

The internet – the key to win an election campaign



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1. Introduction The presidential election campaign of Barack Obama was declared as the first Internet Campaign and in the American media there was talk of a transformation of the traditional campaigning.

Hillary Clinton announced her presidential candidature in January 2008 not at a press conference but on the internet. ??? The 2008 campaign will be the first truly 21st Century presidential race.??? wrote Arianna Huffington at The Huffington Post on August 02 in 2007.

It is the same in politics as it is in every other part of our society: The internet becomes more and more important. Even the reasons are the same, the internet provides numerous considerable advantages which must not be wasted. Modern politicians from many countries have realized this and try to use the internet for their activities. The main aspect which makes the internet the number one medium of our society is its function as a communication platform.

The amount of data and information available on the internet grows every day. Today, people use the internet not just to find information but to create and publish information themselves. Besides that, today the internet provides possibilities to publish videos, photos and even your own private thoughts and more and more people use that. In a way the internet has become more and more personal and it is like a huge bulletin board for everyone's own ideas.

That is the advantage for modern politics, the internet provides the opportunity to communicate with people in a more personal way (than for

example TV would do). There are two very good examples for people who have used all that with great success. Howard Dean ran unsuccessfully for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination, nevertheless he is considered to be a pioneer of campaigning on the internet and especially political fundraising via the Internet. However, a perfect example is the election campaign of Barack Obama, whose online campaign applied a new standard. Nobody can deny that the internet is connected to nearly every part of modern society. Since more and more people use the internet frequently and a company like Google becomes more and more powerful, the internet has to play an important role in politics.

This paper covers one aspect of this connection. By discussing the advantages of the internet as a communication platform, the advantages of the internet for an election campaign, and the examples of Howard Dean and Barack Obama this paper will prove that the internet is the key to win a presidential election campaign these days.

2. The Internet as a Communication Platform

First of all, there are numerous features of the internet which make it the most perfect communication platform and with this an excellent instrument for politics. Communication is one of the most important aspects of politics, especially when it comes to election campaigns.

When politicians want to win an election they have to make sure to reach as many people as they can with their election program. This can of course only be accomplished through the media. In the past, politicians used newspapers and flyer to spread their messages. Later, radio and television were added. The new medium of the 21st century is the internet and it had a much bigger

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impact than radio and tv. The main reason for this is maybe that it is more unbounded than radio and tv. Instead of TV or radio shows with certain time limits, there are websites which are available as long as the respective server is online.

This enables a fast and unlimited communication around the clock. People do not have to wait for a certain TV show to get a particular information, they can search for the information whenever they want. Additionally, the information they find can also lead to another information and so on. This leads to another great advantage: The internet is in a way the center or node of all media. Everything which can be seen on TV, read in a newspaper, or heard on the radio can also be found on the internet. In some cases a TV or radio show is even based on information which was created and/or found on the internet before.

The internet has in a way developed into the first contact point for news and information. Additionally, the cost to use the internet is comparatively low considering how much the internet offers. The main part of the cost to use the internet is the computer which yet has not to be -2-"an expensive one. Someone who does not have a computer (or an internet connection) still has the opportunity to visit an internet cafe.

Basically, everyone (in a modern country) has the possibility to use the internet. Another advantage of the internet compared to radio or television is that information can be transferred in more than one direction. There is not just a producer and a consumer but the consumer can become a producer itself. A person who reads any news or information can immediately

comment it more or less directly or the person can redirect the information to another person. In other words, it is a You-to-them, Them-to-them, and Them-to-you information transfer on the internet. This feature creates another advantage. Any news which comes up in the media becomes widespread in a fast and direct way through the internet.

An excellent example for this is the social network Twitter. For example, the Los Angeles Fire Department used this service to spread news about the forest fires in South California in 2007. Further, the fast information transfer through the internet makes it possible that many people who have a certain opinion towards a particular issue can create a communication platform to discuss that issue on the internet. They do not have to meet up face to face and all people no matter how many they are can come together on one place ??“ their virtual community. 3. Advantages for an Election Campaign All these features of the internet as a communication platform lead to further advantages of the internet for an election campaign. Traditional media like radio, newspapers or television can never provide these advantages.

By that, every politician who does not use the internet for a campaign wastes great potential. The main aspect of the online part of an election campaign is of course the own website of the politician. It is like the central point of all activities on the internet. The politician can post news or his election program here and he can react to everything which was said about him in the media. Besides this, on <http://my.barackobama.com> for example, people could sign up at the website and immediately start to support Barack Obama with his election campaign. One big advantage the internet provides for an election campaign is the possibility of new fundraising strategies.

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Since online payment is so easy and becomes safer and safer through services like Paypal, politicians can offer their supporter the opportunity to donate small or big amounts fast and easy. With this, great fund can be raised through many small online payments. Howard Dean and Barack Obama are excellent examples for this strategy.

- 3-"The already mentioned easy community building through the internet improves something which is essential for every election campaign: recruiting volunteers and supporter. Everyone who wants to support a politician can easily write his friend an email or invite him into a particular group on facebook without any engagement. This is much better than going after votes on the street.

Further, the internet provides a better and easier organization of an election campaign. Especially free supporters can use the internet and several websites to organize meetings or activities. For example the website <http://www.meetup.com> helps people with a common interest to organize a meeting, which was used by the supporters of Howard Dean. Other websites which help organizing activities but also let politicians (and their supporters) post news or other important informations concerning the campaign are as already mentioned Twitter or Blogs. Additionally everyone who reads the news or information can comment or redirect it and so helps to support the respective politician.

Podcasts and newsletters can also fulfill this function, better and more direct than a newscast on TV or an article at a newspaper would do. Social Networks like facebook are good opportunities for politicians to get in closer

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contact with potential young voters. They can create their own profile there and publish it to other people registered on facebook. This helps to create and maintain a modern image and to get new young supporter and voter. Further everyone who is registered on facebook can create and join certain groups which simply stand for an individual interest and where people can discuss topics concerning that interest. In december 2008 John McCain had 594. 095 supporters. By that time, Barack Obama had 3.

423. 094 supporters. This shows which great impact a profile on facebook can have. A website which can have a huge influence especially on young people is <http://www>.

[youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). On youtube everyone can publish own videos and everyone else can watch it. It is no secret that videos can cause more emotions than simple pictures or written text. Politicians and their supporters know this and they can use this. The famous rapper will.

i. am from the Black Eyed Peas used a speech of Barack Obama, created a rap song out of it, and published it on Youtube. It became enormously popular in just a few days and over 15 million people watched it. Finally there is another fundamental advantage the internet provides because of its free and interactive character. Since everybody can use such websites like youtube or social networks and so on everybody can do a little piece of campaigning in a positive or negative way. That means one can support his respective politician with videos, blogs, pictures, messages, and so on ??“ or he can damage the image of the other candidate with the same instruments but with negative publicity.

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That means even rumors about one candidate can be spread and the other candidate will not be held -4-"responsible for this because a free supporter had spread the rumor and not the candidate himself. In addition to this, to fight such rumors the internet can also be used which is much more effective than using other media because no time is wasted. As soon as a rumor appears the supporters of the offended politician can react and post a correction or dementi on the website of the politician. By this rumors are fought just as they appear, so they can cause lower damage. 4. Examples of Dean and Obama Every candidate who uses all those features of the internet for his election campaign has a decided advantage towards a candidate who does not use all the features or even does not use the internet at all. Howard Dean and above all Barack Obama have achieved great success because of internet campaigning.

Whereas Howard Dean had developed out of the role as an outsider into a favorite (for a while), Barack Obama even has won the election and became president with great popularity. The influence of the internet can not be denied. Howard Dean ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004. However, as Andrew Chadwick and Philip N.

Howard point it out ??? It was Howard Dean??™s candidacy for the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 2004 that really seemed to fulfill the early promise of the Internet as a campaigning tool.??? (p. 60) No other democratic candidate was such in the media like Dean at that time. The 61 year old former governor of Vermont was the absolute outsider in terms of the presidential election at first but because of the internet he became the favorite among the democratic candidates. Nobody of his
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opponents nor the sitting president George W. Bush had used the internet so successful like Dean. He maintained a range of websites and many services for his supporters to organize and to communicate. A person could for example enter his zipcode on his campaign website and hence get to know where bigger events, collections of signatures or other smaller or bigger activities of Dean supporters were planned in his surrounding area.

Further, photo galleries could be viewed, newsletter could be subscribed, and weblogs could be read. By this, everybody who was interested could be up to date about every activity of the candidate. There was even a special chat room and on <http://www.deanspace.com> people could get connected to a virtual community. Passionate supporters could also join the so called Dean Defense Forces, which was kind of a virtual response force that broke false pretences of political opponents and critical journalists by posting corrections and dementi on their website or by sending a huge amount of protest emails and letters to the editors.

-5-"Moreover, his staff of thousands of Dean supporters who were all signed up at <http://www.meetup.com> developed in a way an army of political activists who looked for new forms of campaigning. Meeting once a month in restaurants or bars they for example wrote letters by hand and sent them to uncertain voters.

Especially in terms of fund the internet paid off. Howard Dean took so much money with donations like no other democratic candidate. In one quarter of the year even the record amount of 15 million dollar was reached. About two thirds of this were transferred online.

Because of the internet Dean was much lesser dependent on big donations than other candidates which was valuable for his image and campaign. The other candidates got around 90 percent of their fund by donations of more than 200 dollars whereas Dean only got around 50 percent of his fund by such big donations. Unfortunately the advantages of the internet alone did not help Dean to become elected president. The reason for this may be that the opponents and the republican party were too strong at that time.

However, Barack Obama took Howard Dean as an inspiring example and even improved Deans strategy. Just like Deans campaign the campaign of Obama was a so called ??? open source??? campaign which means that the supporters can also help to create and shape the campaign strategy by using those websites and services which were already mentioned. Especially Barack Obamas website is a prime example for modern online campaigning. When signed up and entered his address details every person could be an active part of Obamas campaign.

That means that everybody could create his own profile, find supporters near him, plan and attend events, network with his friends, become a fundraiser, and write his own blog. Obamas online strategy made clear what is essential to have success with online campaigning: Working with voters and supporters instead of working for them, looking for new forms of services and ways of communication and improving those which are already known, making all those internet tools central to the campaign instead of using them just as a sideline. However, most important is that the respective politician is cybergenic.

That means he has to carry a certain image which makes the people think that it is a good thing or even cool to support him on the internet. Barack Obama had the perfect internet campaigning strategy and the essential charisma to win the presidential election with great success. Without this huge online part of his election campaign his popularity would never have been grown so big and he would not be seen as the charismatic and modern president that he is. ??? Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee,??? said Arianna Huffington -6-"5.

Conclusion This paper has discussed the advantages of the internet as a communication platform, the advantages of the internet for an election campaign, and the examples of the election campaigns of Howard Dean and Barack Obama and by this it has pointed out that the internet is the key to win a presidential election campaign these days. It is of course no replacement of the traditional ways of campaigning but an essential extension of traditional campaigning which may become the main part of an election campaign. All the absolute advantages which were mentioned make it essential to use the internet with its full potential because not using it would mean to waste many chances which the opponent surely will not waste. Hence, the candidate who gets the best results in internet campaigning has also the best chances to win the election. Besides this, the internet simply offers enormous possibilities to improve the organization and the funding of the campaign.

Additionally it is obvious that the internet is a big advantage in terms of time, because an email is of course faster than a real letter. Finally, the

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internet has its own image and character. It is a symbol for modernity, innovation, interactivity, and youth. It is in a way cool.

Politics is a topic which is not at all seen as cool. Politics in connection with internet however has a whole new character. It seems more interesting, modern and more important especially to young people. It motivates young people to get in contact with politics. That is what an election campaign and politics in general is about: Arouse peoples interest for political affairs and make them trust in it.-7-"Bibliography Arianna Huffington. ??? Be a Part of HuffPosts Online-Only Presidential Candidate Mashup.??? The Huffington Post.

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