CIRCLE
The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

Young People and Political Campaigning on the Internet

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The Internet has become a powerful force in political campaigns. There is little doubt that its importance will continue to grow. Anecdotal evidence suggests that *young* people are especially prominent in online campaigns. They are often conspicuous participants in "blogs," chat rooms, and meetings organized via the Internet.

A survey released by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press on January 11, 2004 found that the Internet is gaining importance as a source of political news, especially for young people. One in five Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 turns regularly to the Internet for news. The Internet is still only the seventh most popular news source for the 18-29s. More young people say that they turn to cable news networks, local news, nightly network news, TV news magazines, daily newspapers, and comedy TV shows. However, the young audience for other news sources is decreasing, while the Internet is rising.[2]

Meanwhile, campaigns are effectively using the Internet to reach young people, and will continue to do so. But is this because young people are computer-savvy and demand Internet based campaigns? Or is it because campaigns see advantages to a cheap medium that can reach and expand their base (more cost-effectively than
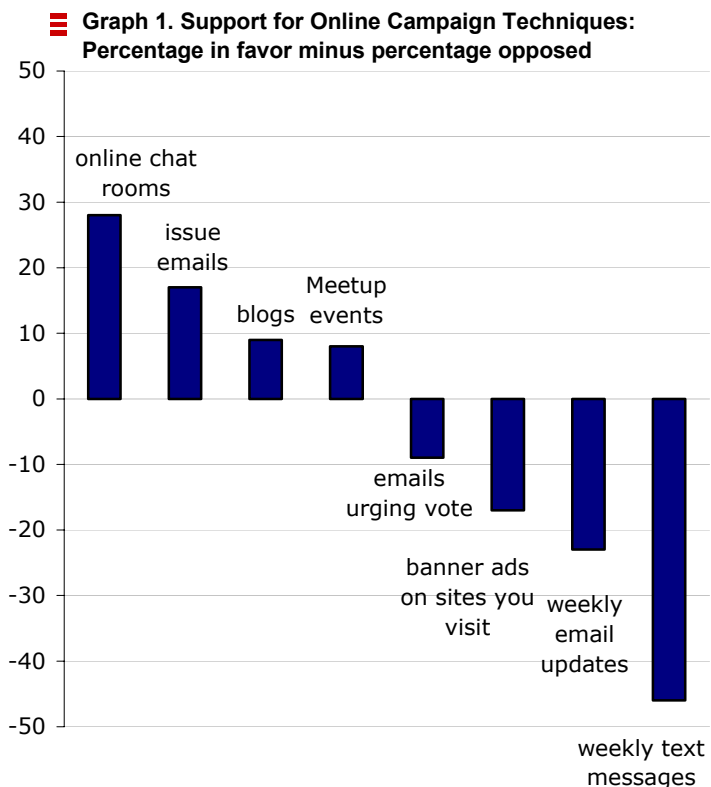
Graph 1. Support for Online Campaign Techniques: Percentage in favor minus percentage opposed

Source: CEG/CIRCLE 2004 Youth Survey. All figures represent the percentage point difference between those who answer "more likely" and those who answer "less likely/turn-off" for each technology.

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broadcasts and mass mailings)?

On January 15, 2004, CIRCLE and The Council for Excellence in Government released a poll of 1,000 young Americans (ages 15-25).[3] This survey asked detailed and unprecedented questions about the use of campaign technologies by young people. Overall, our data show that young people are not particularly favorable toward new, online campaigns techniques. They favor some approaches but oppose others. Graph 1 shows the proportion of young people who say that each technology would make them "more likely" to support a candidate, *minus* the proportion who say that it would make them "less likely" or would be a "turn off." Thus fully half of the campaign techniques would alienate more young voters than they would attract.

In general, young people tend to prefer communications that one can choose to receive ("opt in") over ones that are simply sent to people.

Despite a general lack of enthusiasm for many online campaign techniques, there are some pools of young voters who do like the new technologies. For example, those college students and college graduates who are liberal and concerned about the War in Iraq are overwhelmingly aware of blogs and favor their use in campaigns by 39 percentage points. While political "banner ads" on websites are unpopular among youth in general, the group that is liberal, college educated, and concerned about the War strongly favors them. This group even likes weekly email updates, which most other youth strongly oppose.

Other Groups Favorable to new Campaign Technologies

o   Liberals and conservatives are more favorable toward online campaigning than moderates.
o   Those who attend church regularly (whether liberal or conservative) and those who self-identify as Born Again Christians are more favorable toward online campaigning than others.
o   For 18-25s, greater educational success predicts positive views of online campaigning.
o   Those who are efficacious like online campaigning more than those who are not efficacious.
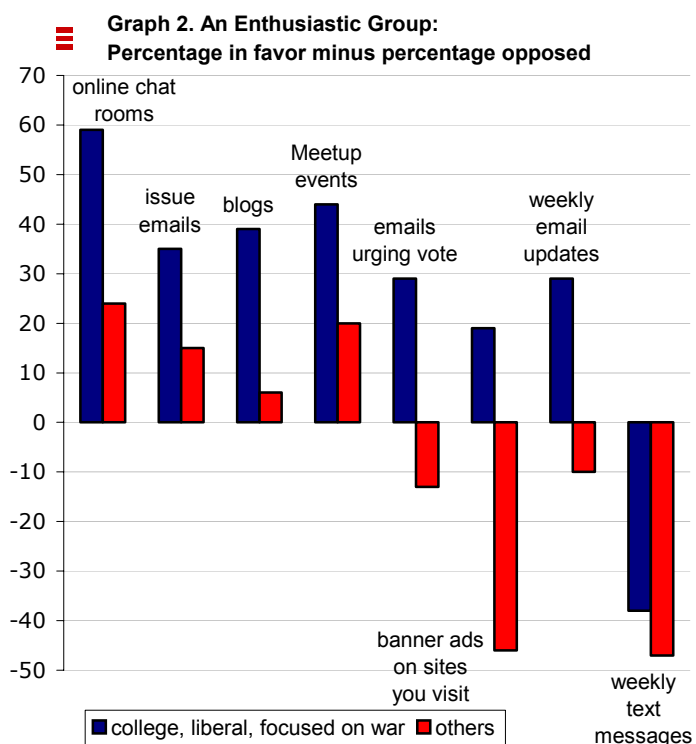
Graph 2. An Enthusiastic Group: Percentage in favor minus percentage opposed

Source: CEG/CIRCLE 2004 Youth Survey. All figures represent the percentage point difference between those who answer "more likely" and those who answer "less likely/turn-off" for each technology.

Table 1 - Opinions of Online Campaign Methods:
Likeliness of Paying Attention to a Candidate or an Organization

	Much More Likely	Somewhat More Likely	TOTAL MORE	NET - positives minus negatives	TOTAL LESS/ TURN OFF	Somewhat Less Likely	Much Less Likely	Turn off	Don't Know
Sponsoring an online chat room where you can go to ask questions of candidates or organization staff	19	41	**60**	*+27*	**32**	12	8	12	8
Sending email on issues that are important to you	17	38	**54**	*+17*	**37**	12	10	16	8
Having a weblog geared toward people like you with messages about issues that interest you	12	37	**50**	*+10*	**40**	14	10	16	10
Sponsoring campaign events in your area organized by Meetup.org	15	32	**47**	*+9*	**38**	15	10	14	15
Sending weekly emails with news about endorsement or other campaign updates	9	33	**42**	*-7*	**49**	13	17	19	10
Sending emails urging you to turn out to vote on Election Day	11	30	**41**	*-9*	**50**	14	14	22	9
Sponsoring an Internet banner ad on a website you visit frequently	7	29	**36**	*-17*	**53**	16	16	21	11
Sending weekly text message campaign updates to your cell phone or other handheld device	3	19	**23**	*-46*	**69**	16	18	34	9

Source: CEG/CIRCLE 2004 Youth Survey.

Notes