

Web 2.0 Technologies for Election Campaigning in Sri Lanka

Background

Internet has been a very popular media for election campaigning in different parts of the world. Sri Lanka is a country with regular elections and the internet usage is growing fast during last few years. However, the use of internet and web technologies for political campaigning is still emerging. By 2009, all the major parties hosted their party websites and some national politicians maintained effective web presence via their personal websites. However, not much research done on web-based campaigning in Sri Lankan elections. Therefore this research is an attempt to study the use of web based technologies in campaigning in Sri Lankan elections.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the extend of web 2.0 technologies for campaigning
2. To identify the particular technologies used and the campaign strategies followed
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of web based technologies used in final election results

Data Collection

- . Western Provincial Council Election - April 2009
- . **Presidential Election - Jan. 2010**
- . Parliamentary Elections – April 2010

Methodology

- . **Online Research**– Details of all candidates were studied for their web presence. (e.g.- Google searchability, personal website, face book entry, other network listing ect. The main candidates who had high web presence (Official website, active participation in social networking, on line candidanship, online advertising ect.) were studied in detail.
- . **Focus Group Discussions**– Held on evaluating the official sites and web presence of above candidates were conducted with the participation of web experts.
- . **Questionnaire/ Personal Interviews**– Conducted with the candidates/ campaign managers on their web based activities in comparison to other promotional activities.
- . **Election Results** compared against the campaign effectiveness.

Presidential Election, Jan. 2010 - Web 2.0 Tools for Campaigning

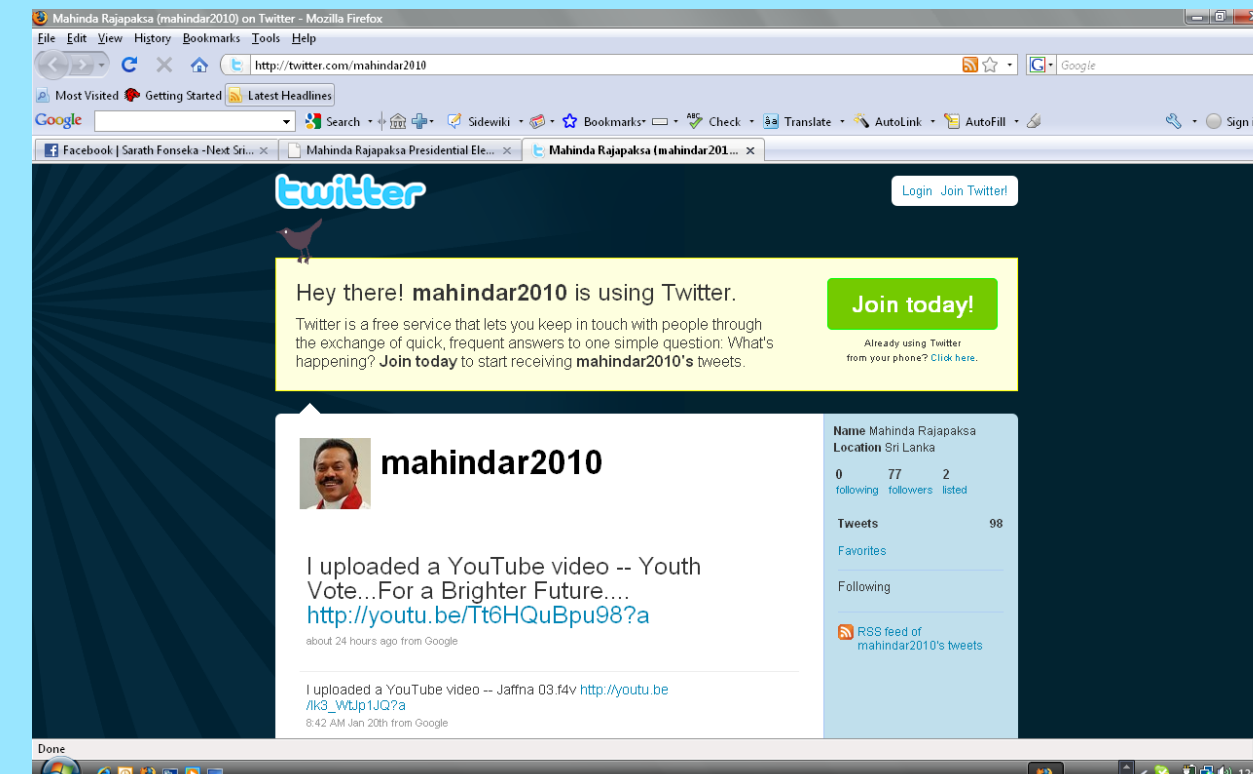
Mahinda Rajapaksa at Facebook



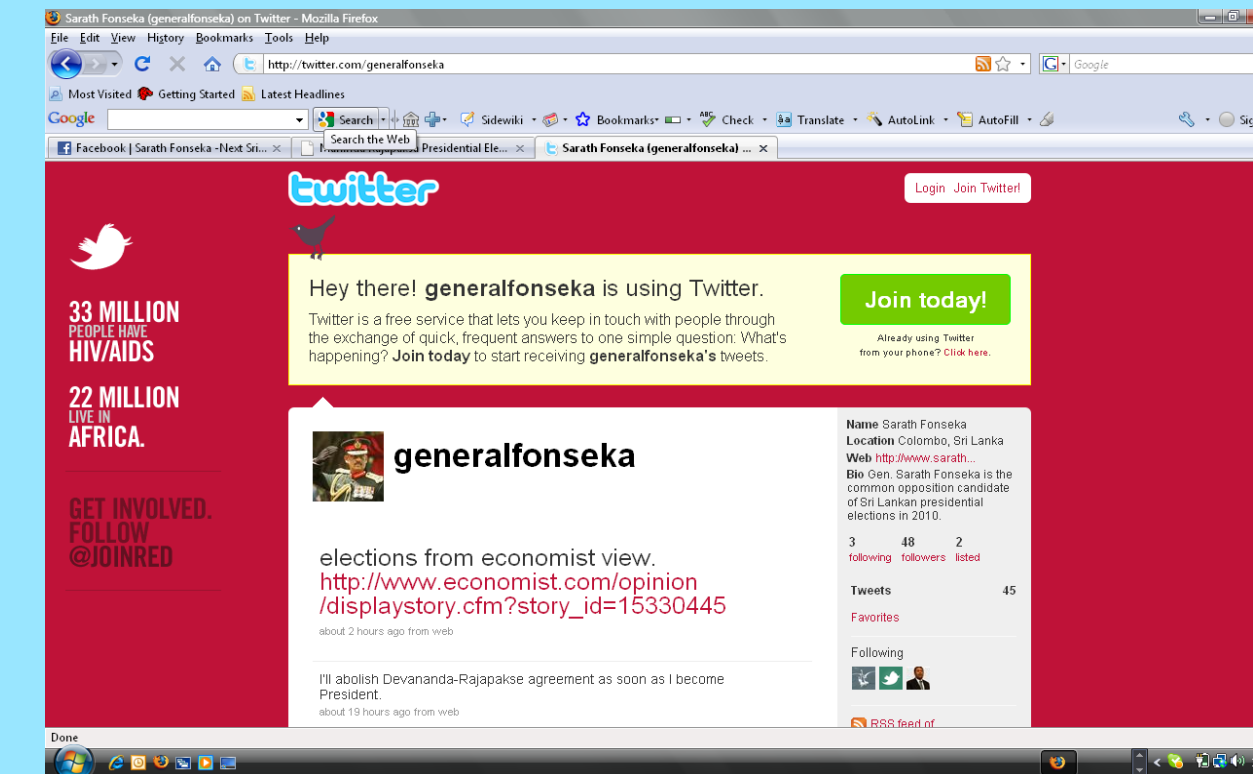
Sarath Fonseka at Facebook



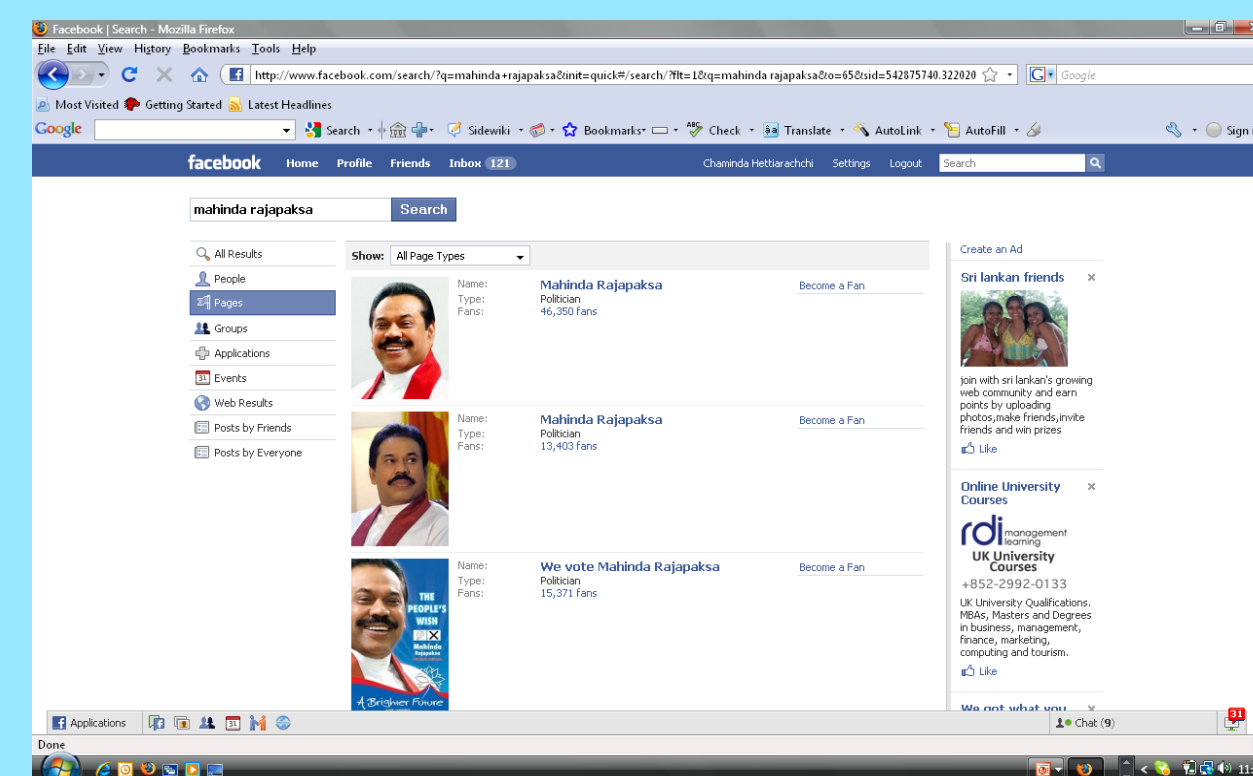
Mahinda Rajapaksa's Twitter



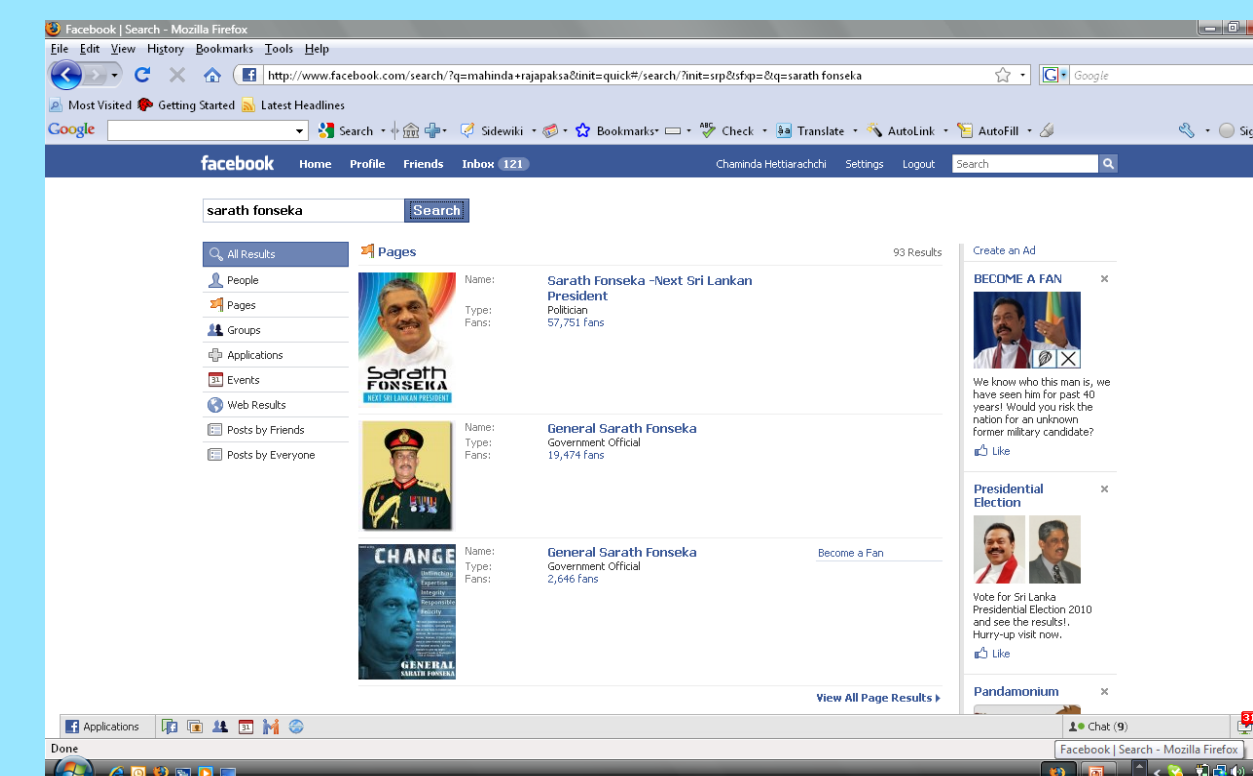
Sarath Fonseka's Twitter



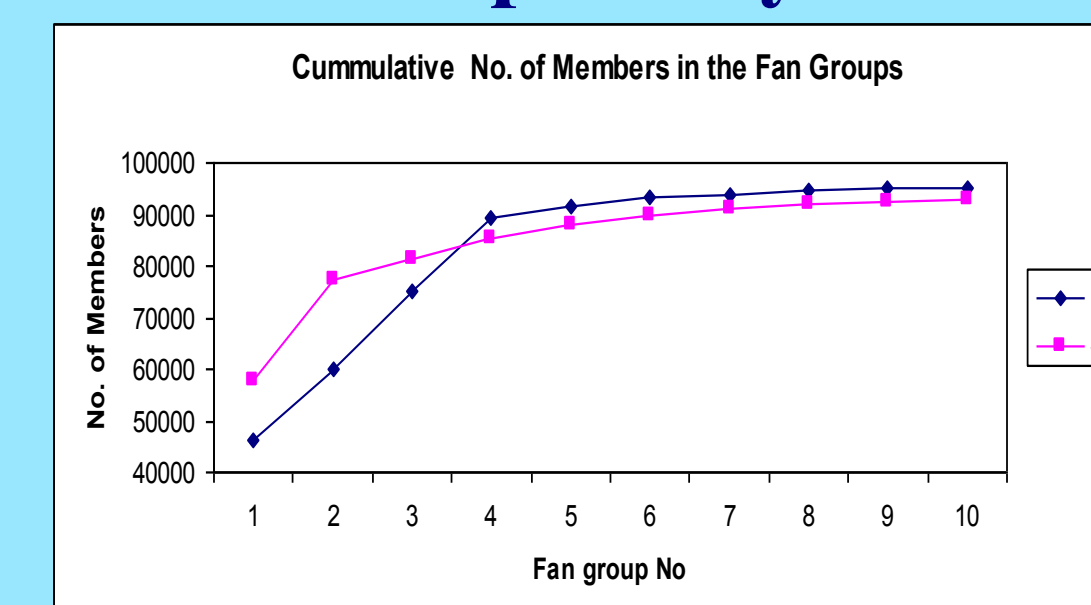
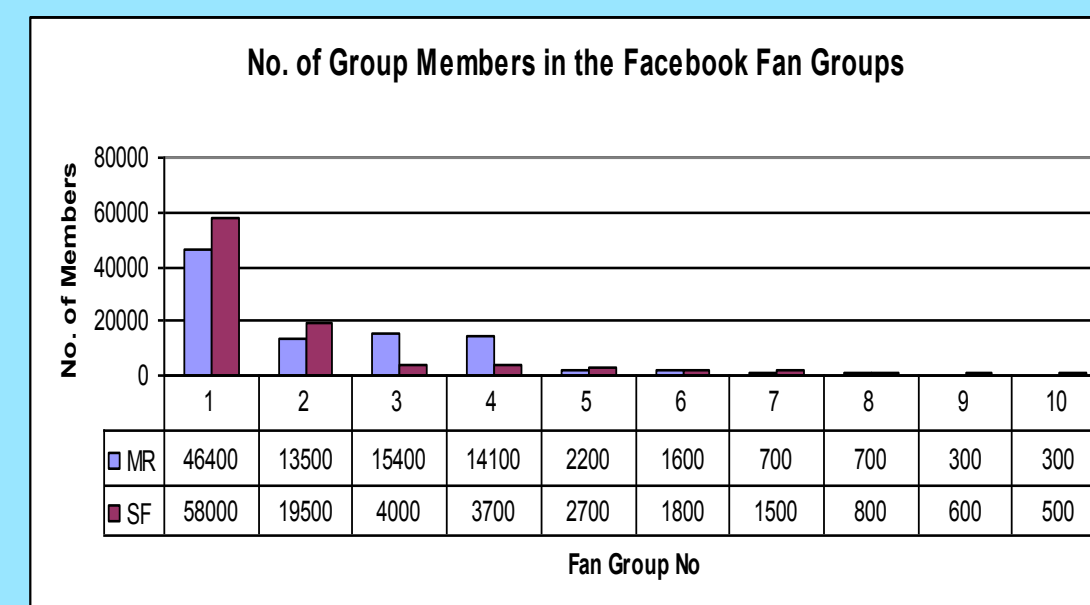
Mahinda Rajapaksa Facebook Fan groups



Sarath Fonseka Facebook Fan groups



Facebook Fan Groups Membership Analysis



Presidential Election, Jan. 2010

Observations

- . Only 2 candidates among 22 have utilized web technologies effectively.
- . **Mahinda Rajapaksha** has a better web presence as,
 - . Official website with superior quality
 - . High advertising budget
 - . Effective use of web 2.0 technology
 - . Natural advantage as the president
- . **Sarath Fonseka** has emerged as a strong campaigner on the web as he has created a highly interactive dialog among voters in the web space
- . Both candidates have extensively used web technologies for campaigning
- . Following improvements are possible,
 - . Integrated approach with other promotional channels
 - . Personalized approach
 - . More space for interaction and transactions
 - . Continuous web presence

Limitations of the Research

- . Research could not be used for predictions
- . Limited Internet access by the voters (only 20% of the population)
- . Users are mainly young, educated and urban participants
- . Lack of access to relevant data such as financing and user statistics
- . More analysis required using qualitative aspects
- . No post-election data

Conclusions

- . Internet is a powerful media in carrying out election campaigning
- . Web 2.0 technologies are effective and economical set of tools to reach target audience
- . It is necessary to learn the “rules of the game” on the web space to carry out a successful campaign
- . Full potential of this new media is yet to be realized in Sri Lanka

Chaminda Hettiarachchi
 University of Sri Jayewardenepura
 Colombo, Sri Lanka
 dilhanake@yahoo.com