

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES EXPERIENCE THE GOOD AND THE BAD OF SOCIAL MEDIA



Donald Trump speaks at the 42nd annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Feb. 27, 2015 in National Harbor, Md. Conservative activists attended the annual political conference to discuss their agenda.

Olivier Douliery/Abaca Press



Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks during the "Brunch with Bernie" event at the National Nurses United office in Oakland, Calif., on Monday, Aug. 10, 2015.

Aric Crabb/Bay Area News



Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton, joined by husband, Bill Clinton, and daughter, Chelsea, hosts a New Year's event in Des Moines, Iowa, Monday, December 31, 2007.

Chuck Kennedy/MCT

by ELLIE POBIS

“GIVEN my age it’s difficult for me to be involved in politics. Twitter has given me a form of political participation, and has overall made me more

educated in regards to our government,” said Katerina Baumann, sophomore.

Topics ranging from the decision that legalized gay marriage in all fifty states to the status of Donald Trump’s hair have made trending status on social media this summer.

Students and candidates alike have been using Twitter to their advantage in preparation for the upcoming 2016 elections.

Baumann is glad that social media is playing such a big role.

Despite this positive reaction, having social media at the forefront of this election also has downsides.

Leacy Burke, former RNE student is now the communications director for Joe Wilson.

“Social media can be a positive force in elections because it lets you reach voters that you may not be able to reach via traditional media and encourage them to take action,” said Burke, “However, one of

the downsides is that now many candidates are doing it to just check a box, or consider it a limited part of their communications strategy.”

Rashonda Reeves, sophomore, agrees that social media can cause problems for candidates.

“A con of using social media is sometimes candidates try too hard to connect on a cyber level, and they can forget that face to face interaction is also an important part of their campaign,” said Reeves. “Also they may rely too much on social media to get their message out there and they don’t have a lot of face recognition.”

Regardless of negatives that come with the combination of social media and politics, some candidates are gaining positive publicity through media outlets. Bernie Sanders appears to be a teen favorite.

“Bernie Sanders has been a breath of fresh air in a hopeless situation,” says Baumann who attended a recent Bernie Sanders rally in Columbia. “He advocates for a livable minimum wage, decrease in public college tuition, universal health care as a human right, and has recently been the only candidate to discuss steps of action in response to police brutality towards African Americans.”

Sanders has been able to reap the benefits of social media and avoid the backlash of public opinion.

“Bernie Sanders is one of those candidates that started small with barely no one knowing who he was and now he’s almost as well known as Clinton. He has benefited the most from social media because his constituents are basically doing all of his campaigning for him,” Reeves said. “He was completely unknown and because of his constituents on social media, he’s very well known.”

Burke addressed why Sanders is so popular among teens.

“I think Senator Sanders is popular with teenagers because he is talking about issues that directly impact the youngest generation of voters.”

Unfortunately for some, Twitter and other sites have not been so supportive.

Speaking about Republican candidate Donald Trump, Baumann said, “Social media has not been kind to Trump. It seems he is always trending in a negative way, whether that be about something controversial that he has said or his infamous hair.”

Reeves also pointed out many of Trump’s issues.

“He’s a very problematic person with a history of misogyny, racism, homophobia, and so much more. I’m actually kind of scared for the future of this country because he has a good chance of being president and he would probably destroy America.”

Both Reeves and Baumann believe that social media is changing elections.

“I think the biggest way social media will make this election different is the candidates forming their own fan bases that basically advertise for them,” said Reeves. “Their fan bases will help them share their message and encourage people to learn more about them, do their research, and maybe even vote for them.”

Richland Northeast alumna Hannah Greenhouse, worked for the Hillary Clinton campaign this summer.

“With social media becoming more popular and with more types emerging, we have a larger ‘circle’ that we can influence with our beliefs regarding certain candidates,” says Greenhouse. “Seeing that a friend is going to hear a candidate’s speech might not encourage you to go, but it will increase name recognition of that particular candidate.”

Burke urges students to not only get involved online, but also get involved in the community.

“Take advantage of South Carolina’s role as an early primary state and the fact that there are many candidates on both sides of the aisle and get involved!” said Burke. “Spend some time knocking on doors or making calls, because every little bit counts and the knowledge you pick up is invaluable. Register to vote!”