

#StandWithRand

How Rand Paul Utilized Social Media to Spread
His Message, Gain Media Attention, and Position
Himself as a National Figure

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Executive Summary

Ten years ago, politicians mostly relied on traditional media to pick up their message if they wanted to gain widespread attention. Online fundraising was just getting established, and political message boards were relatively crude. Grassroots movements and supporter mobilization have always been effective options, but require a commitment of resources and time that restrict innovative and experimental initiatives.

Today social media has lowered the cost of outreach dramatically, allowing politicians to amplify their initiatives and connect with constituents in new and creative ways. Senator Rand Paul's utilization of social media during his filibuster last March is one of the clearest examples of how politicians can use these new tools to push their agenda more effectively. By providing a steady stream of content to active followers, Senator Paul's staff planted seeds that resulted in over a million tweets related to his filibuster. This not only brought attention to him on social media, but became a news story that brought mainstream coverage.

The aftermath suggests a permanent increase in Senator Paul's prominence. His average Facebook shares per day more than doubled, indicating that more people are getting exposed to his views through family and friends. Mentions of Senator Paul in the news went from under 25 per day to frequently fluctuating around 100. Even Senators who took the floor with Rand, like Ted Cruz, Ron Wyden, and Marco Rubio, saw huge jumps in media coverage over the filibuster.

Cooperating with constituents and political organizations to provide easily sharable content in conjunction with new initiatives can serve to increase the influence of legislators and public figures in the long term. Legislators seeking to increase their effectiveness need to develop social media strategies if they want to promote their ideas and policies nationally.

Since the filibuster, Senator Paul has become a voice that gets attention on a wide variety of issues. His social media team deserves their share of the credit - the event may have gotten coverage without them, but they managed to leverage a one-time initiative into a platform for Senator Paul that will be there as he continues to push for increased influence within the Republican Party.

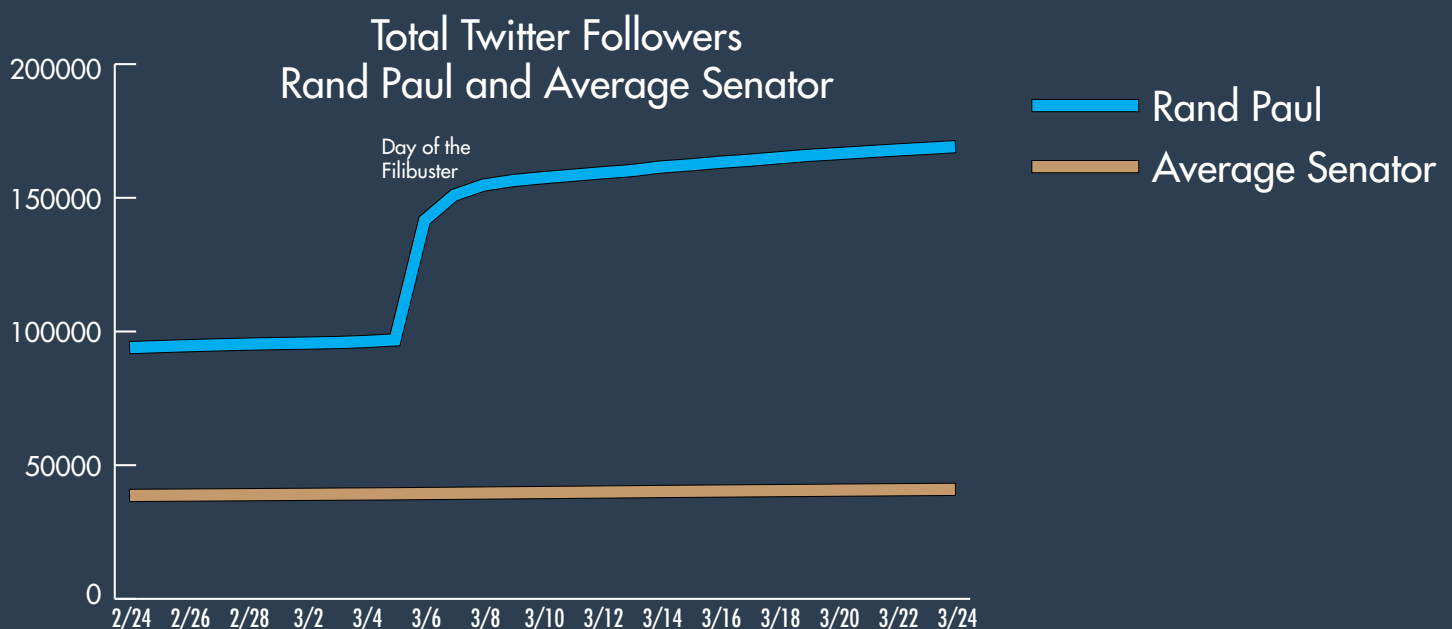
Introduction

The Effect of Social Media On News Cycles

The rise of social media has brought new opportunities for politicians to gain national exposure and advance their agendas. Within the Republican Party, Senator Rand Paul has shown himself to be particularly effective at utilizing social media. His filibuster against CIA Director John Brennan last March serves as a strong case study regarding effective use of social media to advance political agendas.

The filibuster, which lasted nearly 13 hours, was intended to highlight Senator Paul's objections to the CIA's controversial drone program. By the end Rand Paul had positioned himself as a nationally known political figure. For those seeking to replicate Senator Paul's social media success, one question lingers: what made his effort so successful?

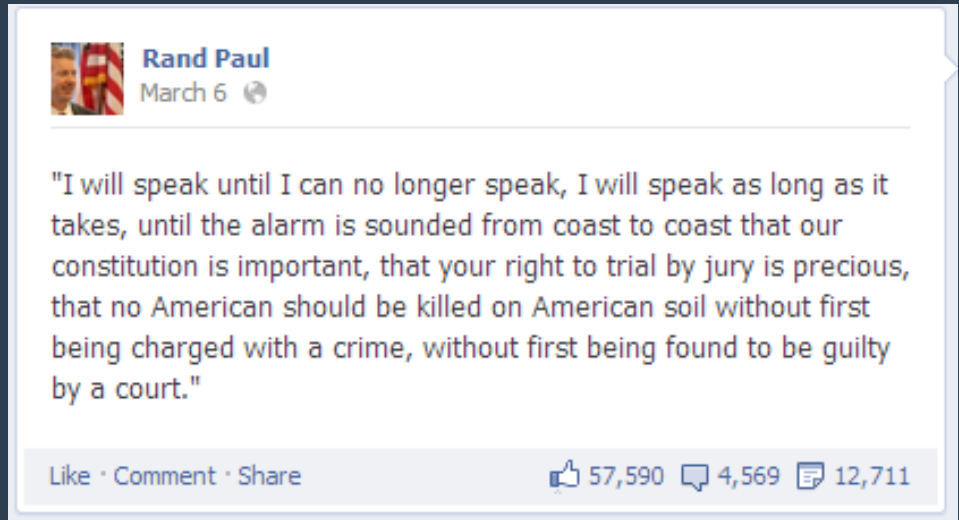
The main catalyst for Senator Paul's success was an explosion of attention on Twitter. His large following propagated not only the steady flow of content from his staff, but original content from supporters as well. This resulted in #StandWithRand becoming the number one trending topic on Twitter. By the end of the filibuster, there were over 1.1 million related tweets, including 450,000 containing the #StandWithRand hashtag. Senator Paul gained 44,700 new followers in 24 hours.



What sparked such an explosion of attention? A large part of the credit has to go to Senator Paul's social media team, who released a steady flow of engaging Facebook and Twitter content that was shared en masse by his followers. Image macros (pictures with overlaid text) from conservative and libertarian organizations including the Heritage Foundation and Campaign for Liberty were reposted on his page and received tens of thousands of shares. The high profile outside support gave the filibuster greater libertarian and conservative credibility.

Thanks to the sharing component of social media, event coverage tends to snowball. While the filibuster may have started as a spectacle with little coverage outside of Senator Paul's followers, his effective engagement of social media led to his message propagating itself organically.

Facebook and Twitter users shared content from Rand Paul's page with their family and friends, giving Senator Paul free publicity from credible sources. This was crucial to growing his audience beyond his core supporters and into mainstream politics.



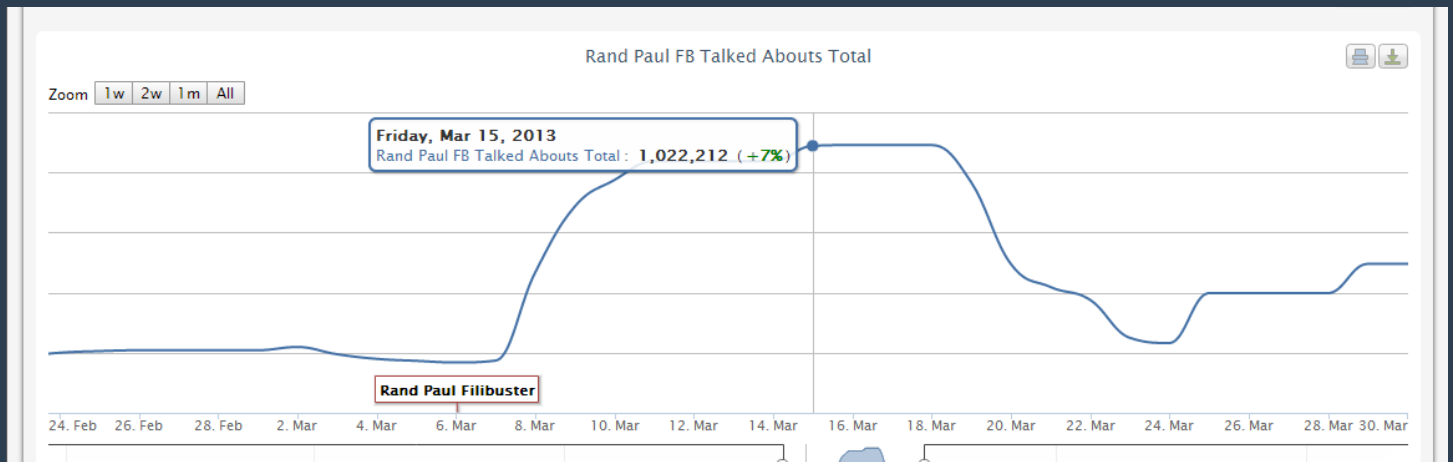
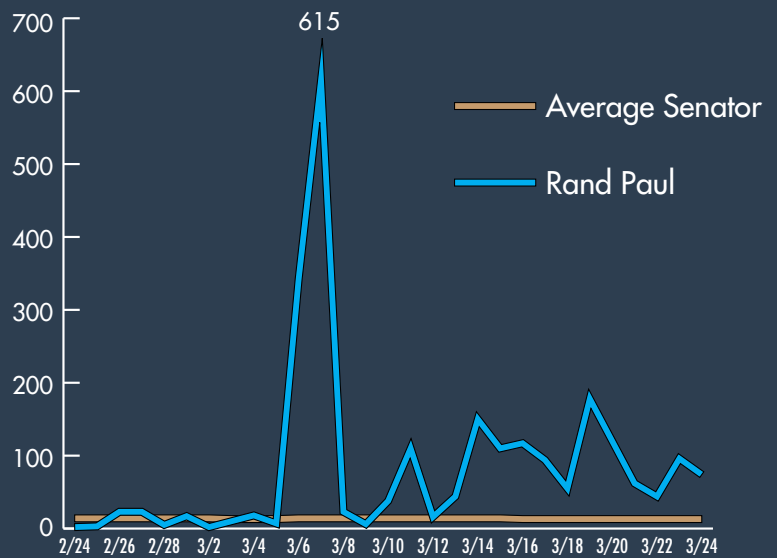
Media Reaction

How Traditional Media and Social Media Feed Off One Another

The massive Twitter conversation became a news story in itself, fueling mainstream media coverage. Rand Paul went from 7 news mentions on March 5th, the day before the filibuster, to 615 mentions on March 7th, the day after the filibuster. This propelled him to #3 on the TrendPo Rank, where he stayed for over a week. In comparison, the average Senator received just 14 news mentions that day – less than 1/40th of Senator Paul.

Not only did Senator Paul continue to sustain an average of over 100 news mentions a day, Facebook activity increased dramatically as social media spread the story further. Facebook Talked Abouts showed Rand Paul went from 121,394 the day before the filibuster to over one million Talked Abouts daily over the next two weeks. The average senator received less than 8,000 Talked Abouts in the same timeframe. This indicates the power of social media to maintain attention beyond the news cycle, as people share content through their social groups.

Rand Paul and Average Senator News Mentions 2/24-3/24

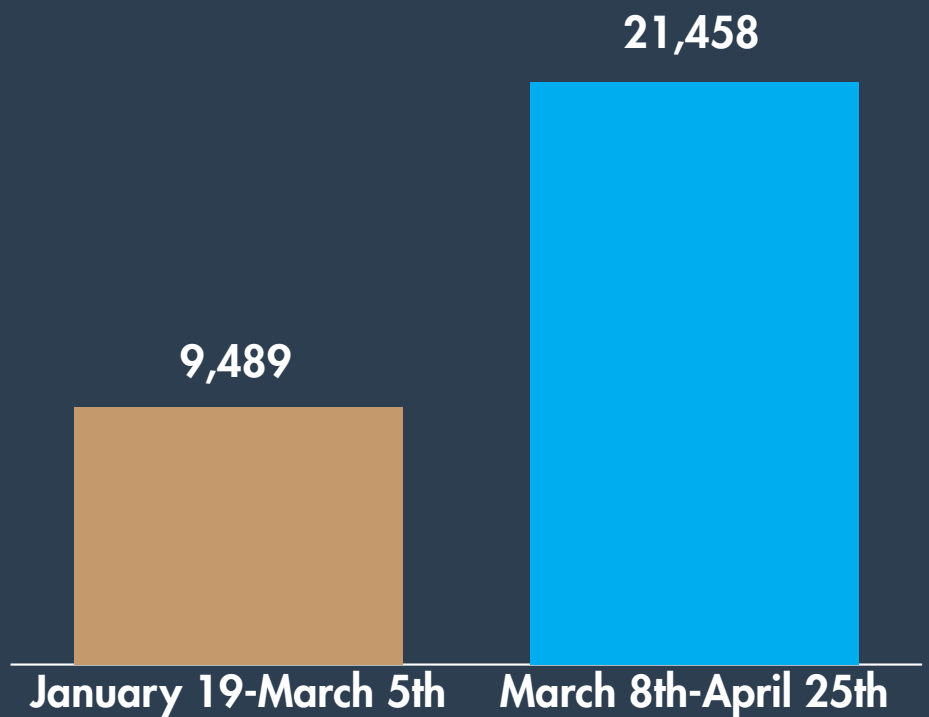


The massive uptick in traditional and social media attention during the filibuster translated into more than 140,000 new likes on Facebook and over 60,000 new Twitter followers during the next two weeks.

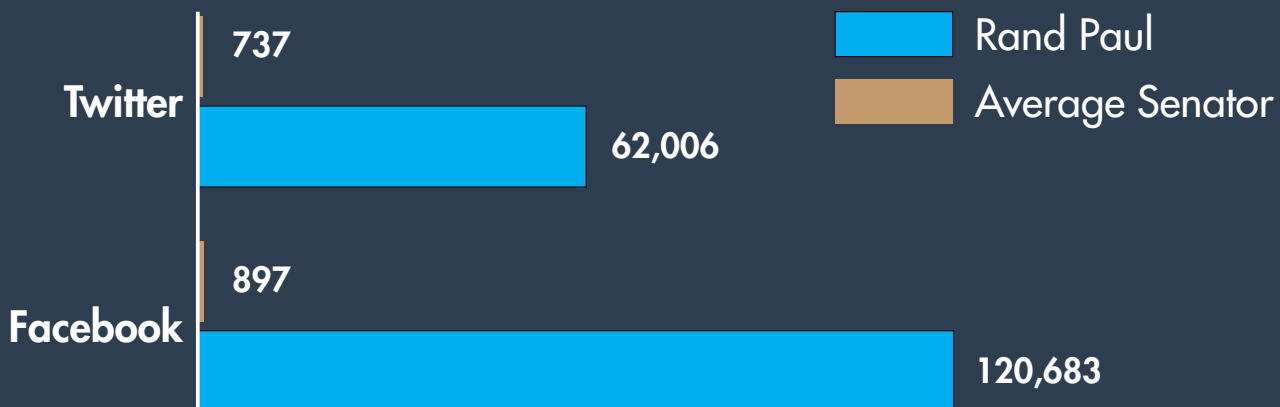
This resulted in a significant long term impact on Facebook users sharing Rand Paul's content. From January 15th to March 5th the average daily share rate of his Facebook posts was 9,489. From March 8th to April 25th, the average rate was 21,458. This excludes the day of and the day after the filibuster, which netted Senator Paul over 300,000 total shares.

Additional shares means more than just greater social media engagement; it means that posts are being spread through people's family and friends, where it inherently has more credibility. That kind of personal credibility cannot be created through traditional media outlets. Taking advantage of this new medium is crucial for creating a self-sustaining national following with a broad reach.

Average Facebook Shares Per Day



New Facebook Likes and Twitter Followers 3/1-3/10

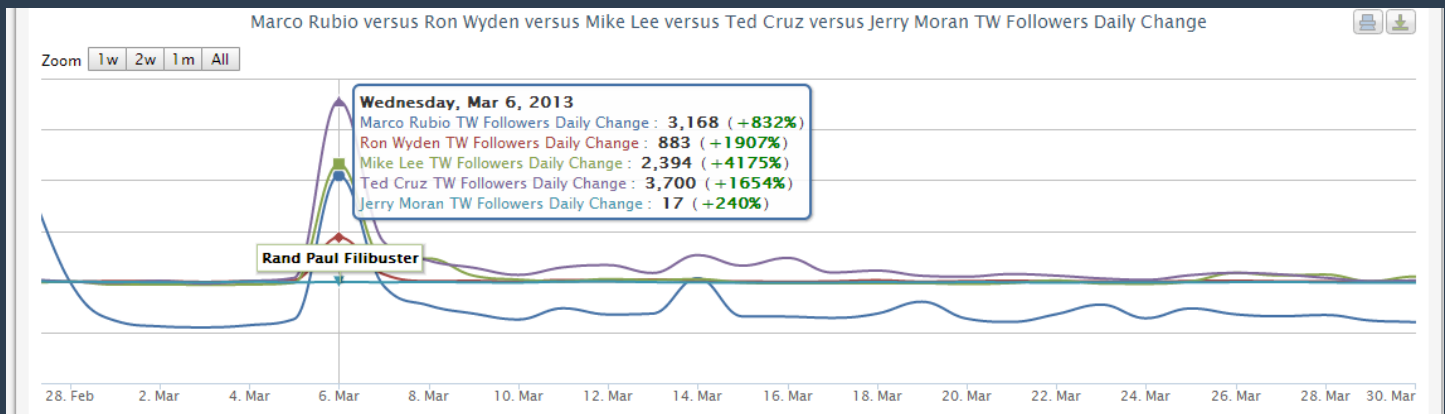
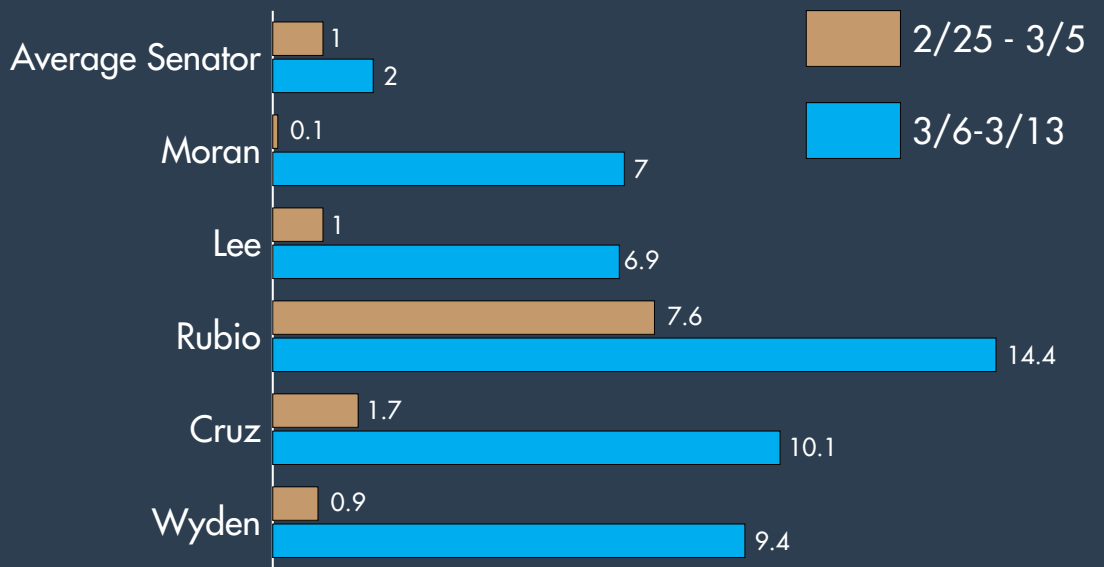


The Other Senators

The Benefits of Major Events Aren't Limited to the Star

Senators who took the floor with Rand Paul achieved massive national news coverage. Senators Cruz, Rubio, Lee, Wyden, and Moran, all of whom were thanked on Rand Paul's Twitter, saw an uptick in mainstream reporting and Twitter followers. The change in media coverage is striking; Senators with below average news attention like Jerry Moran and Mike Lee gained attention similar to high profile Senators. Marco Rubio more than doubled his usual media attention. Ted Cruz in particular utilized the occasion to make himself a national conservative icon, leading to a permanent average increase in his coverage. Ron Wyden, the most prominent Democrat to support the filibuster, also saw a big jump in media attention.

National Media Coverage 2/25-3/10



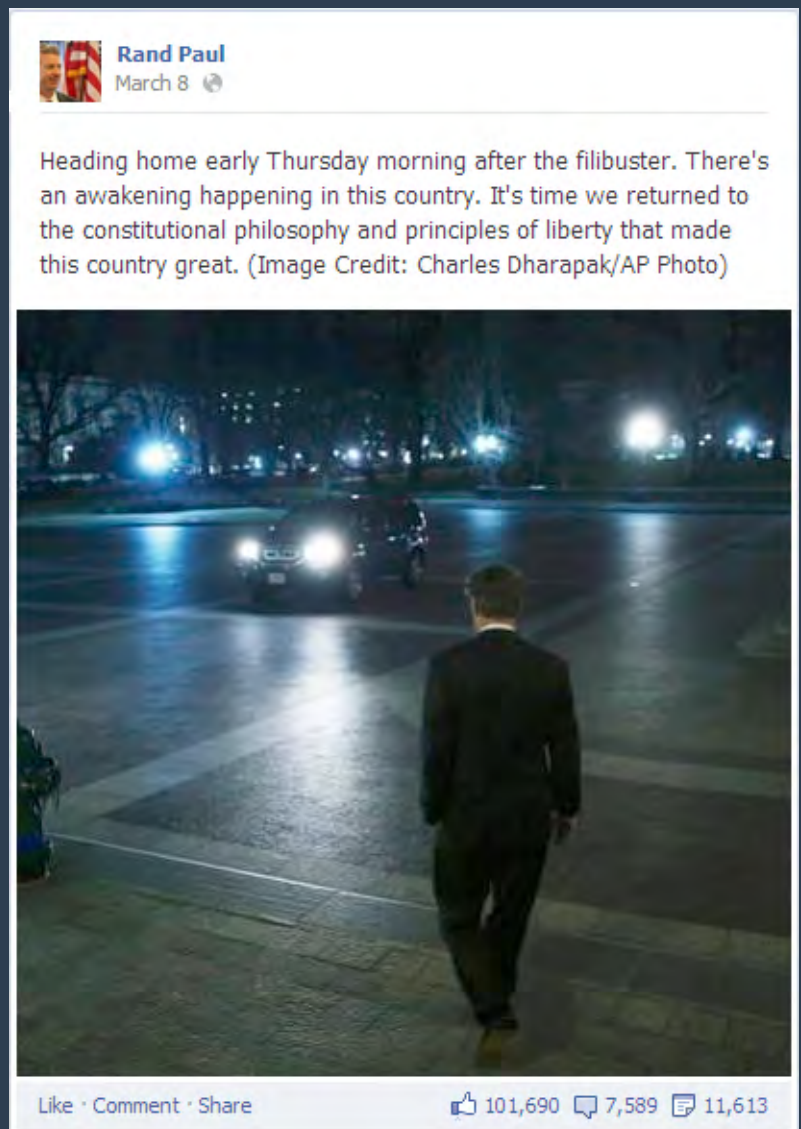
Lessons

How Can Other Politicians Learn From This?

The biggest insight we can take from Senator Rand Paul's filibuster is the disruption of the traditional news cycle as the sole driver of national attention. While national media will undoubtedly continue to be the primary way for millions of Americans to get their news, social media can share politician's initiatives while mobilizing their audience to propagate a message. Getting people to share ideas with their family and friends through a social media campaign can be a better use of resources than a paid ad, which can struggle to achieve the same authenticity.

A press conference is not enough for a politician to effectively share their ideas anymore - they need social media campaigns to amplify their message, which gives cues to traditional media to increase their coverage. Evidence from Senator Paul's experience shows that, if capitalized on properly, a major initiative or media event can result in a positive social media response for weeks on end. Politicians will increasingly need to take advantage of media coverage to permanently increase their social media presence, giving them a bigger audience for future initiatives while engaging supporters. This means that including social media in a press strategy is more important than ever - simply focusing on traditional news outlets and press clippings will hinder attempts to create long lasting support.

The filibuster also demonstrates the



A screenshot of a Facebook post by Rand Paul, dated March 8. The post features a photograph of a man in a dark suit walking away from the camera on a paved path at night. In the background, there are streetlights and the headlights of a car. The post text reads: "Heading home early Thursday morning after the filibuster. There's an awakening happening in this country. It's time we returned to the constitutional philosophy and principles of liberty that made this country great. (Image Credit: Charles Dharapak/AP Photo)". Below the photo, the Facebook interface shows "Like · Comment · Share" and engagement statistics: 101,690 likes, 7,589 comments, and 11,613 shares.

Rand Paul
March 8

Heading home early Thursday morning after the filibuster. There's an awakening happening in this country. It's time we returned to the constitutional philosophy and principles of liberty that made this country great. (Image Credit: Charles Dharapak/AP Photo)

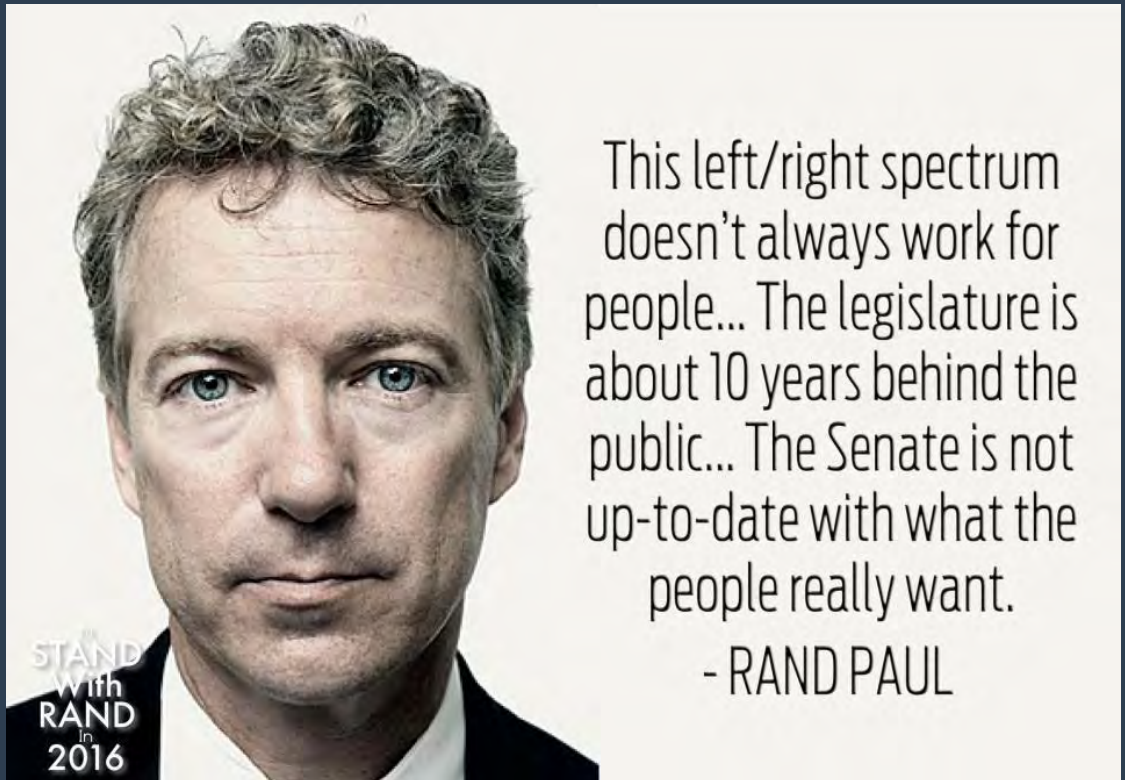
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power of intra and inter party cooperation. His cooperation with other Senators was mutually beneficial; those following the participating Senators were exposed to the filibuster, and the participating Senators saw a huge jump in traditional and social media attention from Senator Paul's followers. Engaging multiple figures, each with their own base of support, reinforced the point being made and gave additional credibility to the event. This put pressure on other party members who wanted to share in the positive perception to publically support the filibuster.

Senator Paul's filibuster demonstrates the power of social media to not only spread a message, but to become a story in its own right. That doesn't mean image macros and social media by themselves create a story, but in conjunction with real initiatives politicians taking advantage of online activism create a compelling grassroots story. Timing is crucial - not just knowing when the media is favorable, but when people are talking about you and when people are

receptive to being mobilized. Tools that utilize social media data in addition to national news coverage are going to become increasingly important for politicians seeking to maximize their impact. Those that do not are going to find themselves increasingly ineffectual in enacting the legislation that is important to them.



Stand With Rand has become more than just a hashtag: it is now an integral part of Senator Paul's branding. Fans have created macros, like the one above, containing "Stand With Rand in 2016," a reference to a possible Presidential run. It will be interesting to see how the social media buzz from 2013 plays into a potential 2016 campaign, should he choose to run. Either way, #StandWithRand remains a model for politicians seeking to utilize social media.