

The humble but immeasurably powerful photograph

 By Francois Rank

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In the fast-growing world of social media and viral videos, conventional communication tools and their power to shape perception are often forgotten or ignored. Recently, however, the world's most-powerful spin machine has returned to use old-fashioned PR - particularly the humble but immeasurably powerful photograph.



Byline: Pete Souza/White House.
Published on: [Huffington Post](#).

While Republican Party candidates in the US have been undermining each other in paid-for television advertisements as they vie for the Republican candidacy, the communication team at the White House has slowly started public relations for President Barack Obama.

It is an election year in the US and recently Obama delivered his state-of-the-nation address -officially signaling the start of his campaign for re-election. In the buildup to the speech, remarkably "candid" photographs of Obama emerged on social networking sites and in the media. The bylines read - White House.

Simple content



Byline: Andrew
Harrer/Bloomberg. Published in:
The Star.

The content was simple: the president greeting a cleaner in the passages of the White House with his now trademark fist bump; phoning the father of a rescued soldier, his wife by his side supporting him; and, finally, hugging the now-retired Republican congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot a year ago at her "Congress on Your Corner" event in Tuscon Arizona.

While on the face of it the photos are news pictures, they go a long way in painting Obama as a man of the people -- a humble, intelligent leader who empathises with the plight of the everyday man.

This is electioneering gold and, in this day and age, PR is a major part of electioneering.

The Republican race has led to media speculation that Obama cannot be re-elected. However, this speculation has come in the absence of any campaigning by the current US president. It is well-documented that Obama employs a small army of communication experts and the PR abilities of a man who has written two books, has delivered at least one of the greatest speeches in US history (Yes We Can) and, ostensibly, won a Nobel Peace Prize for running a brilliant election campaign, cannot be underestimated.

Appreciation of simpler PR tools

For all the glitz and glam which characterised Obama's 2008 election campaign, the photographs released recently demonstrate that the president and his team have a wonderful appreciation of the simpler PR tools.

They are striking images and will go a long way to bringing back some of Obama's supporters who might have strayed as a result of issues they have had with the administration thus far.

The most obvious lesson here is that companies should explore all avenues of communication - not just a press release or a radio or television interview. Great images of a chief executive at a CSR event can paint a more human picture of an organisation in the public eye, and an iconic image can go a long way to upping your brand's image, making it instantly recognisable.

Reminder to us all

That photographs are powerful tools cannot be denied. That they are often ignored by communicators is equally undeniable. That the most powerful man in the world has used them as an effective communication tool in recent times should serve as a reminder to all of us in the communications business that sometimes simpler really is better.

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