

On US campaign trail, your 15 Meerkats of fame

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Former Florida governor and prospective presidential candidate Jeb Bush, pictured here outside Washington on February 27, 2015, "meerkatted" a speech before Georgia's state legislature

As the 2016 presidential race comes into view, social media app-of-the-moment Meerkat offers American candidates a promising but perhaps risky way to reach out to the masses.

The online video streaming service, which was launched last month,

allows users to broadcast footage live from their smartphone with the touch of a button.

And now anyone within slingshot distance of a political [campaign](#) appears to be glomming on to an app that could change how people follow and report the upcoming presidential race.

Fueling the hype, the White House made its Meerkat debut Friday, with spokesman Josh Earnest sitting for a live-streamed interview with MSNBC correspondent Kasie Hunt.

"A little early morning history," Earnest quipped on the stream, which drew a total of 346 viewers. "We'll see how this goes."

So will everyone on the 2016 campaign trail.

Prospective Republican frontrunner Jeb Bush "meerkatted" his speech Thursday before Georgia's state legislature.

And four days earlier, Republican Senator Rand Paul—whose campaigns are known for their [social media](#) savvy—used the service to film a speaker at the SXSW event in Austin, Texas.

Meerkat integrates with Twitter, allowing users of the messaging platform to launch live video streams by sending a link for their followers to use or share.

It is hardly the first livestreaming app, but it has captured the zeitgeist in Washington's political and media microcosm and taken off with younger users outside the capital.

That could be a draw for [candidates](#) eager to appear they are tech-savvy enough to earn millennials' votes.

This week, Dan Pfeiffer, a former senior advisor to President Barack Obama, posted a call to arms—or perhaps a warning—to potential candidates.

"Every minute—literally every minute— of every day of the campaign will be available live to anyone who wants it, no matter where they are," Pfeiffer wrote in a column about how Meerkat will "change the 2016 election for every campaign, reporter and voter."

Closer to candidates

That is where risks could lurk.

"In some ways it turns every person that they run into into a live cameraman," Earnest said in his live-stream, which had glitches of its own, including desktop video streams cutting part of the subjects' heads out of the frame.

"Somebody who has instant access to the global communications network, that does heighten the risk a little bit."

The expression "47 percent" comes to mind.

Back in September 2012—early days in the social media technology arc—Republican nominee Mitt Romney told donors "there are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what" because they are "dependent upon government."

The candid moment, at a private fundraiser in Florida, was secretly recorded on a smartphone and the video went viral, damaging Romney's campaign less than two months before Election Day.

"This year's '47 Percent Moment' will be on live video," Pfeiffer

predicted.

Candidates are also weighing whether Meerkat's rewards might be worth the risks.

Paul's digital strategist Vincent Harris said live-streaming can amplify supporter engagement by showing behind-the-scenes action and other unique content.

"Closer to the candidate is great," Harris told AFP.

"But it needs to reach a certain threshold of commonality to really get there," he added. "I'm not sure if it is there yet."

On Monday, self-described "culture hacker" Rowan Wilken spoke in more cynical terms about the potential fleeting nature of the technology, tweeting that "in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 Meerkats."

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