

**The Tale Told by Social Media in
California's 2010 Gubernatorial Race**
A Comparative Analysis of Social Listening and Traditional Polling

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Introduction

This paper highlights an in-depth comparative analysis we conducted between the emerging field of social media listening and traditional polling; using as our subject matter the 2010 California Gubernatorial contest between candidates Meg Whitman and Jerry Brown. Our analysis looked at the favorability ratings of Brown and Whitman in social media, comparing those ratings to traditional polling to better understand how social media listening and polling can be effectively utilized together in a political/public affairs context.

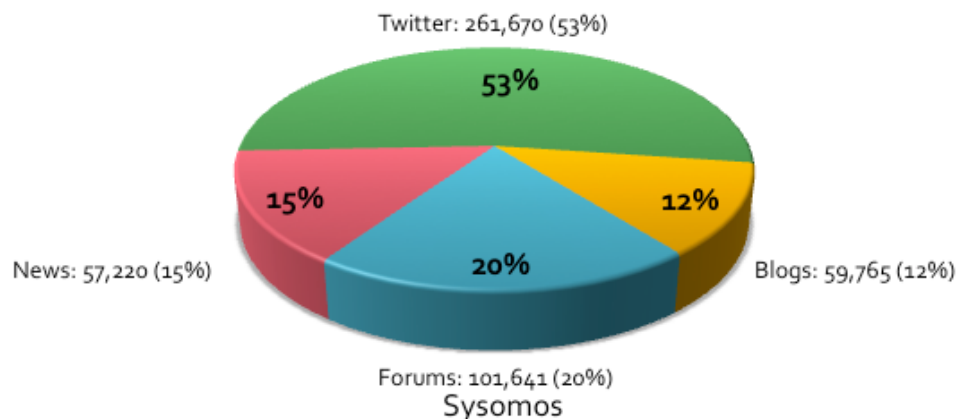
This analysis unlocked several key findings, including:

1. Social and Polling Data were Closely Correlated
2. Social Chatter was Driven by Key Campaign Events
3. The Impact of Nanny-gate was Significant

Methodology

Using the Sysomos MAP social media listening tool, we isolated and analyzed hundreds of thousands of comments related to the race publicly posted on blogs, news sites and other public web forums. We analyzed comments from January 1, 2010 through Election Day, November 2, 2010. The volume of relevant social media comments was measured during this period along with the overall sentiment (positive, neutral, negative) of those comments.

Sources of Social Media Data Volume



Finding #1: Social and Polling Data Were Closely Correlated

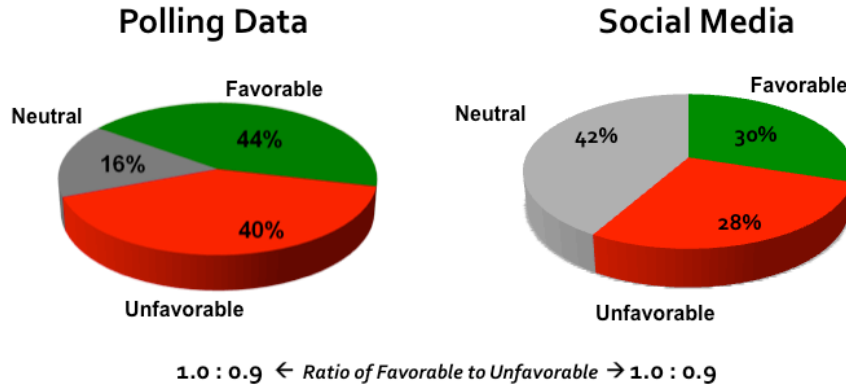
We compared the overall social media sentiment to publicly available polling data on the race for each candidate. Significantly, the ratio of positive to negative social

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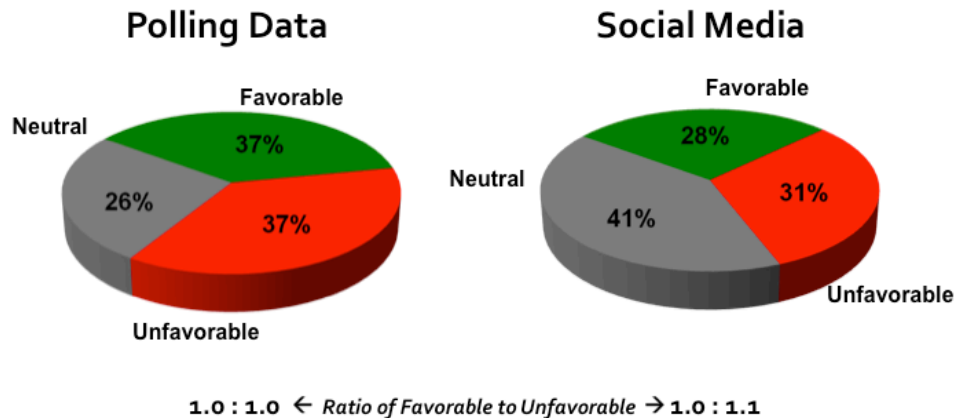
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sentiment was very much in line with the ratio of favorable to unfavorable ratings shown by traditional polling. This analysis provides a high level of confidence in the correlation between outputs of these two very different measurement systems.

Jerry Brown's Overall Favorability Rating



Meg Whitman's Overall Favorability Rating



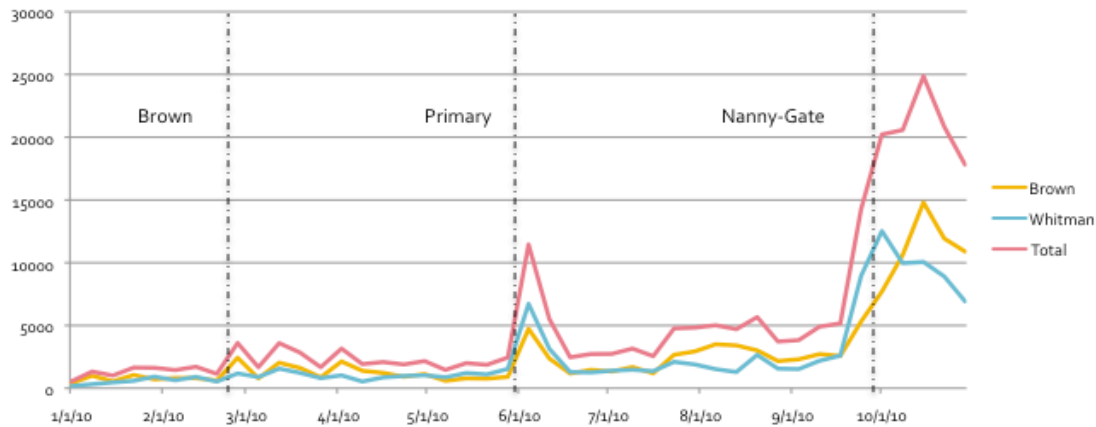
Finding #2: Social Chatter Was Driven by Key Campaign Events

When looking at the daily volume of social media chatter over the campaign timeline, it is clearly evident that peaks in social conversation volume coincided with major campaign events. There were three major peaks we observed: Brown's announcement that he would run for Governor, the primary election and the largest peak of all, the Nanny-gate scandal.

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Social Media Chatter Volume



It is clear from the social media data that the Nanny-gate issue attracted wide audience attention; the overall spike on this issue is bigger than any other spike by a factor of 2-5 times. Based on this significant conversation spike, we turned the focus of our analysis on this issue.

Finding #3: The Impact of Nanny-gate was Significant

The Nanny-gate issue arose when Whitman's former housekeeper, Nicky Diaz, came forward with serious allegations against Whitman in the final weeks of the campaign. Diaz, together with her attorney, Gloria Allred, raised issues around her employment status as an undocumented worker and her ultimate firing by Whitman. When social media sentiment was analyzed for Meg Whitman, her highest negative perception occurred during the course of Nanny-gate.

This story played out over a number of days in the media after it initially broke. During this time things seemed to get worse for Whitman as her responses were unable to quell the story. It is certainly reasonable to assume that Whitman, aided by a highly sophisticated and experienced team, was deliberating intensely about how best to respond while working to gather as much intelligence via traditional public opinion research to inform her response. However, relying on traditional polling data alone would have left her team without solid facts during the most critical initial hours and days after the story broke.

It is interesting to consider the outcome of this episode if Whitman had utilized social media listening tools to inform and calculate her response. With these tools Whitman and her campaign team would have seen within hours that that the level of

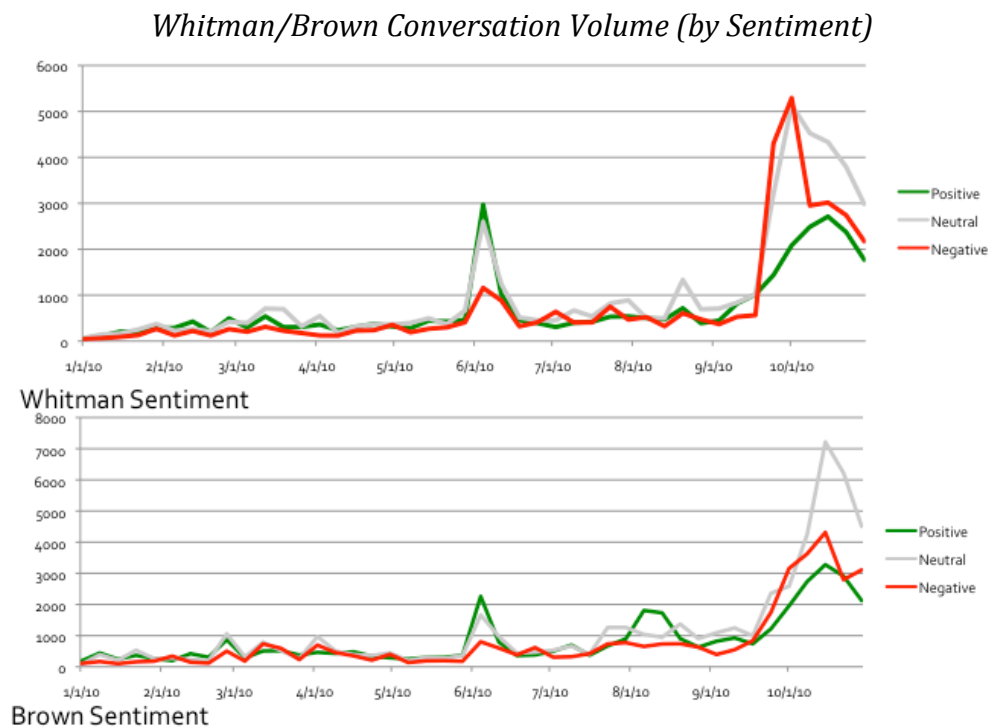
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Nanny-gate chatter was highly abnormal and would have no doubt understood that an immediate and well-calculated response was imperative.

When looking at the social media sentiment chart below, it is interesting to note that the negative sentiment spike for Whitman occurs over two weeks (each point on the chart represents one week's data). The initial spike in negative social media sentiment in the first ten hours of the crisis would have no doubt triggered major alarms within the campaign. And the continued increase of negative sentiment in week two speaks to the importance of a correctly informed response to prevent the issue from growing.

The chart below additionally shows that while Brown also had a negative spike during this time because of a related scandal ("Whore-gate"), the overall gap between his positives and negatives is not nearly as far apart as Whitman's during this time, nor did Brown's negatives spike nearly to the same degree as Whitman's did over the same period.



So, while one of the significant powers of social listening in a crisis scenario is real-time insight, there are additional benefits for campaigns to recognize. In fact, campaigns are able to drill down into the chatter – right down to individual underlying conversations – and get focus group like insights into the attitudes and opinions of the public on issues. Perhaps, in the case of Whitman, this would have

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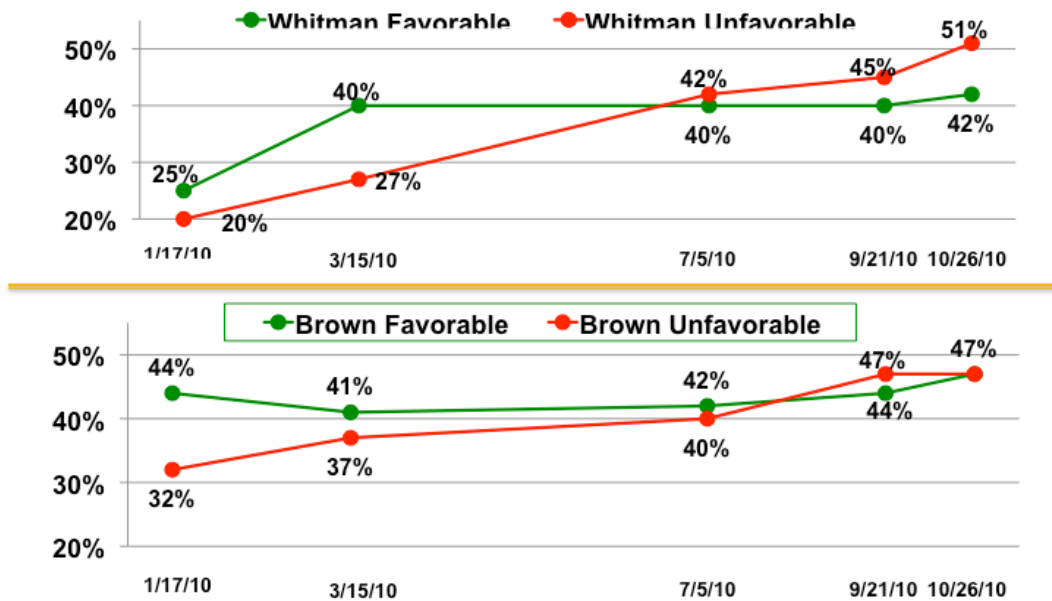
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meant a different initial response to the issue, and a different outcome.

It is also with the Nanny-gate event that our analysis reveals some interesting insights from traditional polling data. The last published polling data before the scandal broke showed Whitman with a 45% unfavorable rating, after Nanny-gate it was 51%, while for Brown, during this period unfavorables remained steady at 47% before and after the scandal. At minimum, Nanny-gate was a highly negative issue for Whitman during a time when she needed all of the positives she could get. And possibly, it was a major contributing factor to her decline in the polls.

While it is impossible to identify the direct impact of this issue on the ultimate outcome of the race, it is reasonable to say that a better handling of this issue by Whitman's campaign as the result of having better data may have helped her during a critical time where she was obviously losing support.

Traditional Tracking Poll on Favorable/Unfavorable for Brown and Whitman



Ultimately, the key take-away from this analysis is that traditional methods of polling alone would not have been enough to appropriately respond to Nanny-gate, given the rapid speed at which the issue played out. Also, there are more to the differences between social media and traditional methods of polling which campaigns need to understand. Our next section covers these key areas of difference.

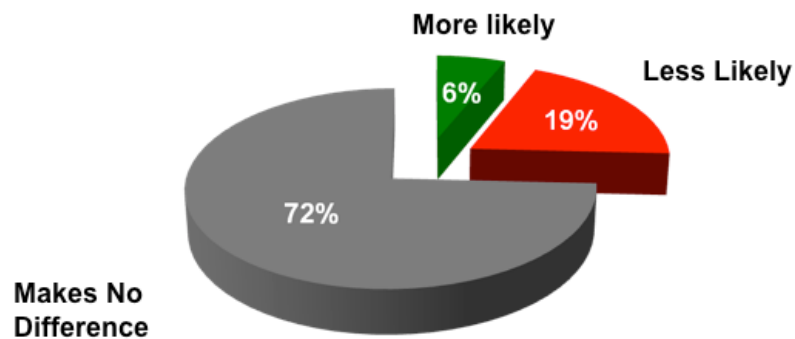
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Social Media Listening vs. Traditional Polling

Some have argued that the Nanny-gate issue was not at all impactful on the race. A majority of voters, when asked by a traditional polling firm, said Nanny-gate made no difference in their decision on their choice for governor (see polling question results below).

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



In fact, based on a detailed analysis of individual conversations and overall patterns, we believe the social media listening data told a different story in the Nanny-gate episode. It is important to understand that traditional polling is built around asking exactly the right question. The social data showed that the issue of Nanny-gate was not just that Meg Whitman hired an undocumented worker, but how she generally responded to it along with a few underlying issues such as: the perceived lack of support for a woman she employed for nearly a decade or her overall position on immigration. These divergent analyses are likely due to the fundamental differences between Social Media Listening and traditional polling (summarized below):

| | Traditional Polling | Social Media Listening |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Action | Framing the right questions | Just listening |
| Audience | Models of "likely voters" | Self-selected |
| Accuracy | Statistical models | Law of very large numbers |
| Available Results | Days | Hours |
| Authority | Wisdom of Pollster | Wisdom of Crowds |

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Conclusion

Traditional polling took up to seven days to show the negative effects of Nanny-gate and some polls even indicated that Nanny-gate had little-to-no impact on the election. Social media, however, clearly demonstrates the severity of impact on the Whitman campaign. With social media, campaigns have the ability to ask and re-ask, many different questions to get the correct answer, while traditional polling must ask the exact right question to illicit the most correct answer.

Perhaps more significant is the ability of social listening to spot trends in almost real time (vs. the days polling requires). In a 24/7 news cycle reality, relying on polling data alone may be very much like driving 80 mph at night with the headlights turned off. While scientific polling will always be an essential tool for campaigns to use, social media listening, as this case study shows, can provide crucial supplemental guidance to a campaign in real-time.

Social media listening is an undeniably powerful new tool that campaigns should utilize effectively to have the most up-to-date information. However, listening is really only half the equation. A digital response strategy, coupled with social listening, completes the picture (the brakes and steering wheel on that 80 mph car). Effective digital response involves proactive engagement online and in social media, in particular. Successful campaigns focus on cultivating online influencers before there is a crisis and activating those supporters in a time of need.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Having the insights provided by social listening is indispensable at crisis or critical junctions of a campaign that can decide the outcome of the race. While traditional polling is still essential to the world of campaigning (and will be for some time), social media listening can augment polling by providing further guidance to a campaign. As the field of social media listening evolves, we expect to see more sophisticated applications in the political and public affairs arenas appear.

Biographies

Bryan Merica, CEO Activate Direct

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Bryan founded Activate Direct (www.activatedirect.com) on the one powerful idea that social technologies are fundamentally changing the way politics and advocacy gets done. Since its inception in 2004, Activate Direct has served hundreds of political and public affairs campaigns on the Activate Direct platform, providing a full set of tools for persuasion, grassroots, fundraising and data intelligence. Activate Direct brings together a diverse team of professionals working in our San Francisco, Sacramento and New York offices. Our team members are political/public affairs strategists, software engineers and graphic designers.

Before starting Activate Direct, Bryan was a Senior Strategist at the enterprise software firm, PeopleSoft. He also founded and worked with several Internet startups in the pioneering days of the dot-com era. Merica started his career in IT/management consulting, working with international consulting powerhouses Deloitte & Touche and Price Waterhouse. Bryan graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of the Pacific.

Ben Tulchin

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As the President and Founder of Tulchin Research, Ben is a leading pollster and campaign strategist. He provides research and consulting services to a wide range of clients across the country, including candidates for elected office, ballot measure campaigns, government agencies, labor unions, non-profits, corporations and foundations. Tulchin has directed the polling operations for candidates at all levels of the ballot box, from president to city council. His clients have included California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, California Speaker of the Assembly John Perez, former DNC Chairman and presidential candidate Howard Dean, former California Governor Gray Davis, U.S. Senators Patty Murray and Harry Reid and he has helped elect and re-elect several members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Tulchin received his Bachelor's degree in History from Amherst College and resides in San Francisco.

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Paul Wittenberg

Paul Wittenberg, PWSMC President, has over 20 years experience helping clients find effective ways to take new technologies and apply them to further their mission. The need for organizations to understand and evolve with current technologies has never been more critical for success. Paul has built a unique and valuable foundational structure that equips companies and campaigns to apply Social Media strategies and technologies, transforming the way they approach both their supporters and their competition, resulting in a powerful edge.