

US debate battle starts on Internet

October 3 2012, by Ivan Couronne



Noah Kaplan, a supporter of US President Barack Obama, carries a sign across the street prior to the presidential debate in Denver. Obama and rival Mitt Romney will not wait until the end of their first debate to proclaim themselves the winner or deny each other's claims—their online teams will already have done so.

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While aides and other interested parties spun their message in Denver, Colorado ahead of Wednesday's first of three 90-minute showdowns between the White House [rivals](#), two websites will provide live punch later on.

Romney's [debates.mittromney.com](#) and Obama's

www.barackobama.com/debate will vie for online supremacy when the debate starts at 0100 GMT.

Obama's site was trailing a "Cheat sheet," outlining what the Democratic candidate contends that Republican rival Romney will say to try and win favor.

"While President Obama will lay out his specific plan to grow the economy and restore middle-class security, [Mitt Romney](#) will no doubt double down on his well-established strategy of attacking the president, distorting his own record, and avoiding any and all details of his plans for this country."

Romney's site, meanwhile, listed a set of "Debate Facts," noting that the United States had suffered a credit rating downgrade under Obama and said the [national debt](#) had risen by more than \$5.4 trillion on his watch.



Supporters hold up signs during a campaign rally of Republican US presidential candidate Mitt Romney in Ohio in September.

The site "will be the hub of our debate night efforts, fact-checking the Obama campaign as well as posting supportive material for our arguments," said Zac Moffatt, director of Romney's digital campaign, told Mashable, a website.

On Twitter, the battle was already underway between Republican accounts, including the candidate's official @MittRomney and @RomneyResponse, and the Obama side @BarackObama and @TruthTeam2012 will lead the charge.

Obama's top advisor David Axelrod, @davidaxelrod, is likely to be active as is the president's campaign spokesman Ben La Bolt, @BenLaBolt on what are two of the most followed accounts among the Democrats.

But a less partisan check on each of the candidates is likely to come from independent websites including politifact.com (@PolitiFact on Twitter) and factcheck.org, both of which check the veracity of campaign statements.

Leading traditional news organizations, most notably The New York Times, have also upped their online game for the debate, with the "Gray Lady," ready to publish elements on 76 subjects on the newspaper's website when appropriate.

"We're writing these fact-checks in advance so that we're not scrambling," said Mary Suh, a deputy politics editor at The New York Times, where 20 reporters have worked on the debate material.

"It's all on an Excel spreadsheet—from Romney's Bain history to Obama's record on the deficit," Suh added.

But Andrew Beaujon, a media reporter for the Poynter Institute, a non-profit journalism school, said social media had changed the game of making sure that politicians' public statements are held to account.

"Probably the biggest fact checker is Twitter, not everybody will need a professional fact checker to look things up," Beaujon said.

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