



Do Social Media Impact Political Campaigns?



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Questions



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- Do social networks impact campaigns?
- The dawn of twitter politics?

Volatility in political contest



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 - a good $\frac{1}{4}$ of the electorate made up their mind the last week of the election campaign
 - while $\frac{1}{5}$ of voters changed their mind at the ballot box from a declared voting intention, 3 days before the election!

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 - while 1/5 of voters changed their mind at the ballot box from a declared voting intention, 3 days before the election!
- **Electoral volatility and new media**
 - Contest volatility exacerbates the need for a targeted use of resources in political campaigns
 - And there is anecdotal evidence that social media is effective in mobilising voters

Social media with political relevance

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- *Live streaming*: Livestream, Justin.tv ...

What is new about social media?

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What is new about social media?

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- Powerful politicians are visible through directed media (print, radio, tv) but the nature of such media means they are not reciprocally accessible
- Social media effectiveness depends on the **illusion of a personal connection**

1a. Illusion of reciprocity

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The 'apolitical' nature of social media is a cause for concern for the insidious nature of political messages.
Social distance: Six degrees of separation.

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- The same social mechanisms that we use to convey information of low value (say gossip) piggybacks on the social media technological platforms

2a. Mobilising: Protest

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There is lack of any strong evidence that social media are instrumental in the organisation of protest events. Facebook posts resulted in prosecutions rather than any noticeable impact on the 2011 English riots. The blogosphere and social media in the Ukrainian Orange revolution was dominated by state controlled content. And events in Iran or Egypt are more directly associated to the use of direct communications (mobile phone texts) than new technologies.

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- Political marketing can utilise the viral nature of social media to ride a wave of activism or public concern but it cannot engineer it on its own

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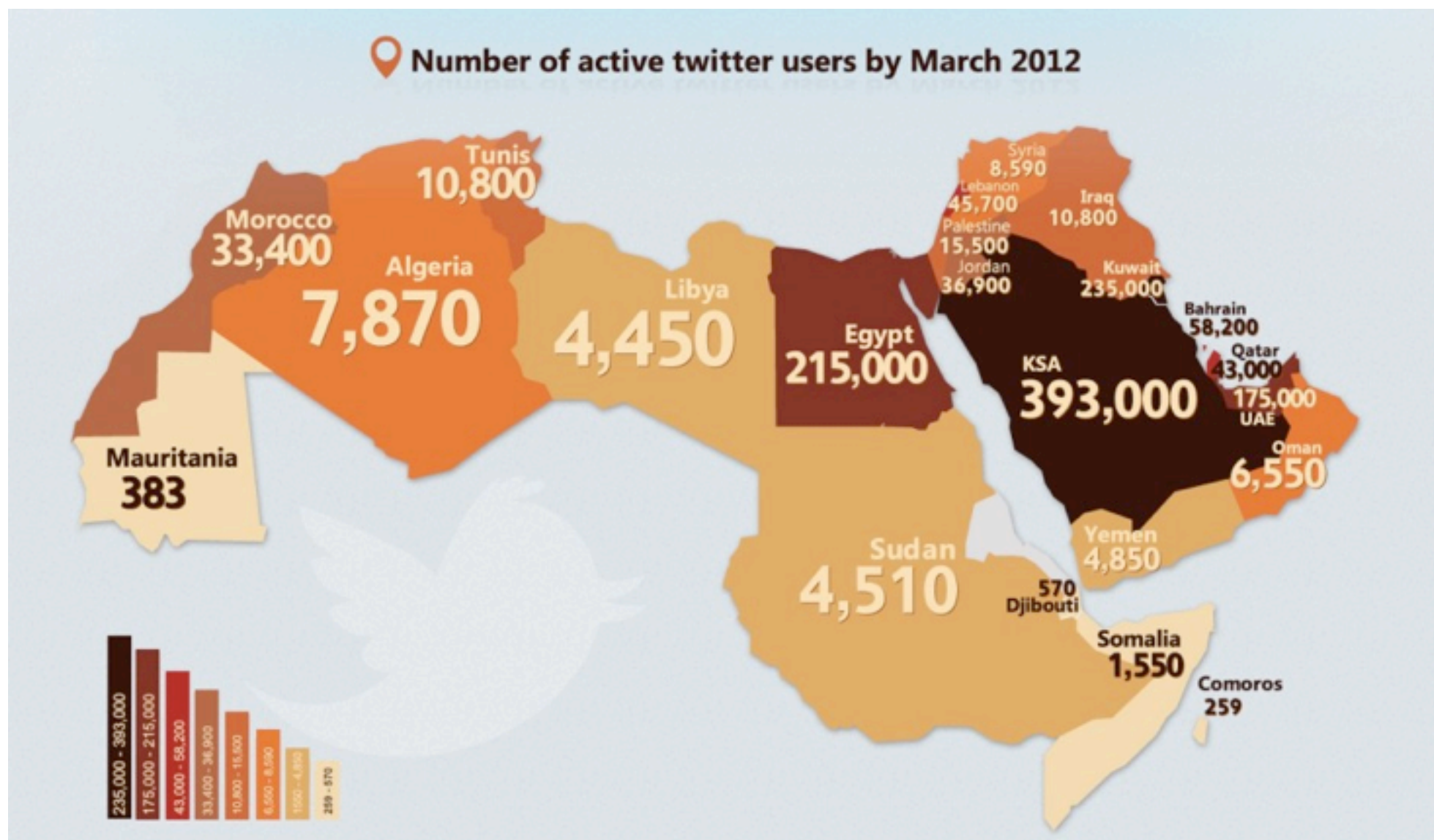
2b. Mobilising: Protest

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The Arab Spring was texted and not
twitted

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- A recent study by the Dubai School of Government indicate that only 0.2% of the Arab population are active on twitter



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2c. Mobilising: Protest

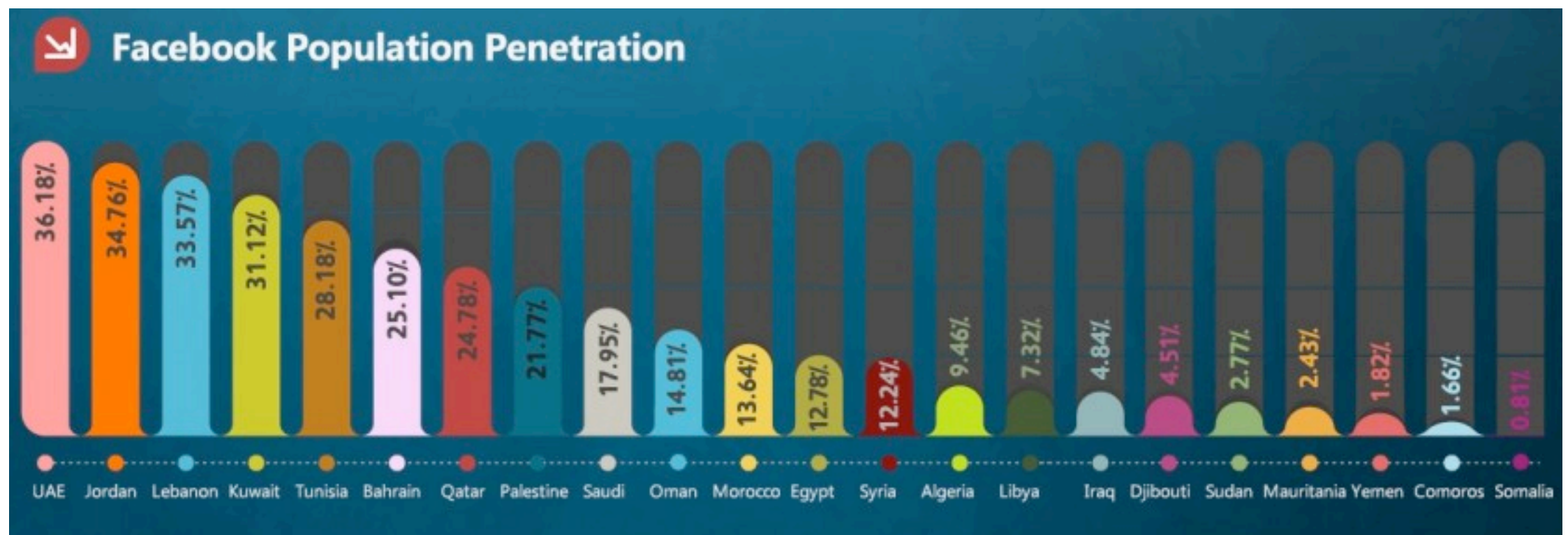
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Bots copy and replicate content which is often filtered, so results of 'virality' subject to technology sophistication

During the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, most online content (volume & centrality) was created and disseminated by the state.

2c. Mobilising: Protest

- The same study by DGS indicates that facebook has a penetration of around 8%



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3a. Mobilising: Targeting voter & community cohorts

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Social media can refine targeting at the level of 20-household postcodes while cable television is only capable of refinement to about 100k inhabitants.

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- One of the great success stories for the use of social media are **targeted political campaigns**
- It is often possible to purchase (or often freely obtain) quality sociodemographics and opinions of those highly embedded in social media platforms
 - It is therefore possible to sell ideas the same way we sell products

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 - It is therefore possible to sell ideas the same way we sell products
- There are four main targeting strategies:
 - profile based targeting (Labour voters, 24-30, F)
 - opinion leader targeting (network Opinion Leader or broker)
 - propagation targeting (endorse and re-send)
 - geo-locator targeting of any of the above

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3b. Mobilising



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Grassroots mobilisation: 1.3 million donors 98% of whom gave less than 250\$ in the 2008 Obama campaign

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- **Voter segmentation** can be highly sophisticated
 - The Obama campaign is already reported to tailor its message to 26 different voter segments

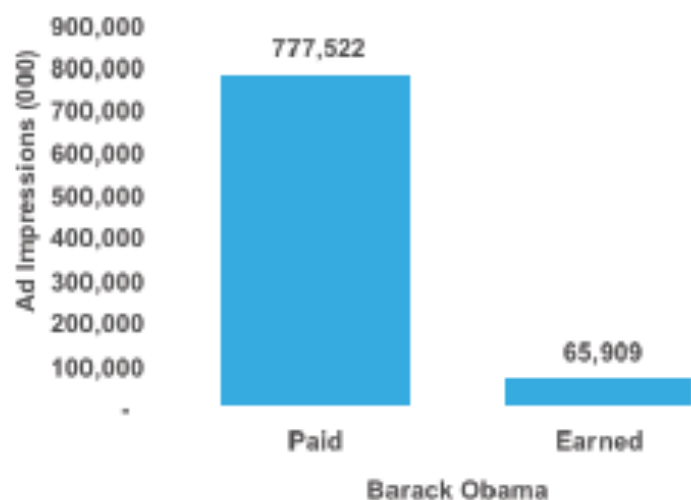
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- **Voter segmentation** can be highly sophisticated
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- Re-enforcement effects however vary and there is wide discord among analysts on what constitutes an effective 'viral' strategy

Barack Obama:

Total Paid Ad Impressions (000) vs. Earned Media Impressions (000) on Facebook

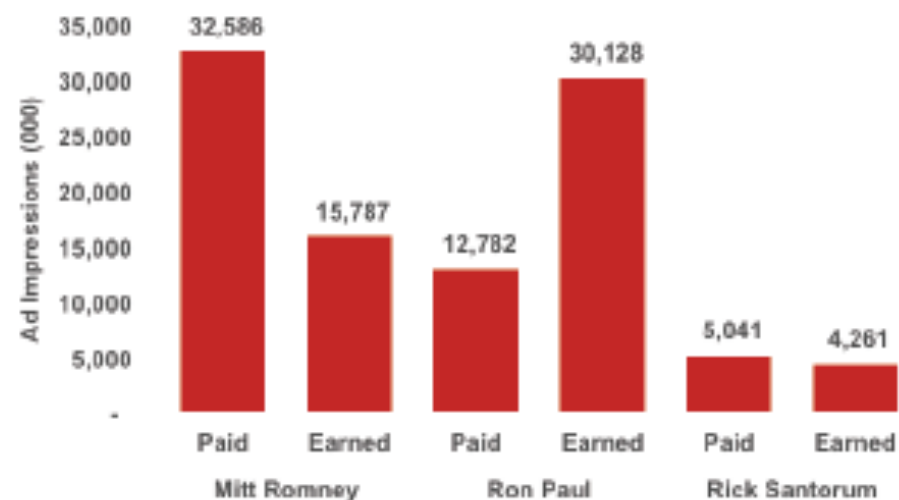
Source: comScore Ad Metrix and Social Essentials, U.S., Jan-2012



Selected Republican Presidential Candidates:

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Does social media affect political campaigns?

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Nature of social network data create specific ethics concerns:

Private and public space.

Data integration.

Disclosure of third-party data.

Data disclosure on 'alters'

Does social media affect political campaigns?

- Online political advertising
 - narrow message segmentation & tailored messages
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 - Joining a campaign through facebook allows the campaign managers access to your AND your contacts sociodemographics as well as information on your social structure (ego network)

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- This has further allowed **integrating data bases** on voters and creates concerns on data protection

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So has political communication changed?

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Of course what constitutes a facebook friend is a matter of considerable debate

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- It can have unanticipated reach
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- This implies a substantive understanding of the structure of virtual and real social networks
- But fundamentally, an understanding of the value and **salience of specific political messages**

Is this new politics?



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The jury is out on optimal strategies for the new media.

Voter volatility determines engagement.

Strategy of opponents determines engagement with the new media. i.e. flotilla politics.

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 - only a fraction of that will go towards social media, the current estimate being 35m\$
- The bulk of **advertising goes to traditional broadcast media** for all political candidates
- Social media advertising is typically aimed at
 - Display ads (Yahoo!, Facebook, AOL, Google, Fox News, etc)
 - Video ads (targeted via search history)
 - Paid search (through search engines)

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So what?



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So what?

→ Social Media supplement rather than supplant traditional methods of political campaigning

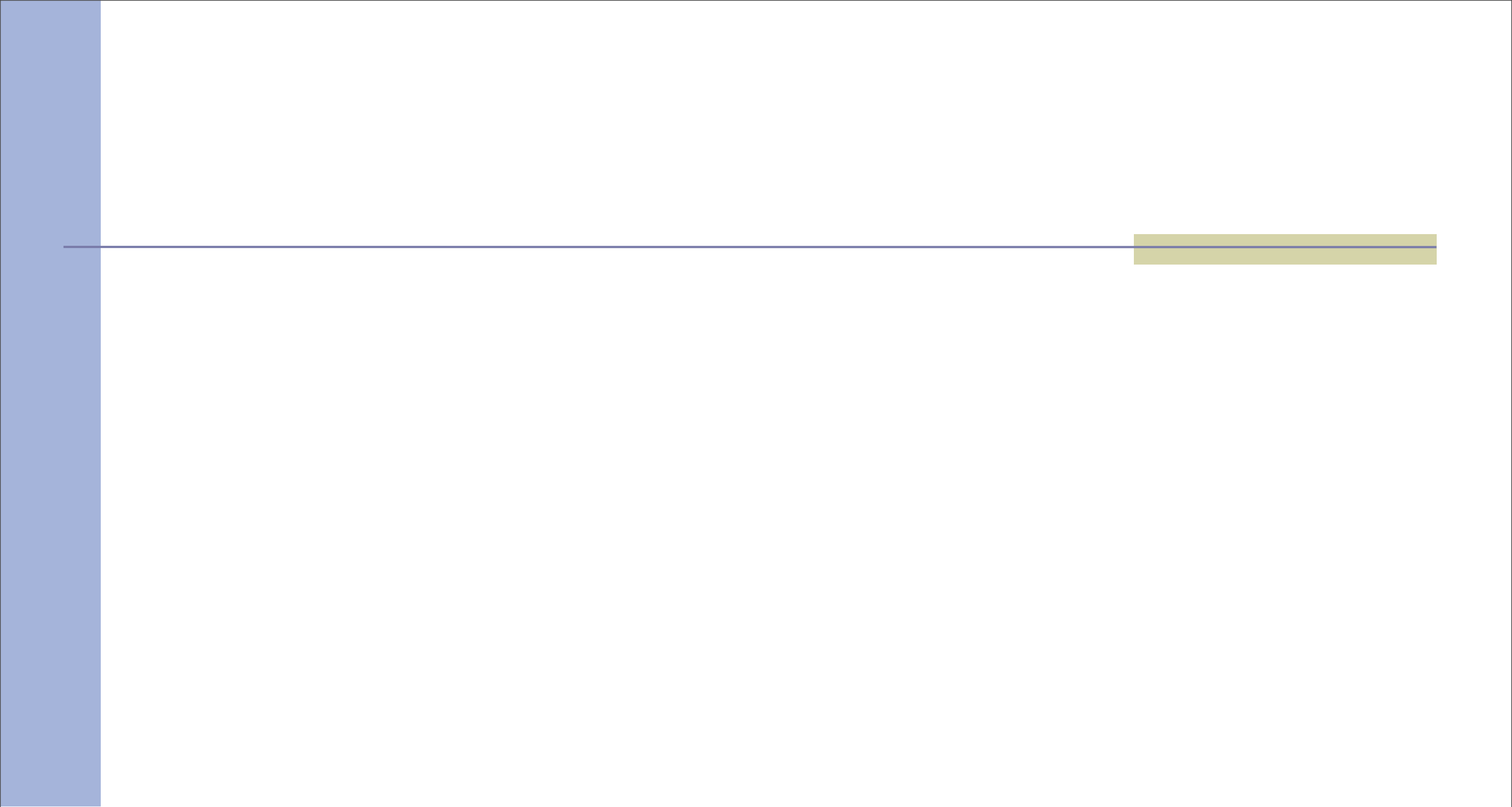
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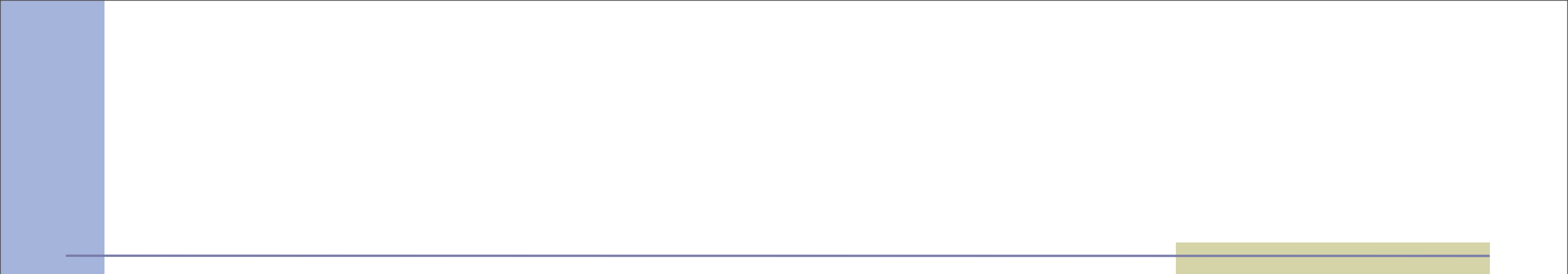
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- Social Media supplement rather than supplant traditional methods of political campaigning
- The art of constructing messages of high political salience and successfully introducing them to the political debate has not been altered by the new media
- Political parties, campaigns and political actors sometimes appear drowned in a cacophony of political messages but the **fundamentals of political debates** during the democratic contest **has not changed**





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- The new media can facilitate political messages entering the political debate sidestepping traditional media routes
 - Political actors adjust (often by mirroring opponents):
 - inputting (spinning) political signals continuously
 - personalising the political message
 - integrating their data on voters from different sources
 - developing direct marketing strategies to different political segments



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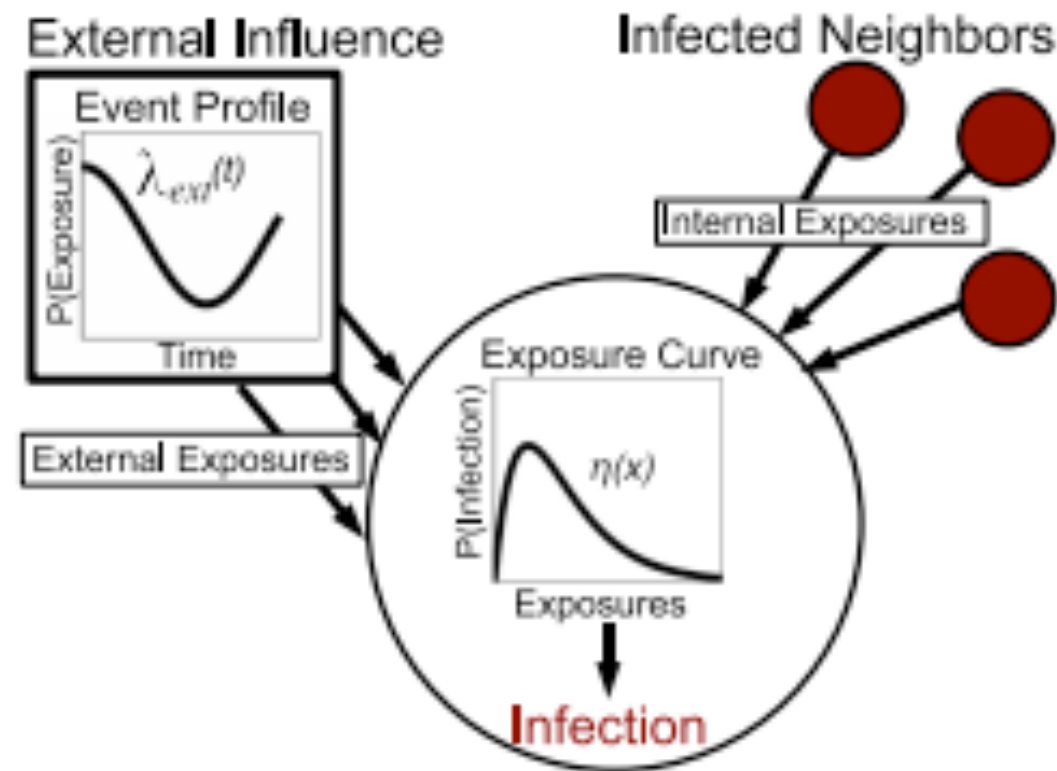


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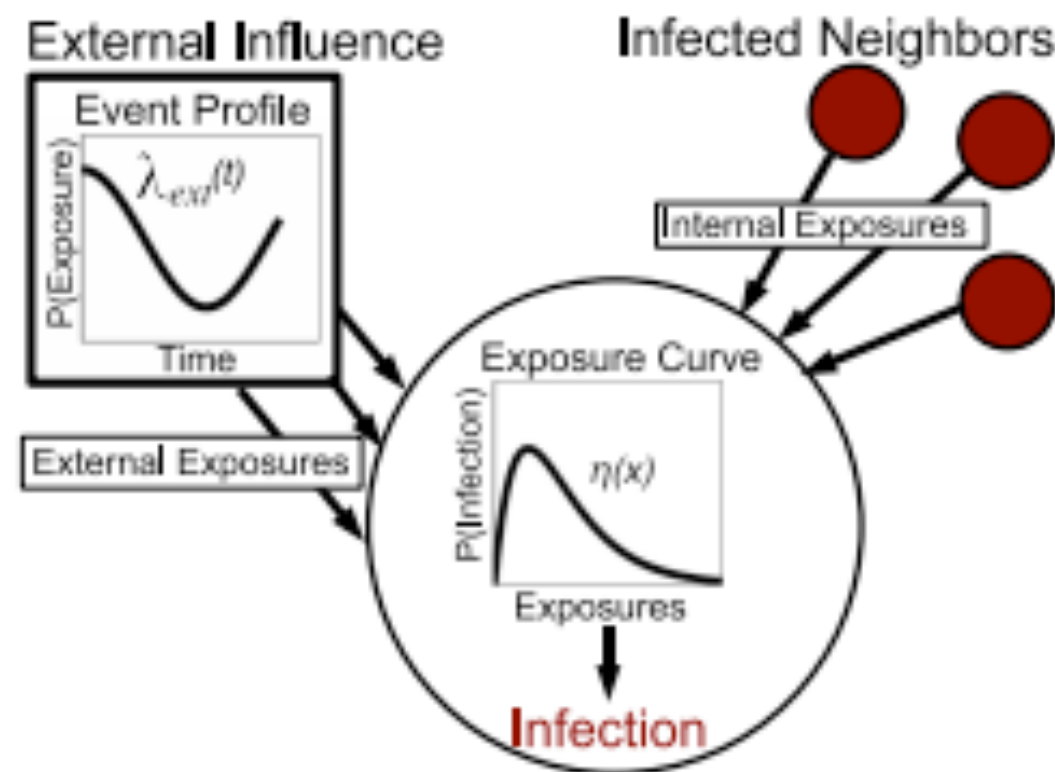
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Limitations on the mechanism of Influence through Twitter



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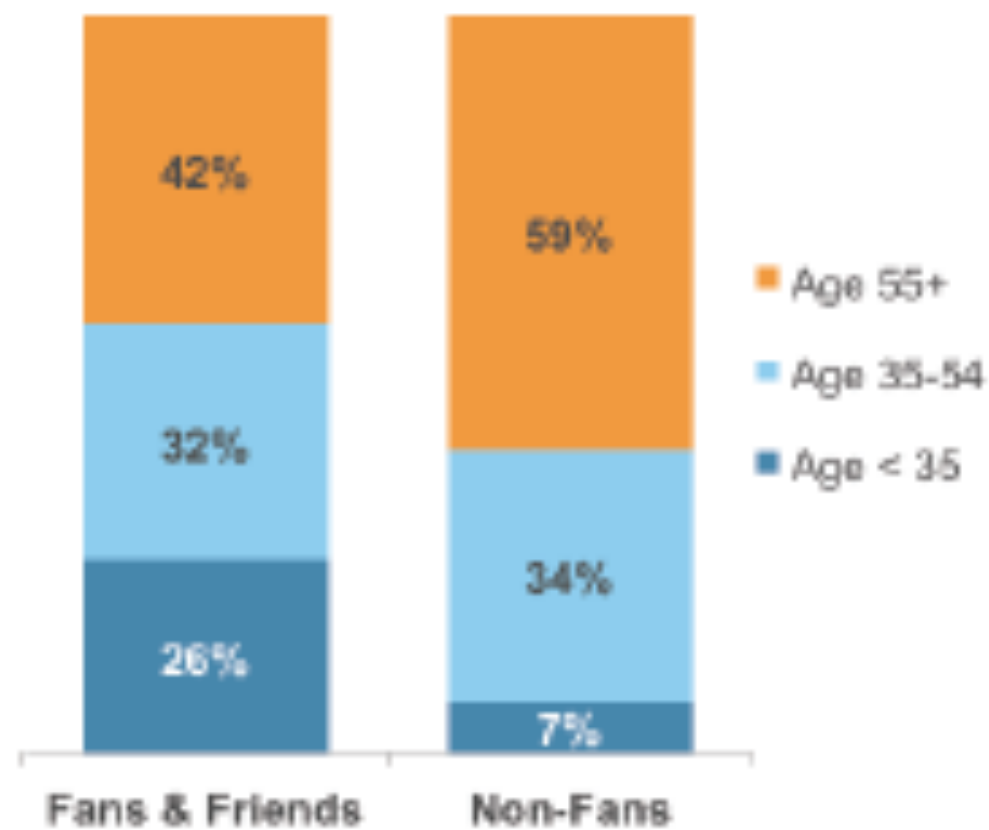
- A recent experiment by Myers, Zhu, Leskovec (2012) indicates that only 71% of twitter information diffusion is due to direct contagion the rest being the result of alternative mechanisms of influence.



Social media reach

Barack Obama Online Donors: Demographic Composition of Facebook Fans & Friends vs. Non-Fans

Source: comScore Social Essentials, U.S., Oct-2011 to Feb-2012

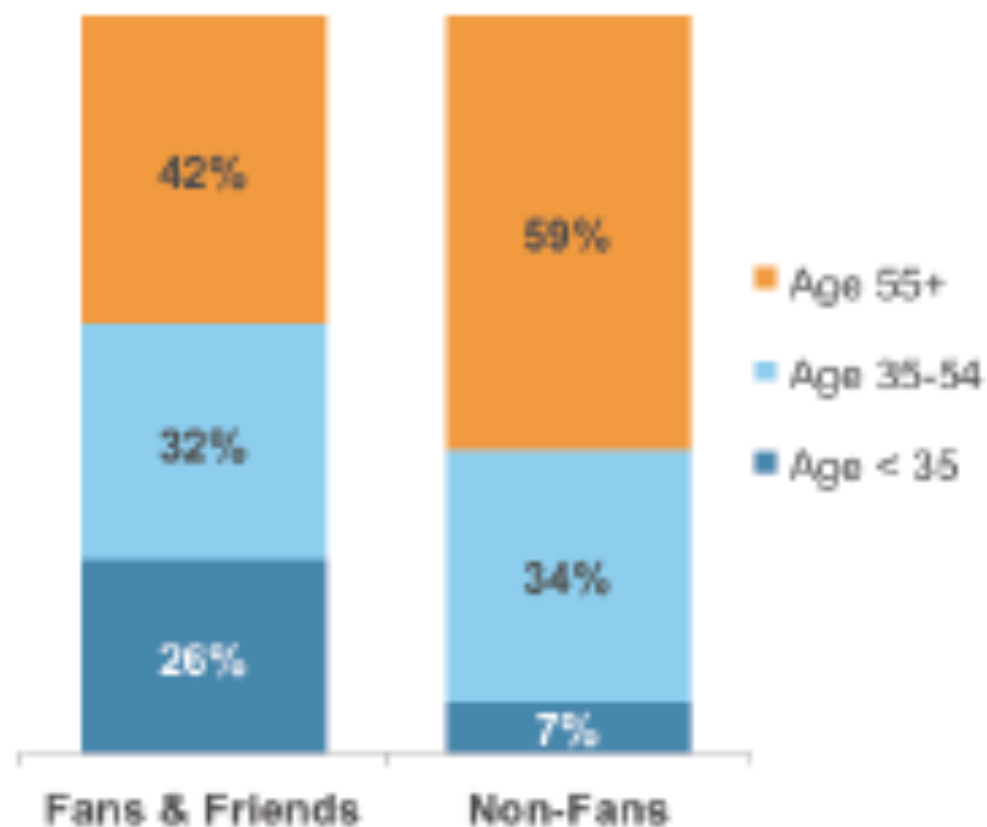


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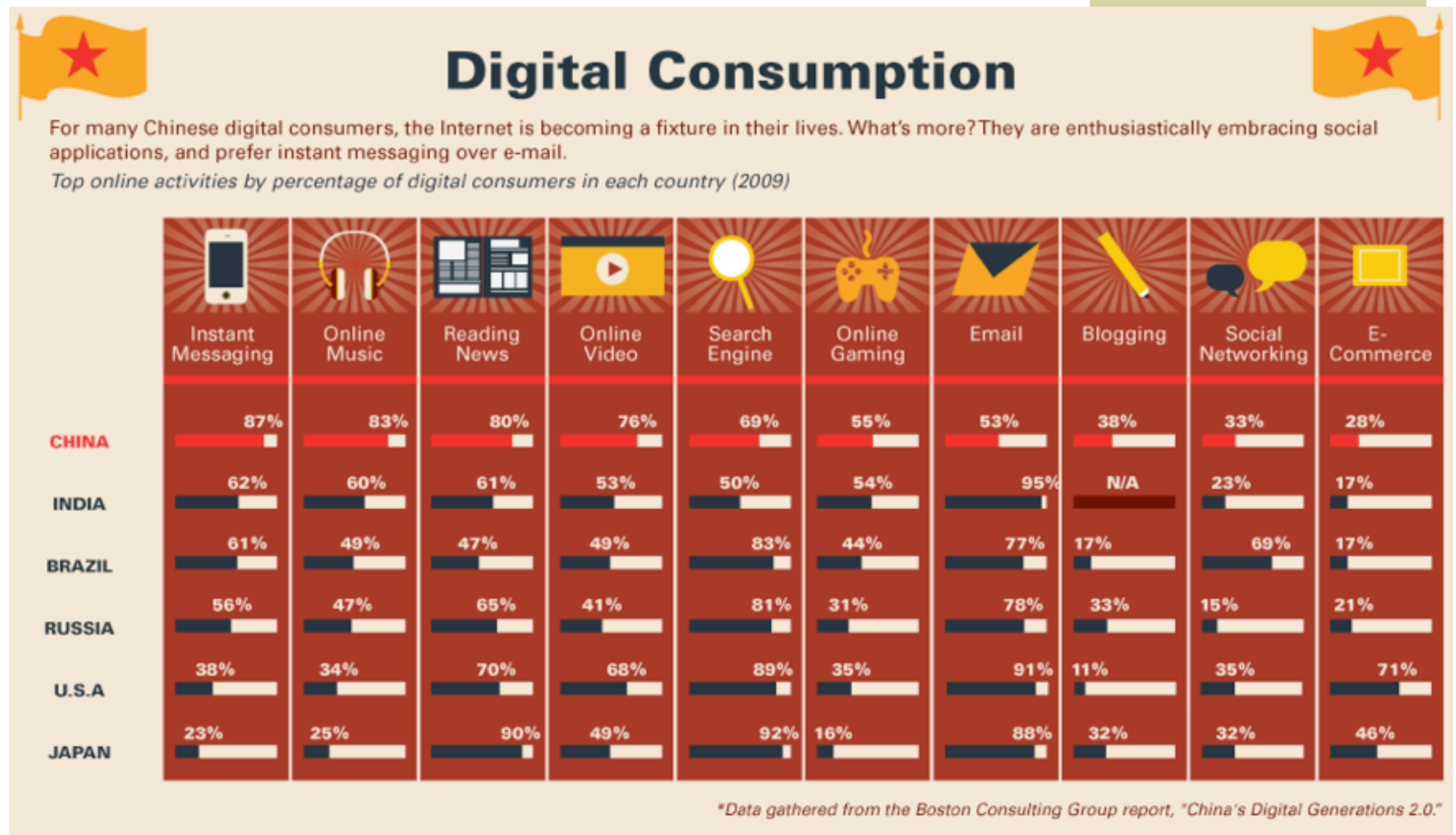
- Donors active in social media are younger than other donors but contribute less (18 vs 28\$)

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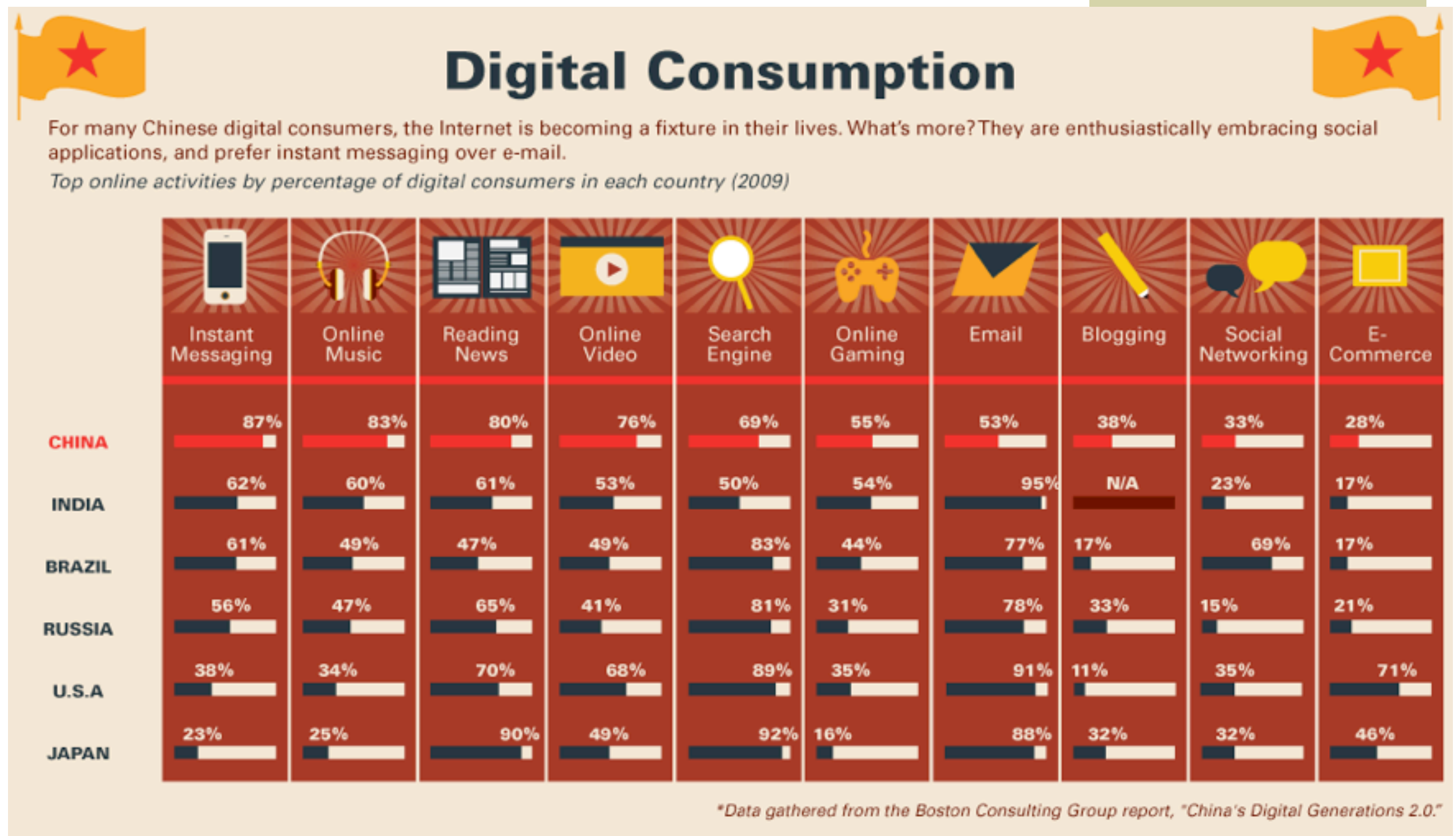
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Consumption rates of digital content



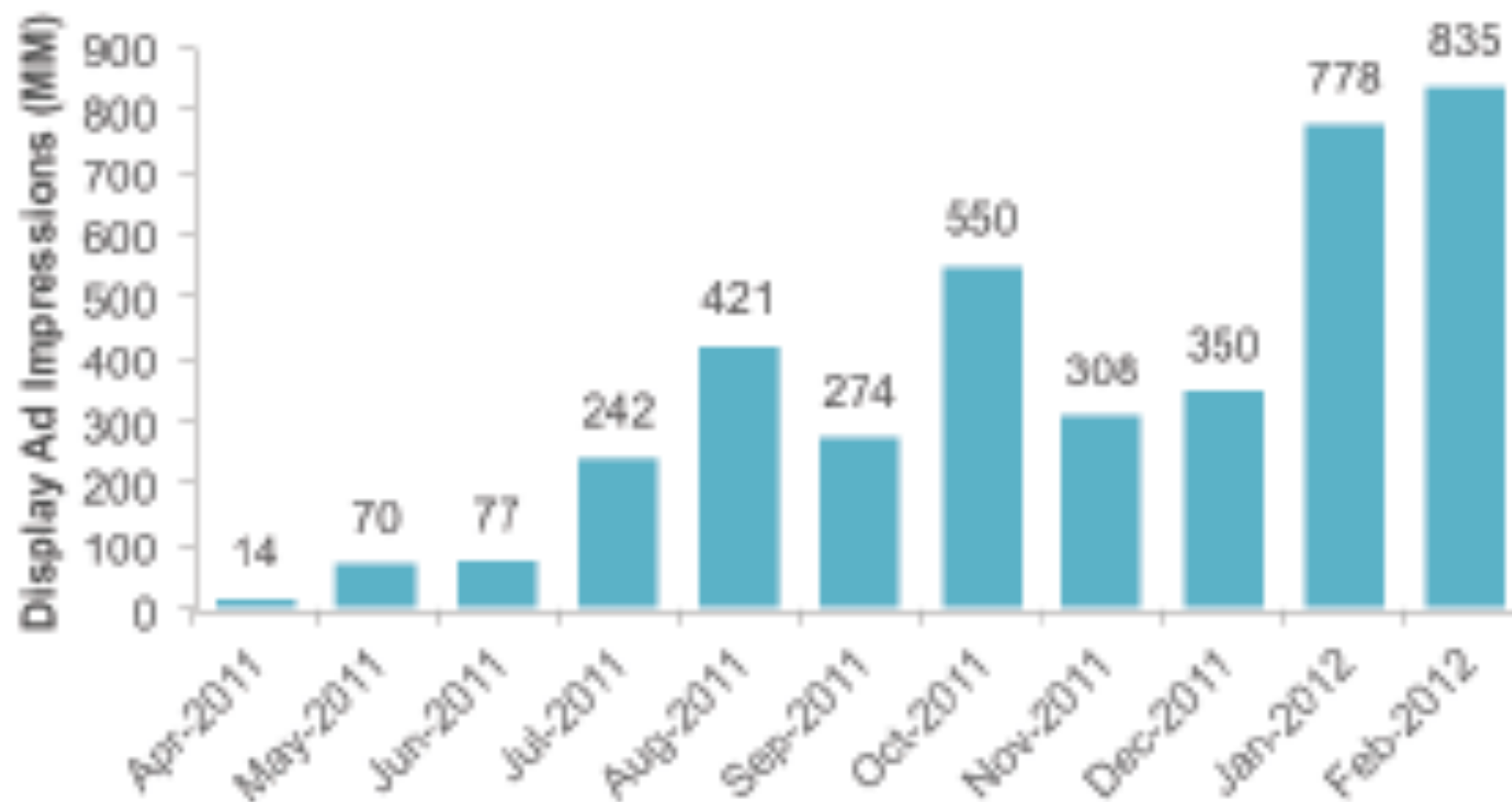
Consumption rates of digital content



Obama online campaign

Obama for America: Display Ad Trends

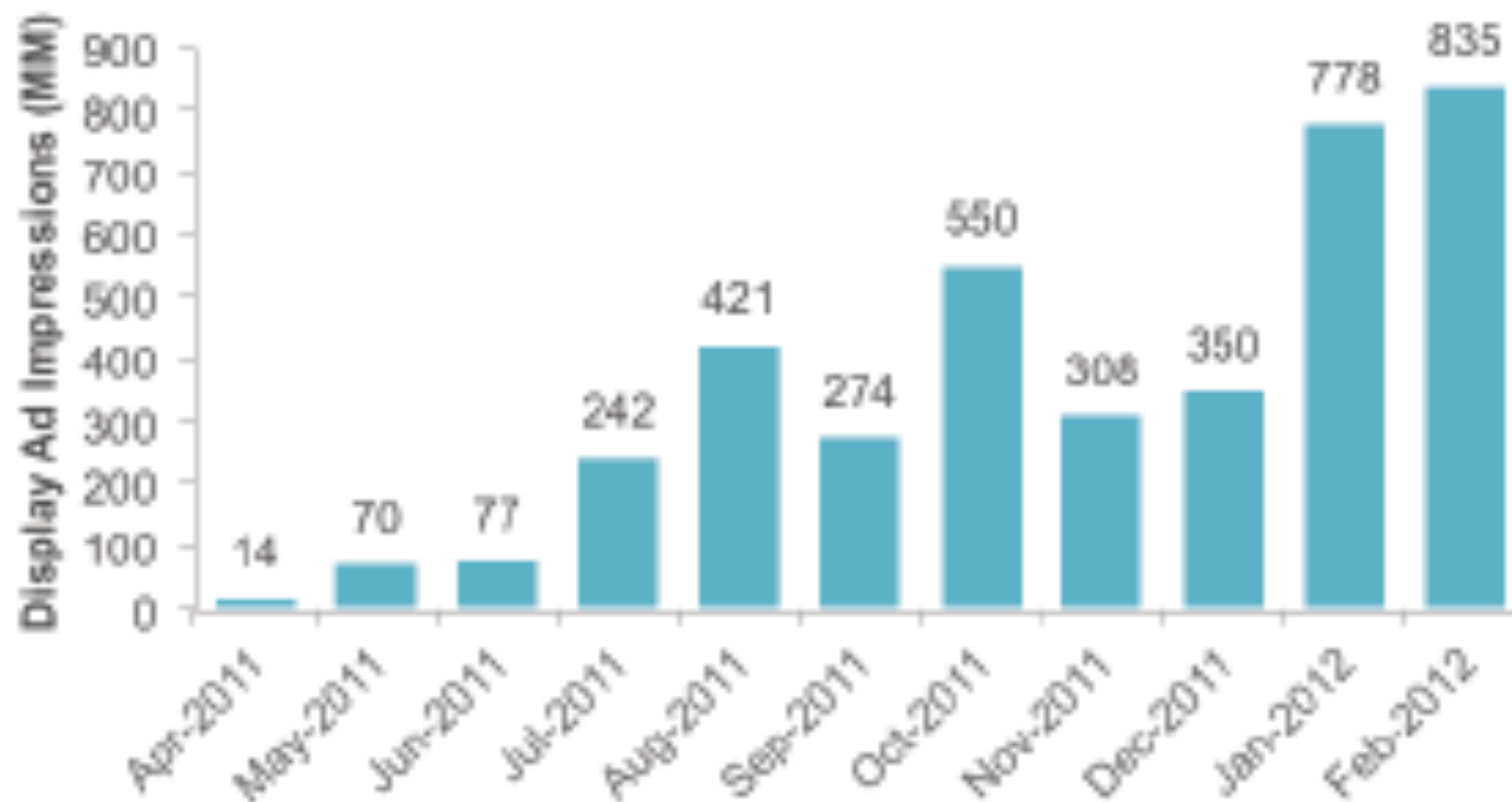
Source: comScore Ad Metrix, U.S., Apr-2011 - Feb-2012



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Effectiveness of facebook campaign



Source: comScore Media Metrix, U.S., Mar-2012, and Facebook, Apr-2012

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