues other than the campaign was insignificant. Obama did a much better job of incorporating family rhetoric into the discussions on healthcare (32/0), tax reform (17/1), education (25/1), military (13/1), and equality issues (11/1) than Romney.

### *Conclusion*

Mitt Romney and Barack Obama used social media in two very different ways during the 2012 presidential election with the hopes of achieving the same goal: incorporating family and the demonstration of family values into their campaign

strategy. Based on the results of this analysis, it is evident that the Obama campaign was more successful in achieving this goal by using Tumblr, Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube to develop a personable, relatable image. He included personal testimonies of voters that were relevant to policy issues such as healthcare, equality issues, military, tax reform, and higher education. Although the Romney campaign included many posts that featured his own family, he did not frequently include family or family values rhetoric when framing policy issues.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The results presented in Chapter 4 suggest that there are two major findings that resulted from the research conducted: (1) the Obama campaign more frequently utilized family rhetoric to create a relatable, family-oriented image through social media channels than Romney, and (2) the Obama campaign used family rhetoric to frame policy and issue-based messages more frequently than the Romney. In sum, given the outcome of the 2012 election, it could be said that Obama's strategic use of the combination of family values rhetoric and social media worked to his advantage. In fact, Jerpi (2012) would suggest that it was the frequency of which the Obama campaign employed social media for campaign communication that made a considerable difference in the election outcome. "From now on, social media will have a huge impact on elections. . . .With the speed of communications and the numbers of people involved, the impact has to be significant" (Massey in Jerpi, 2012).

Obama's use of family rhetoric through social media was evident in not only the language used, i.e., "I would like my daughters to have the same opportunities as your sons," but also in the pictures posted. More specifically, the Romney campaign mentioned family and family values in language when referencing personal, family-related events and outings whereas the Obama campaign used family rhetoric for personal references as well as issues communication in order to better relate to voters. Further, the Obama campaign incorporated family and family values rhetoric when discussing specific issues like tax reform, healthcare, education,

military, and women's issues; in fact, family-oriented stories and testimonials were used to frame campaign messages on each of the aforementioned issues.

Mitt Romney suffered the criticism of being unrelatable and out of touch during the 2012 campaign, which is evident in a poll cast by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and cited in a Huffington Post article: "Obama now leads Romney by nearly three-to-one (66 percent to 23 percent) as the candidate who connects well with ordinary Americans" (Ward, 2012). Through the present content analysis, it appears that his use of family rhetoric and even social media could have contributed to this criticism. In addition, based on the results it is possible that voter perceptions were influenced from the staged family images and limited reference to family from the Romney campaign, while Obama's focus on emphasis on family appeared more authentic and candid. Although only four sites were analyzed for this study, according to Jerpi (2012), Obama used over 15 social media sites during his campaign, which "allowed him to communicate to his supporters on a more personal basis." Blogging sites such as Tumblr, a site used by both campaigns, is where social media appears to be moving. A marked example of the difference between campaigns was the actual use of Tumblr; the Obama campaign used Tumblr to relate to voters through funny messages, memes, GIFs, and reposts of voter testimonies, while the Romney campaign simply used his Tumblr to recycle and cross-post campaign material from his other social media sites. The Romney campaign used Facebook the most, which is limited to posts made only by the account owner and is becoming increasingly popular with middle-aged Americans; on the other hand, Tumblr is a blog that is managed by the account

owner who has the ability to “reblog” posts from other users, which in this case, were Obama supporters. According to a study on the perception of homophily, the feeling of the candidate being similar you, Syndr (2012) states that voters are genetically inclined to like the candidate who is most similar to them. “Thus, political discussions on TV, radio, or other media may be morphed by one’s reward gene polymorphisms and as such, may explain the prevalence of generations of die-hard republicans and equally entrenched democratic legacies. Indeed, even in politics, birds of a feather (homophily) flock together.

Also noteworthy in the findings was the frequency of posts about family; the Obama campaign posted more than double the amount of times than the Romney campaign during the period of analysis. Although posts were only counted if they included any type of family rhetoric, Obama’s posts outnumbered Romney’s by almost 200. A study published on Journalism.org (2012) that studied social media use by both candidates found similar results in that that from June 4-17 of 2012, the Obama campaign published a total of 614 posts compared to the Romney campaign, which published only 168 posts. Another interesting finding of the Journalism.org study was that Romney was four times as likely to post about Obama on his social media accounts than Obama was to post about Romney. The findings from the present study suggest that Obama’s inclusion of voters’ families in the framing of messages/posts about topics such as healthcare reform (most prominent on his Tumblr account) allowed voters to feel that their personal situation mattered to Obama and that he could relate to where they were in life. So while the Obama

campaign related to voters through social media, the Romney campaign appeared to reference his opponent.

### *Framing*

Chapter 4 revealed that Obama did a better job of personalizing, even humanizing, his campaign and focused more on framing his family in regard to his campaign efforts (his family standing on stage with him at a rally). This is important because it speaks directly to the first major finding of this study: the different uses of family and family rhetoric through social media, and the outcomes that resulted.

Whenever Obama did use his family to frame campaign messages, he did so in a way that was very personal and transparent. For example, he would post a screenshot of Michelle Obama's tweets in which she personally encouraged supporters to get out and vote, or a video of Michelle promoting the group, Women for Obama. On the other hand, Romney did not include Ann Romney in any material by herself except for a YouTube video in which she talks about Mitt's character as a leader and as a father. In this way, it seems that Romney kept Ann in the traditional gender sphere of being his supporter, while Obama stepped outside of that traditional boundary and included Michelle as his teammate.

More specifically, the Obama campaign used their Tumblr account to frame policy issues using family rhetoric; not only did they post material including pictures and language including the Obama family, he also reposted or "reblogged" posts from his supporters that discussed how policy issues affect their families. This is critical to campaign strategy because it allowed supporters to feel that they mattered personally to Obama; even if a supporter was not "reblogged" by the

Obama campaign, he/she might be able to relate to the personal testimony of another supporter that was “reblogged”, and in turn, feel a personal connection to the Obama campaign.

Not surprisingly, the issue that the Obama campaign framed using family rhetoric the most was healthcare. They posted many voter testimonies similar to the one included below (Figure 14), which appeals to voter emotions.

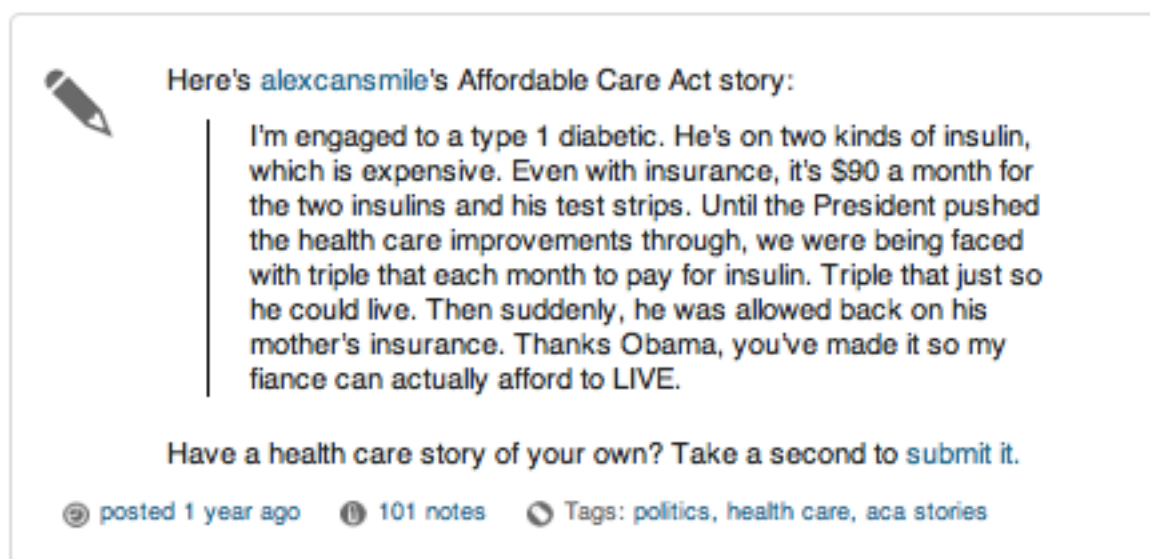


Figure 14

Interestingly, the Romney campaign did not discuss issues of healthcare from a family frame at all; not only did he lose the advantage of incorporating *his* family into this policy issue, he also lost the advantage of including *your* family, which would have helped voters relate to Romney as a presidential candidate.

The Obama campaign promoted military, education and tax reform issues in the same way as healthcare, by posting testimonies of supporters who have been affected by the issues (example in Figure 15). Further, the same argument about



personalization applies; Romney did not use his family to strategically promote any of these issues to the extent that Obama did.

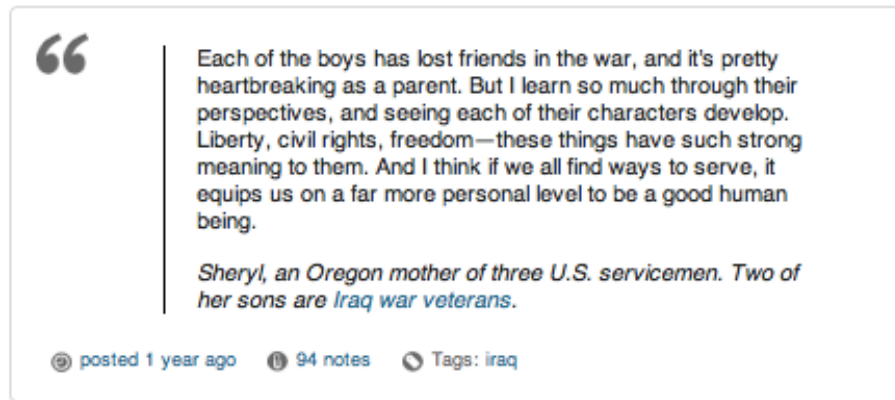


Figure 15

In fact, the only instance in which Romney used family to frame an issue was that of military support was on Thanksgiving in which he is supportive of the troops who were overseas during the holiday (Figure 16).

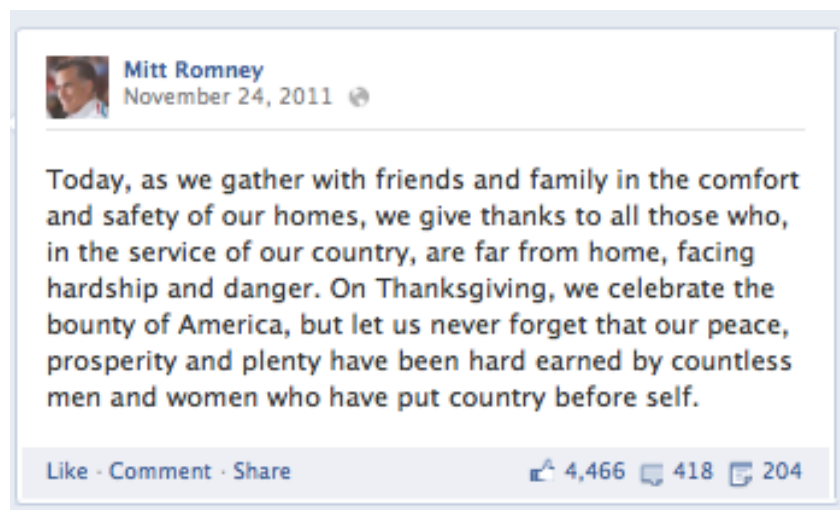


Figure 16

While this post does communicate his pro-military stance, it also reveals a sliver about his personal life (i.e., “Today as *we* gather with friends and *family* in the safety of our homes.”).

When framing women’s issues using family rhetoric, the Obama campaign used inclusive language such as “*our* daughters” and had a total count of framing women’s issues/issues of equality 11 times (3%) compared to Romney’s one-time mention (.006%) of women’s issues/issues of equality through a YouTube video that also touched on issues of debt and unemployment. The Obama campaign also used family to put a face with equality issues by including Michelle Obama in the ways previously mentioned. Figure 17 is an example of how Michelle promoted both women’s issues/issues of equality as well as campaign efforts.



Overall, the notable result that emerged from the analysis of campaign message framing was that the Obama campaign employed family and family values

rhetoric to frame the discussion on a variety of issues while the Romney campaign did not. This finding, coupled with existing literature, suggests that the strategic approach to campaigning that the Obama campaign employed was successful due in part to their ability to appear family-oriented, relatable, authentic, and empathetic in their messaging.

### *Study Limitations*

Although the researcher is pleased with the outcomes of the study, there are a few limitations that must be addressed. The main limitation of the present study was the inability to access all major social media accounts of interest, specifically Obama's Twitter feed (tweets prior to November 2012 were not available/archived). Although Romney's Twitter account was accessible for the entire time period of the analysis, he only had 56 tweets that were relevant to this topic of study. If Twitter is similar to the results from other social media channels, Obama's Twitter feed most likely contained many more tweets relevant to this study than Romney's. In fact, the aforementioned Journalism.org study found that from June 4 through June 17, 2012, Obama tweeted 404 times while Romney only tweeted 16 times. According to those results, access to Obama's Twitter would have provided evidence that would greatly strengthen the claims made in this study regarding social media use.

An additional limitation is the use of a single coder to conduct the content analysis. Ideally, a team of coders would have been trained to conduct the analysis to increase the reliability of the results. However, the sheer number of items coded

as well as the time constraints placed on the study prohibited the use of a coding team; therefore, inter-coder reliability statistics were not provided or available.

Finally, a significant limitation of the study is the lack of existing literature to support the analysis. The researcher utilized the small amount of scholarship on this topic to create a framework for the framing portion of the study; however, it is recognized that these frames might not capture all of the significant issues framed using family rhetoric during the 2012 Presidential Election Season.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

If time had not been a factor in this study, it would have been interesting to follow the campaign during the time period analyzed to track family values messaging in association with polling data. It would be suggested that analysis take place on a daily basis during the campaign season in order to capture all relevant campaign materials as well.

Another area of this study that could be expanded is the number of social media channels examined. According to Wortham (2012), both candidates also used Spotify and Instagram as part of their campaign efforts; in fact, Brown (2012) found that Obama used over 15 different social media outlets in 2008, so clearly there are many other social media channels that could provide items for analysis for a similar study. It would be beneficial to study all of the outlets used by both candidates and analyze them for the use of family rhetoric to make comparisons across social media channels.

Researching and analyzing the candidates' wives roles in the campaign would also be beneficial to future studies. If the researcher could gauge the wives'

involvement, the results could serve as an extension of an analysis of the use of family in campaign strategy.

In addition to expanding the present study's depth and breadth, it would also be interesting to study the reaction of social media users to messages incorporating family and family values rhetoric. Existing literature suggests that this type of rhetoric positively influences voter response, however, it would be insightful to examine reactions following exposure of those messages on social media.

Additionally, it would be valuable for campaign professionals to understand the influence different social media channels have on the reaction and reception of campaign efforts. Questions of media effects could be asked to determine why individuals choose one social medium over another and how the different posts on those mediums affect their preexisting opinion about the candidates and policies.

#### *Recommendations for Future Campaign Practice*

Before concluding the study, it is important to recognize that the findings from this study do provide insight for practice in regard to political campaigning. Most notably is the regular use of social media for campaign efforts. Academic and popular literature supports the notion that social media has changed the face of political campaigning; however, the type of social media and the specific use of social media is not overwhelmingly discussed in the literature. This study suggests that some social media channels might be more suitable for certain campaign efforts over others, and that the ways in which social media is used (posting pictures, voter testimonials, videos, personal images, storied) is just as important as simply using it.

Moreover, the incorporation of family and family values rhetoric to not only frame the discussion on issues but also humanize the candidate and their campaign appears to impact the candidate's ultimate success. There is a marked difference between the uses of family throughout the 2012 Presidential Election Season; these differences reveal the ways in which political campaigns can and should employ family and family values rhetoric as campaign strategy.

### *Conclusion*

This study revealed two major findings: Obama used social media channels to incorporate family value rhetoric more effectively and strategically than Romney and in turn, Obama personalized his campaign and his image more successfully than Romney. Brown (2012) discusses how the digital age is changing campaign strategy in that social media is accessible via mobile devices. According to a Pew Study cited by Brown (2012), 93% of adults aged 18-29 now have cell phones, which means they can be easily reached via social media.

Political analysts are able to record the people's locations and use that information as a data gathering point. By using Internet applications such as Foursquare and Facebook, political parties are able to keep track of people who have checked in at rallies and follow up with more political paraphernalia related to the events they attended. (Brown 2012)

In the digital age, many aspects of everyday life are changing. From the way you check emails on your Gmail app to the way you deposit a check via mobile banking, so why should politics be any different? In an age with so much focus on communicating through social networks, it is imperative that candidates take

advantage of this medium to incorporate family values in order to make themselves relatable and engage with voters. According to a Forbes article, both camps were equipped with the same amounts and types of data, but Obama used the data more strategically through social media outlets (Fidelman, 2012). Nick Judd, cited by Fidelman (2012), states:

The Romney campaign was able to deploy all the same tools—website, mobile apps, social media like Twitter and Facebook and even a comparatively little-frequented Tumblr, a graphics and design department, and highly targeted online advertising—but was never able to point to an innovation that originated first in the Romney campaign and that yielded significant wins.” Obama was able to create the “guy next door” persona though his strategic use of social media channels, while Romney maintained his stoicism because he mainly used social media as a place to recycle his traditional media campaign material.

Obama was able to create the “guy next door” persona though his strategic use of social media channels, while Romney maintained his stoicism because he mainly used social media as a place to recycle his traditional media campaign material.

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