



ETHICAL ISSUES

Politics and the Internet: The Candidate's View

It is generally agreed that the Internet has changed the way presidential campaigns are run. President Barack Obama was not the first, or only, candidate to use the Internet in his campaign. A single-day record for raising campaign contributions was set by Ron Paul (Republican), who collected \$6 million in one day in 2007 through Internet donations. More notable was Howard Dean (Democrat), who used the Internet as a fundamental tool in his "50-state strategy" primary run in 2004. Although Dean was ultimately defeated in the election, none could deny his success at raising funds through his pioneering Internet campaign of a "\$100 revolution," in which 2 million Americans would give \$100 to Dean's campaign so he could compete with the Republican candidate, George W. Bush. In 2008, Obama, taking a lead from Dean's emphasis on small donors and the Internet, raised almost half of his \$639 million in campaign funds from 3 million donors who gave \$300 or less. Understanding that a successful campaign is run on its cash flow, Obama's staff directed much of its social networking and Internet time toward raising campaign funds.

In the 2008 campaign, staffers for Obama and the Republican candidate, John McCain, used the Internet in many similar ways. Both campaigns created an entire social media platform that pushed information and ideals to the masses, both online and off. The websites of both candidates became focal points where their supporters campaigned for them and undecided voters

went to get information. Both campaigns used other Internet tools, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and YouTube, along with thousands of personal blogging sites and forums. On sites such as YouTube, more than 14.5 million hours of election coverage were available that pushed opinions and the campaign agenda—and those hours were cost-free to the candidates. The Internet allows candidates to increase their visibility to larger audiences of potential voters at costs substantially less than those incurred for television campaign commercials that might reach fewer people. Moreover, the Internet allows candidates to quickly respond to negative feedback by simply editing text and video, whereas a television spot that is run cannot be undone.

Even those who argue that television is still "the" influential medium for reaching potential voters admit the influence of the Internet. An issue might start as a blogging buzz between hardcore followers. If the blogging buzz becomes loud enough, mainstream media pick up the issue in their articles and broadcasts. From there, the issue enters general discussions in day-to-day life.

In 2012, it was generally agreed that Obama won the election through his team's use of data mining the Internet. To quote *Time*, "Data-driven decisionmaking played a huge role in creating a second term for the 44th president and will be one of the more closely studied elements in the 2012 cycle." For the 2012 race, Obama's campaign manager, Jim Messina, promised a metric-driven