Open Source Politics

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Introduction

- Interactions with internet and elections
  - Youtube, online video feeds
  - Social networking
  - Blogging

- Thesis: New web tools, in particular blogging, is challenging the traditional ways of doing politics, by increasing transparency and accountability.
A new blog or online journal is started every 5.3 seconds according to Technorati.com, and estimated that there are over 100 million blogs currently on the internet.

Of the 400,000-500,000 people who attended political meetings through Meetup.com, half had never attended a political meeting before and 60% were under the age of 40. Attendees averaged a donation of $312 in political contributions, well above the average (Sifry).

61% of the regular online users also use the Internet as their main avenue in which to gather information on candidates and their political views (Kush).
Transparency

- Blogging has brought stories into mainstream media that might not have normally been printed by traditional news sources.

- Examples include:
  - Clinton and Lewinsky story printed by the Drudge Report.
  - Baghdad blogger Salman Pax who narrated the toppling of Hussein from Iraq.

- Newspapers are driven by the market, blogs are driven by devotion to a particular subject.

- Challenges top down politics and political elites.

- “The new political technology works because it gives individuals a way to pool their time, attention and resources around causes they may hold in common- and to do it without needing to become a professional activist or wait for approval from any authority figure” (Powers).
Accountability

- Challenges top-down politics
- Grassroot activists through online networking, bloggers and small donors now play a huge part of politics because of the growth of internet politics
- Often allow for a more articulate and accurate account of events because it doesn’t require censorship and doesn’t depend on market attraction
- “increased personalization of content when discussing politics could allow a political message to fall under the radar and not be immediately labeled political.”
Previously, political membership meant little more than writing a check or receiving direct mail. “Undermined by the Vietnam War, the rights revolutions and the new mass media system, mass membership groups atrophied. They were replaced by a proliferating array of professionally run, top-down advocacy organizations” (Skocpol)

Blogs change this- anyone can blog, blogs such as DailyKos ask for peer review by members, and blog interactivity through clicking links and means though which the reader can reply mean that politics is more mass population driven (Trammel)
Fundraising

- Rise of bloggers has provided a new avenue for fundraising
- Example:
  - $2,000 investment in advertising on a few political blogs generated more than $80,000 in two weeks in small contributions to Congressional candidate Ben Chandler
  - In the first six months of his campaign, Obama raised $58.4 million through small donors giving less than $200 contributed online (NYTimes)
  - In the 24 hours after Clinton’s win in Pennsylvania, donors contributed $10 million in contributions online (Wired)
Conclusions

- Blogs have affected the media and politicians: it makes them more accountable to large or underrepresented populations by eliminating the top-down approach. It also requires the media to respond to oftentimes ignored news issues.

- Blogs have changed voters: it has allowed for a more personal approach to politics, it allowed for previously less important voters to gain a larger voice through small contributions, and has attracted younger people to vote/politically contribute.
Selected References