

The Age of Cyberpolitics

Internet Campaigning in a Modern, Youth-Friendly World

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Abstract

Modern political campaigns have evolved as the Internet has grown in popularity. Almost all campaigns have a candidate website, electronic media and forums that have made the political news cycles change almost instantly, and millions of dollars can be raised for candidates at the click of a mouse button. Nevertheless, is the Internet only affecting the people already involved in the political process—or is it bringing new voters into the polling booths, such as the ever-coveted youth vote? This paper examines the political ramifications of the Internet as a form of alternate media using data from the Pew Center, and discovers that despite the media hype, the Internet is not yet a primary tool for campaigns and does not lead to increased political knowledge and activism among Americans and the youth of America.

Introduction

As little as ten short years ago, using the Internet for political purposes seemed unnecessary. While presidential candidate Bob Dole mentioned his website in his 1996 Presidential concession speech and businessman Steve Forbes launched his candidacy online in 2000, the medium was still secondary to broadcast television and direct mail (Murray 2005).

Americans are now starting to enter the world of “Internet politics,” and its effects on today’s modern campaigns are dramatic. The growth of the Internet has made it possible for candidates of all levels to establish a website for advertising their platforms, gathering grassroots support, and fundraising. The Internet has also done something that other forms of media are not able to accomplish—hit all key targets of a demographic using all forms of visual media simultaneously—and its effects have made a difference. Candidates can post the ads they broadcast on national TV on their webpages, write an entry in a blog page, and post their campaign platforms—in English and Spanish—with the click of a mouse button and at a far smaller cost than the alternatives.

The Internet could also solve a dilemma many candidates face in courting voters—how to increase political participation among younger voters. Often too mobile or disenfranchised with the political process to get involved, Americans aged 18-29 vote at significantly lower averages than their older counterparts. Yet, younger Americans tend to be more Internet savvy, according to surveys completed by the Pew Center and Gallup Research (“How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics,” 2007). Can the Internet then be a mobilizing tool to get the youth voter more involved in the political process and shape the way campaigns work in the future? This paper will work to answer two questions regarding the Internet and the future of campaigns. It will (a) investigate the effect of the Internet on political participation to determine if an

increased use of the medium is increasing political knowledge and involvement among American citizens in the political process and (b) examine what impact this could have on political involvement among the youth vote of today and future generations to come. The latter is an interesting question to study because the demographic is the most comfortable with the Internet and are typically less mobilized than older voters.

Through an analysis of survey data from the past three federal election years, I examined the extent to which Americans have embraced the Internet as a tool for learning about politics and elections. If no change has occurred, or the findings suggest that voter participation has significantly decreased, it could contradict the argument that the Internet is having a significant effect on increasing political motivation among Americans. These results will also be related to the political habits of younger voters—those within the 18 to 30 year old range. This will be influential in determining whether the Internet, a medium proven a part of the daily lifestyle of these individuals, has had an effect on increasing the political involvement and turnout of young Americans.

Literature Review

Evolution of the Internet has dominated the political process and campaign strategy over the past decade. In 1996, Presidential candidate Steve Forbes announced his candidacy online, and Bob Dole referred to his campaign website in several of his speeches—including his concession speech to President Bill Clinton (Murray, 2005). John McCain managed to fundraise thousands of dollars online during the night of his victory in the New Hampshire primary in 2000 and then used an online petition to place himself on the Virginia ballot. In 2004, the RNC hosted flash games on their website highlighting Senator John Kerry's "flip-flops" in his campaign

platforms and comparing him to more liberal members of the party, including his fellow Massachusetts Senator, Ted Kennedy.

Effect of the Internet

The 2000 presidential race shows that campaigns have increasingly focused on the Internet as a form of media to promote their candidate. A study by Park (2002) suggests that while political behavior among Americans did not significantly change in the 2000 elections, Internet influence could have a significant impact on the voting behavior of citizens, especially younger ones, in the future (1).

The party conventions, typically the centerpiece of a successful campaign, prominently featured the Internet for the first time in 2000. The Republicans established “Internet Alley” at their convention in Philadelphia. Editors of online newspapers and blogs as well as reporters for mainstream media who posted to their company’s website camped out in this area scripting, editing, and publishing stories, pictures, and video to accompany convention coverage (Davis, Elin, and Reeher 2002, 29). Additionally, as the host committees for both conventions are technically non-partisan, they can accept unlimited money from corporations. Microsoft aided in the Internet process at both conventions by donating \$500,000 to each convention to assist with their Internet needs (Dwyre and Kolodny 2001, 6). This funding helped the parties become and stay connected electronically throughout the race.

Another sign of the role of the Internet in elections is the presence of campaign websites, especially for raising funds. In 2000, almost every presidential candidate running had a campaign website, with posted video, candidate biographies, and other pertinent information. Fundraising online tends to be especially effective for lesser-known candidates, regardless of their political success. In 2000, New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley raised more money for the Democratic

presidential primary than the front-runner, Vice President Al Gore, through online campaigning. Studies show that these trends remained in all subsequent elections studied (Davis, Elin and Reeher 2002, 56).

The major impact of the Internet on the 2000 presidential cycle, according to Davis, Elin, and Reeher, was the use of banner and pop-up advertisements by the candidates for fundraising and grassroots support (2002). Senator John McCain (R-AZ), for example, posted a web banner the night of his victory in the New Hampshire Primary and raised over \$20,000 from the ad alone (57). To boost support, Texas Governor George W. Bush included a “tax-cut calculator” in his web banners that would provide an individual estimate when a few numbers were added (63). McCain also used the banner ads successfully to petition Virginia residents to place his name on the ballot; within a week, McCain was on the ballot (64).

The 2004 Presidential Elections also introduced a new type of voter to the election process—“online political citizens.” These individuals are the ones to frequent online discussions, websites and political blogs, and contribute funds online. An astonishing 44 percent of surveyed members of this group were never involved with the political process before 2003 (Murray 2005, 5). Results from the Pew Research Center suggest that 75 million Americans learned some of their political news and information, including voting records and issue positions on candidates, from the Internet, a fifty percent increase from the 2000 election cycle (Rainie, Cornfield, and Horrigan 2005). Drew and Weaver (2006) found that individuals who were more frequently exposed to political news and campaign information online were more knowledgeable and interested in the elections; however, this does not necessarily translate into voter turnout.

Yet, the Internet, despite all of its advantages, does not yet reach out to all demographics. A study completed by the Harvard University Institute of Politics notes that an Internet divide exists between those who have access and those who do not. As a significantly large percentage of younger voters have access to the Internet, they may be more likely to become interested in campaigns and voting (“Campaign for President 2004” 2005). Additionally, despite the availability of computers in public places such as libraries, a digital divide still exists in America. This makes one wonder if an increased use of the Internet in politics would further separate the “haves” from the “have nots” in American society and making the political process available only to society’s elites (Alvarez and Nagler 2001, 1152).

The Blogosphere

One fascinating aspect of the Internet world is the growth of the Blogosphere in recent years. More commonly referred to as blogs, they are informal sources of news online that often discuss topics not covered in the mainstream press (Wallsten, 2005). This could include controversial issues, such as when the *Drudge Report* was the first to break the Monica Lewinsky scandal that rocked the Bill Clinton presidency (Cohen, 1998). Blogs are highly partisan in nature, covering issues that primarily appeal to the party base while the candidate attempts to appeal to all voters (Adamic and Glance 2004, 1). Blog pages in the form of Internet diaries have made their way onto candidate profiles. Many candidates in the 2008 election on both sides of the political spectrum have blog pages, from Mitt Romney’s “Five Sons” to Hillary Clinton’s “Blog Hillary.” Individuals can make their own blog pages on some candidate websites.

In just a few years, the Blogosphere expanded to include hundreds of pages from a variety of sources on both sides of the political spectrum (Gill 2004, 8). Bloggers are finding

credibility in the mainstream world, with some of them, including party members, receiving press credentials to attend the DNC and RNC conventions in 2004 (Adamic and Glance 2004, 1). Organizations such as *TownHall.com* and *MoveOn.org* are becoming prominent players in the Internet news world, reporting opinion-editorials and other features from prominent politicians on their pages. Additionally, political Bloggers are hosting annual conventions such as YearlyKos to discuss the growth of the field as a political news source; at the most recent one in August 2007, seven of the eight presidential candidates in the Democratic party, including New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, made appearances (Vargas, 2007).

YouTube

Another important site is YouTube, which contains a massive amount of videos related to the presidential campaigns—including the “official channels” established by the campaign. In partnership with CNN, YouTube has hosted two presidential debates, one for each party, in 2007. The online video-sharing website was established in 2005; the fact that YouTube itself generates one-tenth of all Internet traffic in 2007 highlights its potential towards political influence in the 2008 elections (Cheng, Dale and Liu 2007, 1). By April of 2007, Illinois Senator Barack Obama had posted 41 videos on the site; New York Senator Hillary Clinton had 20 (Ubayasiri 2007, 11-12).

Internet Voting

Individual states have also used the Internet as a method of facilitating the voting in actual elections. In 2000, the Democratic party in Arizona attempted to hold their primary online by allowing voters to cast a vote electronically from a remote server as many as four days before the primary; the day of the primary, the voting website could only be accessed from official polling sites. As Vice-President Albert Gore had already captured the Democratic nomination for

that year before the date of the primary, the primary became a test to determine the success of online voting in the future (Alvarez and Nagler 2001, 1137). While traditional forms of voting were still available, voter turnout increased 723 percent between the 1996 and 2000 elections for Arizona Democrats; the state did not implement the system in future elections, however, because of technical problems (Solop, 2001). Regardless, popularity for the program was high, as fifty-six percent of Arizona voters wanted to use Internet voting in future elections (Alvarez and Nagler 2001, 1149). Michigan also used the Internet primary system in the 2004 elections, with voters using personal identification numbers and voter encryption to allow them to cast their ballots from a personal computer (Lauer 2004, 180), finding greater success than the Grand Canyon State's four years earlier. No data is available on the youth vote in these two elections.

Microtargeting

Having access to the Internet has also helped the campaigns in their daily operations for performing Microtargeting, or the process of pinpointing and grouping individuals together to better reach campaign supporters and fundraisers. Both the Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee have databases that include demographic, voting patterns and other information about registered voters in a district to "microtarget" these individuals. *Voter Vault*, the Republican microtargeting program, assisted with Bush's presidential victories in 2000 and 2004 when the President's campaign team could select what topics to push with different demographics depending upon the voter's history and background. *Voter Vault* uses both information purchased from companies and information gathered online and is accessible to all campaigns that buy into the program from the party (Sosnick, Dowd and Fournier, 2006). The Democrats developed this skill later in the form of *Party Builder*, but used it successfully in the 2006 midterm election in their 50 State Plan and their Congressional takeover (The Democratic

Party). Microtargeting has become a major online advancement for campaigns because of its mobility—campaign staff can reach the information from almost any computer connected to the Internet and create accurate walking lists or update information for the entire campaign.

One should note, however, that microtargeting can undermine the party's willingness to branch out to other groups in the electoral process by favoring the base. The campaign can choose which groups they would like to target at all times and that could provide a bias against party supporters who do not fit the targeted categories as well (Ubertacchio 2005, 6). This could backfire when dealing with the youth vote: because youth voters typically do not vote, they might not be a targeted category in many races (Rackaway 2007, 469).

Social Networks

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are the newest Internet tools to become involved in politics. Individuals can choose to join a group, such as the campus's College Republicans or College Democrats (Westling 2007, 4). Additionally, in 2006 Facebook established an "election pulse," which allowed all candidates running for federal or state office to create their own Facebook pages to reach supporters by friending them (6). This election cycle, the Facebook creators introduced the "Election 2008" application, which allows members to place a banner on their profiles showing which Presidential candidate (or party) they are supporting in the election (7). Studies of MySpace pages demonstrate that while individuals feel less attached to their direct community, they tend to be more aware of the activity in their local community—which could in turn have a positive impact on political involvement among young Americans (Nyland, Marvez, and Beck, 15). Another advantage to social networks is that students can keep connected with friends, including those friends in areas the individual is

registered to vote. Thus, keeping connected with political issues via social networks is beneficial for interest to grow (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 22-23)

Justification for the Study

American politics cannot thrive without voters. With voter participation consistently decreasing, according to polls taken over the past ten years (“Turnout Could Be Highest Since 1968 Election”), campaigns need to reconnect to the American people in ways that reach new voters. The growth of the Internet for business and personal use has dramatically transformed the way Americans act in their daily lives; thus, it makes sense for the campaigns to change their traditions to incorporate this new medium. Additionally, the ability for campaigns to incorporate various different mediums into the Internet (e.g. campaign ads on candidate websites, emails to raise money, using messages to set up campaign events) is a convenience with which campaigns should take advantage.

The youth vote, based on current trends in presidential elections, will likely be an influential group in determining the next president of the United States. In this election cycle, Democrat Barack Obama is courting the youth voters under the premise that they will bring him electoral victory in the upcoming primaries (Nagourney et Al. 2007, 24). Fourteen percent of the Democratic vote on Super Tuesday came from voters under the age of 24, with a large chunk of that vote for Obama (Adler 2008). Census data, based upon the National Election Pool’s state exit poll data results, concluded that youth voter turnout increased by 11 percent in 2004 from the 2000 election (“Census Data Shows Youth Voter Turnout”). The U.S. Census bureau reports that 58 percent of Americans 18 to 24 overall were eligible to vote in 2004, but only 47 percent of young Americans overall did vote—the lowest of all surveyed groups. In contrast,

approximately 91 percent of individuals 55-75 voted in the 2004 election (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

Therefore, the candidates can easily capture this demographic opportunity if they learn how to reach the youth voters—and the Internet may be the tool that delivers the demographic. In their historic study of Harvard graduate students, Eleanor E. Maccoby, Richard E. Matthews, and Anton S. Morton (1954) determined that campaigns could be more successful at persuading first-time voters to vote rather than older, party-established voters in an election motivated by the current political climate. Thus, whom younger voters vote for in their first election may not be for whom they caucus with in future ones.

The Internet may be able to assist campaigns in shaping the political habits of America's youth. Having elements of the campaign specifically geared at younger voters is a key tool for increasing their vote. America's youth today is more computer-savvy than its preceding generations, partly the result of technological advances such as the Internet. Rice and Katz (2003) determined that Americans under the age of forty are more reliant upon mobile phones and the Internet than older Americans.

The Internet could also become the most effective measure of establishing voter turnout and legitimacy among the political electorate. Voters can learn about the progress of an election, and the subsequent results, online. The Pew Center for the People and the Press reported that one-third of adults gained their political news online, with over half of respondents commenting that they read election news online to learn information not usually covered in traditional news sources ("News Attracts Most Internet Users," 1996). As access to the Internet increases, the majority of the American electorate will be able to rely on online political news with the credibility and legitimacy once given only to news that appeared in print. As these younger

generations of Americans are more Internet-adept through their school and job requirements, this trend could increase their political activity among the demographic.

Lastly, the financial costs of running an Internet-based campaign make it a useful tool. Although initial start-up costs can be high in creating a website, adding to and maintaining the pages throughout the campaign costs far less than continuously running television advertisements or creating direct mail campaigns. The start-up price for the Republican National Committee's website in 1996 cost the party \$50,000; other candidates, such as Phil Gramm, spent as much as \$8,000 in starting a private website, and still others received free domain rights if they allowed the host server to advertise on their site (D'Alessio 1998, 3).

Methodology

This paper examines the extent to which Americans are embracing the Internet as a political tool and the success campaigns are achieving when they include the Internet as part of their media campaigns. I conducted this analysis through a number of parts and steps, including coding of data and a review of existing scholarly research.

The Pew Center for the People and the Press conducted surveys in the weeks following the 2002, 2004 and 2006 elections to gauge the political knowledge and involvement of Americans. The amount of people responding to each survey was approximately 2500 individuals (2745 in 2002, 2200 in 2004, 2562 in 2006). Although the results focus on general civic knowledge, they ask questions on the specifics of the Internet use as well. I analyzed the results using frequency and chi-square tests via cross-tabulation reports to determine if there was a statistically significant increase in Internet usage in the 2006 election cycle from the 2002 election cycle. Ten survey questions were employed to test the hypothesis that the increased usage of the Internet by both Americans in general and campaigns has increased political

awareness and participation among voters. There were ten questions cross-tabbed to demonstrate these results, three of which were control tests. Having the control questions analyzed was designed to eliminate any present confounding variables, such as overall voter growth.

After processing this information, I will then use the preexisting literature to compare my results and determine whether there has been an increase among political awareness and involvement among younger Americans in particular. These findings are in the conclusion section.

The ten questions asked in the survey are as follows:

1. Are you registered to vote?
2. What is your primary source of political information?
3. How often are you aware of the political climate in your area?
4. Do you use the Internet at home?
5. Do you use the Internet for email?
6. Have you ever donated to a political candidate online?
7. Have you ever researched candidate endorsements online?
8. Have you ever sent or received email on behalf of a candidate?
9. Have you ever watched video clips of a candidate?
10. Have you ever participated in online chat rooms or instant messenger for political purposes?

Results

The results from the Pew Center surveys provided mixed results regarding political involvement and the Internet.¹ According to the Census Bureau, voting among Americans for federal elections is steadily increasing, but lagging far behind many European counterparts. Naturally, turnout in Presidential years is higher than in off years. In 2004, 55.3 percent of eligible Americans voted for President, 4 percent more than President Bush's first term. Yet turnout in 1992 was 55.1 percent, thus showing it to be a restoration effect ("National Voter Turnout in Federal Elections: 1960-2006"). In addition, the number of registered voters who cast ballots in 2000 and 2004 increased to 86 and 89 percent, respectively, the highest they have ever been (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

The source behind this, however, is yet to be determined. After performing cross tabulations on the data present in the census surveys from the three years studied, the Internet does not seem to be that catalyst behind this change.

Voter Registration

The results from the Pew Center Survey showed a decreased turnout in voter registration over the three years surveyed. The new findings contradict those found in the National Election Survey found that voter registration actually increased during this time. This number was 94.7 percent in 2002; it dropped to 84.7 and 82.3 percent in the next 2 cycles. Additionally, the number of unregistered voters increased from 4.1 percent in 2002 to 16.9 percent in 2006—with the main jump right before the 2004 election (14.8 percent). This results continues to show the disconnect between American voters and the polls. It could also mean, however, that the

¹ The Pew Center Survey did not separate their results by age. This is important to note, as it makes it difficult to infer the findings among the youth vote.

majority of people voting in America had registered already before 2002. The mean age for people who participated in this survey was 49.6, thus this is a true possibility.

Sources of Information

According to the survey results (Fig. 1.2), Internet use is steadily increasing among adult Americans; however, it is still far behind television, radio and newspapers as a primary source for political information. In 2002, 3.9 percent of survey respondents stated that the Internet was their primary source; this later increased to 6.4 and 7.6 percent in the two following surveys. This result is also positive considering many other surveys show that the Internet is increasing in general among voters. In addition, although slight, the numbers for television (59 percent steady with an increase in 2004), newspapers (20 to 16 percent), and radio (9 percent steady) stayed the same or decreased—thus proving that alternate sources are gaining ground to some extent.

Figure 1.2 shows that the Internet is the only medium that showed an increase over time. Because the survey occurred over three election cycles, one of which was a presidential year, the changes in 2004 are logical. Television, for example, became more popular in 2004 because of events such as the party conventions and the presidential debates. Radio, which often has more of a partisan slant, compared to its visual counterpart, decreased as a result; however, its grassroots nature led to its increase in midterm elections.

Levels of Political Interest

When asked how informed they were about the current election, respondents stated that they were typically more politically aware than not (see Fig. 1.3). This seems to be true more so in presidential elections than midterm elections. The highest percentage of people being politically aware was in 2004, when 58.8 percent of those surveyed responded by being aware of politics most of the time. Politically aware, in this survey, refers to whether an individual knows

and understands the political climate at the time in which the survey is issued. This is logical, considering the higher-than-usual coverage of the elections on mainstream media during presidential years. In the midterm elections, the results formed a plateau around 51-52 percent. Additionally, the survey found that there were fewer people found not informed than less informed. Approximately 25 percent of people surveyed were informed “some of the time” throughout the three years, compared with 11 percent only “now and then” and 8 percent “hardly at all.”

The percentages for all responses but “most of the time” increased during midterm years in this self-reported survey. While logical, it demonstrates a general disinterest of political news among Americans. The Internet, if discovered to be more popular, could have raised this number significantly.

General Internet Usage

Internet usage among Americans is typically high, averaging around 60 percent as demonstrated in Figure 1.4. Yet the number of people who said that they did not have Internet access or use the Internet also grew slightly, which is not a good sign for the future of the Internet as a campaign tool. The Internet is becoming more commonplace, but it is among new voters that it needs to make a difference.

General Email Usage

One of the main reasons in which the Internet became popular among Americans was the convenience of the Internet for sending electronic mail messages or emails, as they are more commonly referred. Email is vital to almost every job sector today, including politics. An increase in popularity for Blackberries and other similar devices has also helped with the Internet phenomenon (Kraut et Al. 2005). The results from this question were included to separate

political emails from general emails, and determine if individuals accept and send political emails differently than they do general emails.

Yet the study results demonstrated in Figure 1.5 show that people are not checking their email online, as asked in the question “Do you go online to send or receive email?” In 2002, 87 percent of survey respondents said they frequently went online to check their email. This number dropped drastically over a two year period, with only 37.7 percent of respondents replying yes, and further down by 2006 to 16.6 percent. Not surprisingly, the no response increased over this time inversely to the yes responses.

This could mean several things for the future of emails in general—that it is no longer the primary focus for people when they go online, that they are using more devices such as Blackberries that automatically deliver their email rather than making them open a web browser, or that email has been replaced by other forms of communication such as text messages.

Online Tools and their Influence on Political Participation

The earlier results presented focused more on generalized findings and not those specific to campaigns and their Internet usage. Following are the results of individual online tools, such as online donations, candidate emails, and video chats, and whether or not they increased political awareness and participation among Americans. These can be visually demonstrated in Figure 1.6 of the Appendix.

Candidate Donations

The survey results for online donations showed that most people are not donating online. Again, the peak year for donations was 2004, with 6.3 percent of respondents admitting to donating money online. Surprisingly, the numbers for 2002 were higher (4.6 percent) than 2006

(2.9 percent). This is interesting considering how the 2006 election brought out higher turnout and political interest than the 2002 election.

There are many reasons that could account for the low number of online contributions. While credit card security is typically increasing over time and intermediate sites, such as Paypal, are becoming more popular among consumers, many people still do not feel comfortable with using their card on a website. Additionally, fundraising direct mail is still the most successful method of raising money—partly because people can send their funds in a check that banks can track. Many candidates, especially those running state campaigns, do not use online fundraising because of the cost incurred in processing credit cards, again lowering the effectiveness of online donations (Chen et Al., 2006).

Candidate Endorsements

Researching candidate endorsements online have also decreased as well. In 2002, 64.5 percent of Americans surveyed researched a candidate's endorsements; this dropped to 44 and 29.4 percent in subsequent elections. Several factors could account for this, including a general decrease in reliance upon endorsements, especially from political parties, unions, and celebrities among Americans. Additionally, the media has placed a significant focus on candidate endorsements in the past few years, thus eliminating the need for the average American to research them. Lastly, candidates often use high-clout endorsers, such as governors and senators, in their commercials and other publications, therefore instructing the voters on who supports them as well (Kahn et Al., 2002).

Email Supporting or Opposing Candidates

The results from this survey tended to run parallel to the general Internet findings regarding sending and receiving email for the same years. In 2002, for example, 30 percent of

respondents said that they had sent or received emails involving political candidates. This number dropped drastically two years later to 4.7 percent, and then rose slightly to 12.3 by 2006. Many reasons could account for this change, including the increase in spam filters picking up candidate emails and stopping people from reading them. Additionally, as candidates became more reliant on email for spreading their message and thus sending emails more frequently in later cycles, the deluge of emails could have backfired and inadvertently decreased its effectiveness. Most likely, the answer for the email decrease is the general decrease of email usage among Americans, as demonstrated in the results above.

Online Chat Rooms and Instant Messenger

Levels of online chat room and instant messenger participation were the only response that actually remained the same over the 2002 and 2004 cycles. Typically more popular among a younger set of Americans, these forums are used for discussions with candidates or about the issues in which they stand for. One can also personalize the chat rooms and instant messages electronically, thus making the voter feel as if he or she is an individual within the campaign. Ultimately, campaigns discovered them to be less effective than social networking, and thus that became the primary tool for connecting with the youth set in the 2006 election.

Discussion

I expected to see increases in Internet usage among survey participants over the three years. Yet, the results of this study contradicted conventional wisdom. Instead of showing that there was a significant increase in voter participation online, the numbers of each result seemed

to plateau, and in some cases, decline. Following up this survey with data from several other election cycles, including 2008, will provide more clarity to the results.²

In addition to corroborating the results, a follow-up study would allow for some individual questions that respond to new technologies. Many political scientists believed that polling sites and voting machines were going to be replaced by Internet voting; it was thought that by bringing the election to Americans within their houses or businesses that it would increase voter turnout and decrease costs simultaneously. Most states, however, have scrapped plans for Internet voting in the immediate future (Mohen et Al., 2001). While YouTube has existed since 2005, for example, its video-sharing influence in politics was not realized until former Virginia Senator George Allen used a racial slur against a member of his opponent's staff on the campaign trail. In 2006, candidates did not have their own channels on the site—today the channels for Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama feature hundreds of campaign videos which can be viewed free of charge (Cheng et Al., 2007).

Many questions remain regarding the advantages of Internet campaigning, particularly among the youth vote. For the past several election cycles, the media has left the American public thinking that each subsequent presidential election would be the “Year of the Internet” with little substantive evidence to support the claim. As there is a Presidential election fast approaching and the hype for the Internet increasing daily, this leaves many to wonder whether the 2008 election may actually be the year of the Internet. Additionally, as younger voters are

² Although the survey occurred in the same method and by the same organization, the same individuals did not participate over time, thus a true longitudinal comparison is not available. Adding additional years to the survey would allow a better description of when the change between non-Internet and Internet campaigning began and fully developed.

casting ballots in higher than anticipated numbers, the largest group of Internet users could finally be connecting with the Internet and further increasing its popularity as a campaign tool.

Lastly, the media hype surrounding the Internet and politics should be reviewed. In each election cycle this millennium, Americans have been told that the power of the Internet had finally come to fruition and that the art of campaigning had forever changed. Yet, as each primary and general election concluded, the Internet had not gained the popularity among the voters and usage among the campaigns in which it had been originally hoped. Why does this phenomena occur then, and could we have actually reached the year of the Internet and Cyberpolitics in 2008?

Individual Campaign Techniques and the Internet

Findings have demonstrated that the Internet is more successful at certain aspects, such as raising money and creating meet up locations for grassroots efforts. They can also retool some of their current methods to present them with more personalized touches. For example, instead of having the campaign send out emails to everyone, they could do a chain process where an individual sends out to those who they know personally—thus eliminating, or at least minimizing, the impression that it is a form letter.

Many campaigns and campaign committees in 2006, for example, hosted pages specifically directed at attacking issues or statements of their opponents. The traffic to these websites was not significant, but it substantially influenced the vote for those who perused them. The price of a successful campaign for President or other elected office could therefore decrease and allow qualified candidates who otherwise could not afford to run competitive campaigns the opportunity for success. Campaigns also benefit by the relatively inexpensive costs of the Internet because they can use the funds originally designated to the areas bolstered by the World

Wide Web, such as volunteer coordinators, and use those monies towards other areas, such as media and Microtargeting (Iyengar et Al., 2006). A good example of this is social networks—which are popular among young Americans—which are free to operate and rather successful at mobilizing volunteers for grassroots efforts.

One area of the Internet not accurately studied for this paper was internal social networking. Many of the Presidential candidates, and both the Democratic and Republican National Committees, feature places on their websites in which individuals can make their own support page. On these individual pages, the members can invite others to join or volunteer, donate money, request information, and many other options. The more personalized the page is for the individuals, the more likely they are to get and remain involved in the process. Additionally, this feature parallels many of the social networking sites presently available for younger Americans, and thus it could increase their desire to become involved in the political process (Beckerman et Al., 2005).

Microtargeting can also benefit from the growth of internal social networks. The more input individuals provide to the campaign, the better they can group individuals for meet-ups, fundraising, and mailings and better spend their funds. For example, if a person notes on their profile that they are a part of their University's College Republicans or Democrats, the campaign can contact them about gathering volunteers. Another example would be if an individual noted on their campaign profile that they enjoyed hunting; the campaign could use this information to place them in coalitions and mail them pro-2nd Amendment pieces. Additionally, having the Microtargeting based upon Internet databases and not computer programs allows for more members of a campaign to have access and the data to be accessed on virtually any computer (Gimpel et Al. 2007).

Having this technology can also assist the campaign with fundraising. Microtargeting can select which individuals are more likely to donate large sums to the campaign, and thus allow the finance directors to focus on them. Emails and online web ads can lead to secure donations pages so people can transfer money via credit card in seconds. Having online fundraising also increases the traffic for solicitations, and thus by default the amount of people donating increases as well. Individuals can even use their social networks to convince their friends to donate to the campaign as well.

The Youth Vote

While the sample analyzed in this study dealt with individuals of all ages, further research demonstrates that the impact of the Internet in campaigns and other political processes is more prevalent among younger Americans. According to a study from the Pew Research Center, a large number of young Americans do not watch news television or read about public affairs in the newspaper (Pew Research 2007, 27). As a result, the age gap in terms of utilizing broadcast and other traditional media makes it difficult for campaigns to reach the youth voters, as they focus on likely voters—who are historically older in age—and not the total American population. A Pew Research Study (2007) found that young Americans continue to use the television as their primary news source; however, almost equal numbers of young Americans receive their daily news updates from the Internet, the daily paper, or radio stations (27).

One can also attribute political disinterest among youth voters to the original forms of media preferred by campaigns before the 2000 Presidential election cycle. Nonetheless, almost half of all Americans surveyed by the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy in October 2000 responded that they would not be watching the first of the three Presidential Debates between Governor George W. Bush and Vice-President Al Gore. In

contrast, only a third of Americans above the age of thirty claimed that they would not watch the debate. Additionally, younger Americans seemed more informed on popular culture than the presidential elections; the same poll found that they were three times more likely to know the victor of the 2000 Super Bowl—St. Louis Rams—than the GOP winner of the New Hampshire Primary—Arizona Senator John McCain (“Nearly Half of Young Adults,” 2000). If this focus shifts to one on the new mediums available, such as the Internet, it could have a profound impact on youth voter turnout.

Another campaign aspect that is not popular among young Americans is the party convention coverage. Although in most recent elections it has become a staged platform to present their party’s nominees, only 20 percent of young voters surveyed watched more than a half hour of the convention coverage each night in 2004. Additionally, young Americans were more likely to view it on a national channel than the cable news channels that aired the entire convention (Patterson 2005, 4). While campaigns have attempted to incorporate youth-friendly aspects, such as live musical performances, celebrities, and interactive online participation, they have not proven successful yet. The 2008 election could provide a welcome respite from that, however, with the Democratic primary serving as the deciding ground for the party nominee. Patterson also found that voting among younger Americans rose 9 percent from 2000; because youth voting tends to remain fairly low historically, however, question whether this rise in voting will remain in 2008 (5).

Campus mobilization historically has created increases in voter turnout, as demonstrated in a Harvard University study involving campus voter registration drives (“Tried and True” 2005, 1). Analyzing drives involving students from the University of Southern California, Rutgers University, University of Utah, and University of Virginia—four universities from

distinctly different regions of the United States—researchers found that campus involvement in pushing the youth voter drive, properly training volunteers, and having polling sites accessible on campus were all influential in increasing the youth vote. By implementing all of these techniques, they showed that college-age students are interested in voting; something that could be beneficial for campaigns in the future (1). Additionally, having clubs send messages online to their listservs helped with the mobilization of college students; more people are reachable with less effort (“Campaign for President 2004,” 2005). Facebook and MySpace, discussed below, are also significant mobilization tools in which the administrators of networks or groups can send out messages to members for volunteers or other purposes (Westling 2007, 9).

With the youth vote becoming more desirous, many 2008 Presidential campaigns have created student organizations to court potential voters and supporters. Senator Hillary Clinton has “Students for Hillary,” which boasts among its successes a website that teaches young politicians how to host low-dollar fundraisers. Facebook and MySpace profiles for candidates are becoming commonplace, and candidates are sending out text messages as well as campaign tools. GOP Presidential candidate Mitt Romney has created a program among his campus supporters where for each \$1,000 the group raises for the former Massachusetts governor, they get to keep 10 percent of the funds raised to support the club; already this has brought in \$100,000 to the Romney campaign (Schulte, 2007). This is important because campaigns do not typically rely upon younger Americans for campaign funds, and this is a way for campaigns get the younger members of the voting electorate involved in the process.

The youth vote tends to align itself with a particular candidate, usually a Democrat. In 2004, for example, Howard Dean and his Internet-based campaign pulled a large majority of the youth vote. Moreover, this year is not an exception, with Senator Barack Obama bringing out the

youth vote. Yet, this year actually differs in the area of voter participation. The youth vote is actually participating at the polls, in staggering numbers, and strongly breaking for Obama. In fact, the freshman Illinois senator stands a fair chance at winning the Democratic nomination as a result. Because the election is currently underway and there is currently no Democratic nominee, one cannot measure yet the true impact of the youth vote in the 2008 election; its impact, however, will be different from its predecessors.

The Media Hype: Will 2008 finally be the “Year of the Internet”?

Despite the hype in the media and suggesting a significant increase in Internet usage for political usage, my results, as demonstrated earlier, did not confirm this belief. Nevertheless, evidence from the 2008 cycle, still in the midst of a divisive Democratic primary, suggest a very significant role for the Internet in politics. Could this be a fluke, or is this truly the new wave of political campaigning?

For example, the results from the survey suggest that online donations decreased among participants in the three years surveyed. Yet, Republican congressman and long-shot presidential candidate Ron Paul raised over four million dollars overnight via the Internet according to his website. Senator Barack Obama’s strength in fundraising comes from small online donations—over 1 million people according to his website—from people who rarely bothered to get involved in politics before this year. At the end of the 2008 election cycle, political scientists expect the percentage of people donating to candidates, parties, or other political organizations to be significantly higher than in past years. Additionally, the Campaign Finance Institute (George Washington University) has found that online donations are constantly increasing; however, it fails to directly compare mailed-in contributions with Internet contributions. Because there are

confounding factors—such as the intensely charged political environment—determining if the new wave of political fundraising is online will be a pertinent question for fundraisers to come.

Additionally, the growth in Internet usage among Americans has increased the number of people gaining their news from websites and online sources. Reading newspapers online, for example, has become such a commonplace occurrence that papers are struggling to float financially without subscriptions (“Business Magazines End,” 2007). Political sites such as Politico.com, the Onion, and Realclearpolitics.com have become important in spreading political news to those outside the beltway online as well. Hitwise ranked Drudge Report, a conservative blog, as one of the top five searched media terms and read website—on par with CNN, the Weather Channel, and MSNBC (Hitwise Company). Some blogs, such as Dailykos, even receive frequent postings from politicians such as Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA).

Yet, critics of this media hype can use the fact that 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006 were named the years of the Internet as well. After all, fundraising numbers have been shattered in every election cycle—from Bill Bradley’s success in 2000 to Barack Obama’s over 100 million dollar primary race. As each cycle has passed, new tools and abilities have added to the medium’s power, forcing candidates to constantly retool their strategies. Just as 1960 was for the television, the Internet needs a truly dynamic year for the Internet to cement it as a powerful media medium, and recent surveys general stray away from this fact.

Thus, 2008 will not be the definitive year of the Internet. Television is by far the most important (and expensive) element of a campaign, and there are many reasons for this. Almost everyone has access to a television and Internet availability is still growing, especially in poorer communities. Individuals can filter content posted on the Internet more efficiently than television, thus no one needs to sit through a 30- or 60-second campaign advertisement and

individuals can avoid political web pages at their own leisure. Finally, the group in which the Internet is having the strongest impact is the youth voter—and as described more in full in the following section, their voting records are more fickle and transient than older generations. The hype for the Internet may be there, but the votes most certainly are not. If campaign managers discovered a way to work around these obstacles, the Internet could become a more efficient tool for political purposes.

This does not mean that the 2008 election will not demonstrate more reliance on the World Wide Web than its predecessors will. Part of this comes from the increased capabilities online; however, as these features find themselves to be more mainstream and popular, their use will increase as well. Analyzing the results above with those taken in November are sure to prove stark differences; online donations is one area in which the 2008 numbers will be much larger than those in 2004.

This paper was drafted, however, before the conclusion of the 2008 primary election. Once the general election begins, there is a strong possibility that the Internet will once again take a backseat to its traditional counterparts. After all, action in the presidential campaigns will die down once both sides choose their candidates until the party conventions—broadcast primarily on television—and pick up again via grassroots and traditional debates in the fall. As the primary campaign in 2004 focused on the Internet and fizzled, history demonstrates that the same is possible for the 2008 election.

Conclusion

One can infer many conclusions from the results of the survey and analysis of the literature review. One train of thought involves campaigns continuing their current method of not relying upon the Internet as a primary media source. While this will increase costs for future elections, historic patterns show this to be most effective until proven otherwise. Campaigns can

also change from this pattern completely and increase their focus on the Internet, using many of the techniques and methods mentioned above. The most likely solution for this conundrum, however, is to create a middle ground for the next few election cycles—in which candidates do not directly rely upon the Internet as a primary source but continue to add new features and information as if it was a primary source.

One of the toughest challenges the campaigns now face is the ability to branch out to the youth vote. Not enough data has been collected yet; however, it seems relatively safe to say that the Internet will help increase their desire to become and remain politically involved, and if the campaigns can build upon this, they can create a new generation of voters for the future. Unfortunately, this process appears to be occurring slower than many predicted or hoped, so one cannot study actual results for several more years.

For many years, Americans disconnected themselves from the political process. The potential remains for the Internet to close this divide and increase political activism and participation; it may just needs a few more election cycles to fully present itself.

Appendix

Section 1—Figures and Graphs from the Pew Center Study

Figure 1.1 Voter Registrations

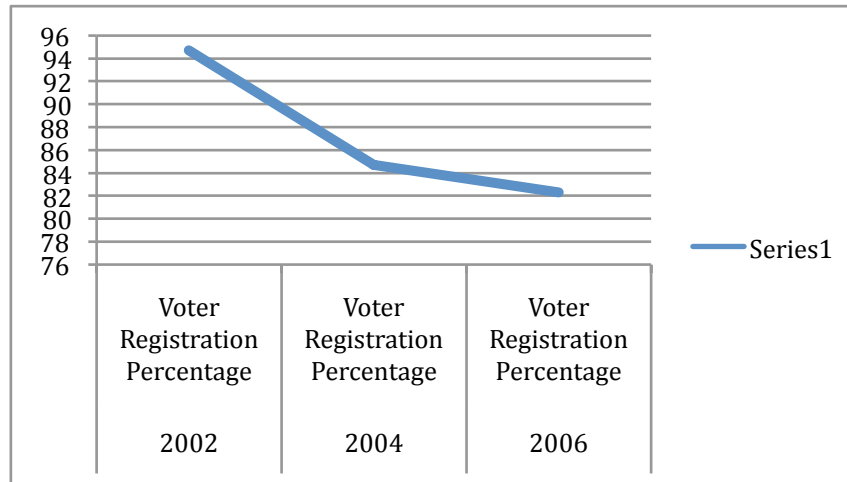


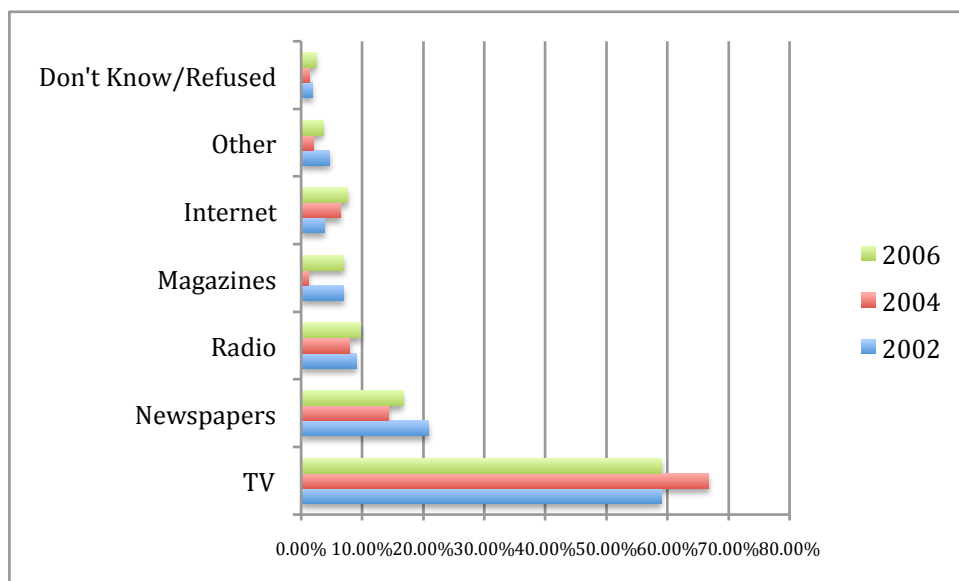
Figure 1.2 Source of Information

Figure 1.3 Level of Political Interest

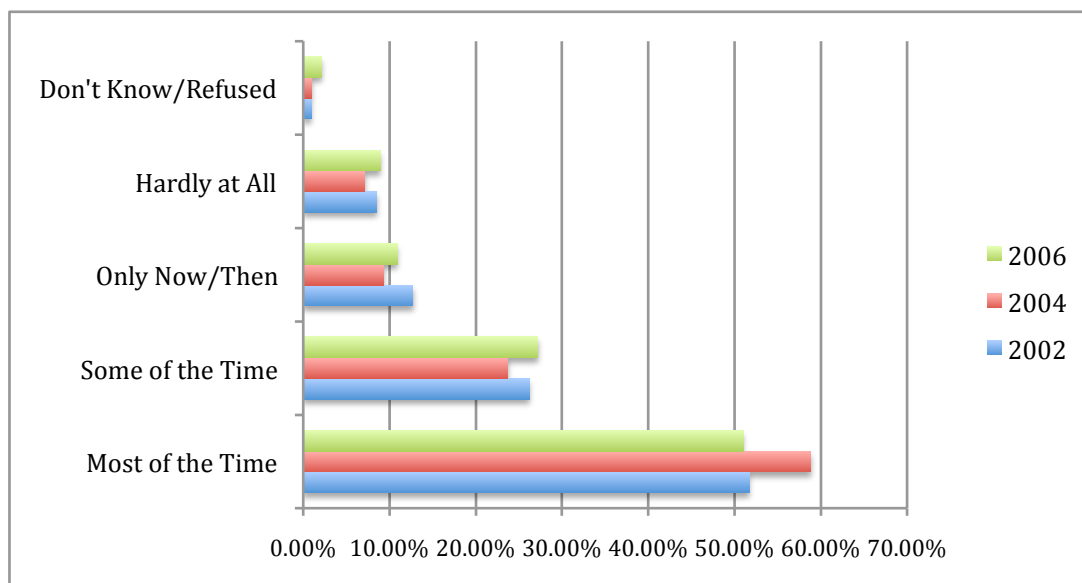


Figure 1.4 Internet Usages among Americans

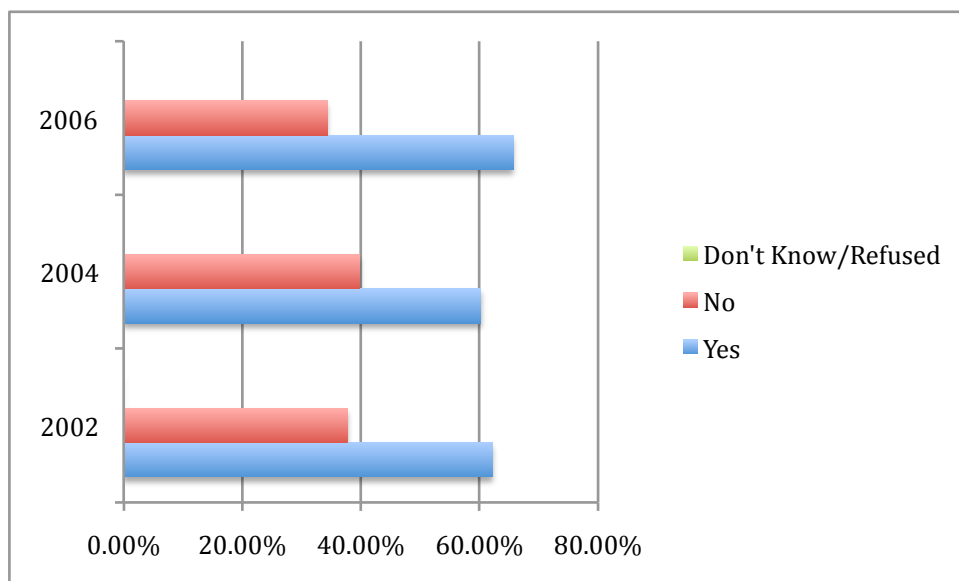


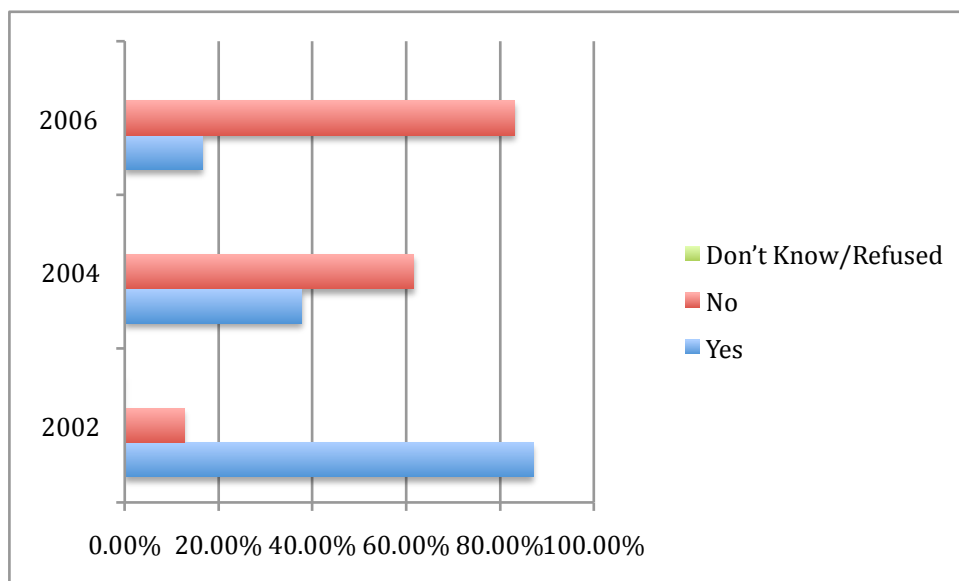
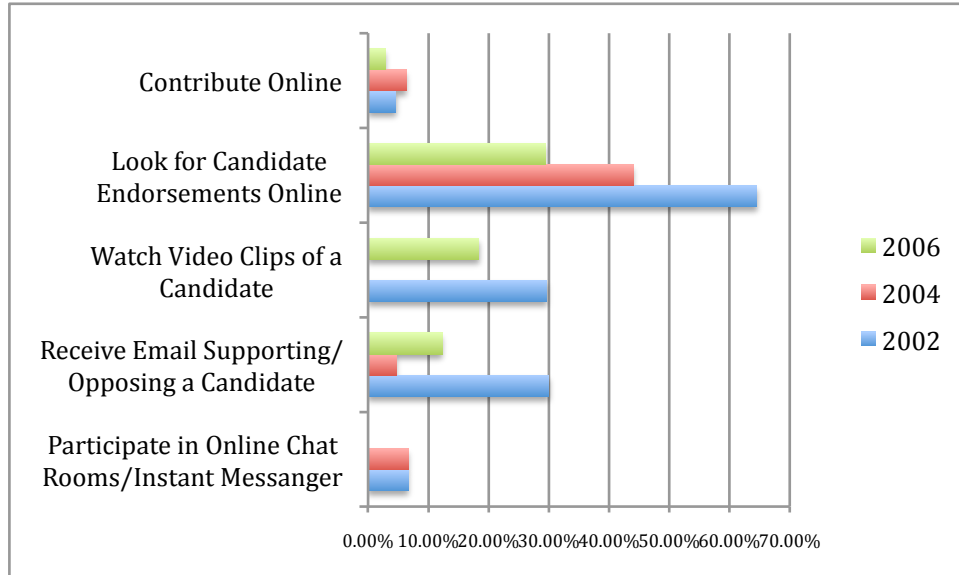
Figure 1.5 General Email Usage

Figure 1.6 Online Tools

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