

# News Cycle Management as Political Communication

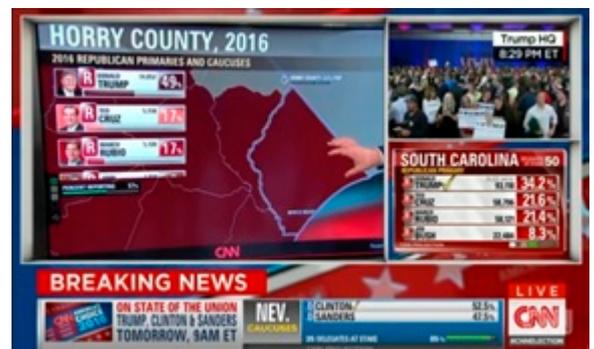


*By Matthew Bennett, Senior Vice President, [Racepoint Global](#) Washington D.C. Practice Lead*

**Political media** – the intersection between news coverage of campaigns and the **communications strategies** employed by candidates – is now a race to opine and define.

The wall-to-wall coverage by the cable networks, the plethora of websites and blogs offering daily, if not hourly, viewpoints, and the instant commentary on Twitter and other social media platforms runs from astute to amusing to annoying in the span of minutes. All these perspectives are jammed into the small period of time when actual political events are occurring, leaving no time for deeper analysis and the voter more confused than ever.

We've reached the point where saying everything is all that matters. For example, during **CNN's** coverage of the South Carolina Republican Primary and Nevada Democratic Caucus results, their screen contained no less than 6 different pieces of information – the main picture of the anchors/commentators, the scrolling headlines at the bottom, the countdown to the next "event," the actual results data, the CNN logo and a revolving fact box.



This information overload is shaping the voter's perception of the race. But is it helping? In this context, what truly matters is the vote count and what the candidates say in their speeches.

Beyond the sheer volume of information, narratives are now focused on "who won/who lost" and what was the most outrageous thing that happened. The media does this for understandable reasons – viewers are drawn to the easy to define constructs of winning and losing, and the more sensational the topic, the more clicks it will receive. Take coverage of the most recent Republican debate, which immediately focused on "who hit Trump harder" and "why did Ben Carson say 'fruit salad?'" It had nothing to do with what the candidates actually said about health care policy, the Supreme Court nomination or any other substantive topic. While this year's election is abnormal in terms of personalities and tactics, we've moved far beyond the era where distinctions were made on policy.

Politics is no longer about party platforms and candidate proposals. With so much money spent on the campaigns and so much air and Internet time to fill, we are surrounded by opinion and not fact. The campaigns engage with the media, sending their experts to comment, issuing "fact checks" and other memos to confirm or dispel media narratives and using the media coverage they get as stand-ins for actual voter engagement.

The campaigns can't be faulted for this approach. Media engagement strategies have to work in this new world of defining reality via the news. The traditional press conferences and white papers of campaigns past (e.g., [Bill Clinton's Putting People First](#) 25-page campaign plan or [Newt Gingrich's Contract with America](#)) are over.

Now, political strategy is directly tied to [commanding the news cycle](#). Last week showcased a perfect example of this new approach. Hours after a "bad" debate, Donald Trump unveiled

the endorsement of Governor Chris Christie and completely changed the conversation. News coverage and opinion immediately shifted from Rubio having finally successfully attacked Trump to a confirmation that Trump's campaign was on a roll. Reporters even jumped on this very premise with a [New York Times reporter](#) and a [Huffington Post editor](#) tweeting about the triumph of [the news cycle](#) over actual political outcomes.

Communicators face this world in two distinct ways. Smart political operatives embrace it, using mechanisms like Twitter to post favorable information about their candidate in forms that will appeal to news directors and voters alike. Those outside the political bubble but still trying to get their messages out in this time of information overload have to find inventive and sometimes farcical means to break through. And voters and consumers alike are stuck trying to find the facts that matter to their lives.

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