Harnessing the power of social media during the GOP debate

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Dr. Jenny Stromer-Galley, an expert in social media and political campaigns offers insight on how candidates used social media to their advantage during the GOP debate on September 16. She said that Carly Fiorina, one of the winners of the debate, may have demonstrated her political savvy on television, but her campaign was unable to capture that momentum on social media.

"Carly Fiorina stepped out of the shadow of Donald Trump and Jeb Bush Wednesday night to carve out an image as a fighter with remarkable command of foreign and domestic policy. Yet, on social media, her campaign didn't use Facebook and Twitter to amplify her message," said Dr. Stromer-Galley. "Fiorina's campaign strategically used the buzz about her debate performance to fundraise online. They paid for a promoted tweet on the #gopdebate hashtag. And, after the debate, one of her two Twitter accounts, @carlyforamerica, heavily retweeted messages from supporters and pundits that she won the debate. Her personal account and her Facebook page urged donations to keep her fighting. But the messages that could amplify her presidential image and educate her supporters about her policy positions did not come through on social media–which increasingly is where public opinion is shaped."

Dr. Stromer-Galley says that savvy campaigns use Twitter to extend the debate-stage conversation with journalists, supporters – and even their opponents. Twitter is where journalists live, and campaigns see Twitter as a place to prove why they won the debate and why their ideas are best for the country.

Jenny Stromer-Galley (PhD Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania) is Syracuse University Associate Professor in the School of Information Studies and Director for the Center for Computational and Data Sciences. She is an affiliated faculty member with the Department of Political Science in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, and Vice President of the Association of Internet Researchers.

She has been studying social media since before it was called social media and has published over 40 journal articles, proceedings, and book chapters. Her award-winning book, "Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age," provides a history of presidential campaigns as they have adopted and adapted to digital communication technologies.

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