

BLOGS, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE PITFALLS OF E-POLITICS.

CONTROLLING THE MESSAGE IS “JOB ONE” FOR CAMPAIGN STRATEGISTS.

But their job has gotten a lot harder lately, thanks to the emergence of blogs, social networks and virtual worlds. How are political campaigns managed in cyberspace? Do Facebook friends boost election results? Bentley College Professor Christine Williams researches these and other questions in the age of YouTube.

CHRISTINE B. WILLIAMS, Professor of International Studies and Government



Christine B. Williams is a Professor of International Studies and Government at Bentley College. She studies political communication with an emphasis on new and emerging technologies. Recently, her research has focused on Internet-hosted technologies including campaign websites and social networks.

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ARE POLITICIANS GETTING SMARTER ONLINE?

In 2000, candidate websites were basically passive billboards: the information only went one way. By 2006, we began to see candidates embrace social networks. The savvy politicians are trying to engage as well as mobilize voters.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

The level of interactivity. Today, you can contribute money online; email friends to enlist their support; link out to MySpace, Facebook or YouTube; hold a rally in Second Life; and post to a blog.

DON'T THINGS GET OUT OF CONTROL FAST?

Certainly it requires 24/7 damage control. To counter negative YouTube videos, for example, candidates move aggressively to post their own positive videos—and provide links on their websites.

DO SOCIAL NETWORKS IMPACT THE VOTE?

Our recent study showed that simply having a Facebook profile didn't give you an edge. However, in open-seat races, candidates with a lot of Facebook supporters had as much as a 3% higher vote share than those with few supporters.

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2008?

Third-tier candidates are using social networks to gain attention they can't get from conventional media—and sometimes doing a better job than the front-runners. Will it be an effective strategy? We'll see. That's the subject of our next study.

MORE Professor Williams discusses her work at www.bentley.edu/research.



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