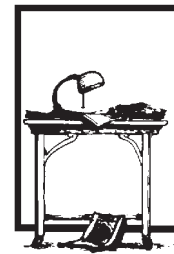


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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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“From many, to many”—these are the watchwords of our new interactivity. Using the Internet to connect, interact, and collaborate is the new standard. We even have labels, ever more widely adopted, for Web 2.0, Library 2.0 and Politics 2.0, which focus our attention on the interactive elements of new online applications. For many, the primary measure of a Web site’s utility, whether used for social, commercial, political, or governmental purposes, will come to be its level of meaningful interactivity. We are also just beginning to understand the computer-generated, real and/or virtual possibilities for political, social, entertainment, educational, and commercial immersion offered by SecondLife, avatars, and synthetic worlds.

It is not just the rising power of wikis for building knowledge, or a certain mega-wiki increasingly found cited in the papers of freshmen and high school students. Nor is it simply the power of the bloggers to redirect the media spotlight (and the light of thousands of link-manufacturing commenter spotlights) into the otherwise neglected dark corners of political life. “From many, to many” matters because of the inherent political relevance of scalable information technologies, open protocols, and collaborative platforms. These new, widely-available tools embody the potential for massive political or policy interactions and functional variants of large-scale online democracy.

In “Internet-based Collaborations and their Political Significance,” Azi Lev-On and Russell Hardin provide a compelling framework likely to prompt many readers to ask whether the logic of collective action is dead, or at least

dying, in the online environment. At its core, the approach links the reduction of the costs of organizing online to the excessive numbers of potential collaborators. As a result, focal online platforms, when successful, dampen the free rider effect associated with traditional collective action problems. Whether it is the search for alien life forms or the development of an open source operating system like Linux, the practical matters of collaborating have shifted, with fewer constraints tied to resource mobilization.

In their article, Lev-On and Hardin cogently push the theory forward by developing a rough typology of the “essential properties” in very large, multi-user, small contributor success stories. In doing so, they set out a challenge for researchers seeking to find the unifying mechanisms of online collaboration. This makes it essential that we re-visit the shifting digital landscape underneath Mancur Olson’s classic work *The Logic of Collective Action*. The ability to provide a low-cost, reproducible or modifiable platform is one such mechanism. The structure of hypertext transfer and the apparent self-organizing capacity of networks of hyperlink creators empowered by search engines also stand out as exceptional factors defining the new interactivity. These online collaboration opportunities and communities of practice are woefully understudied by political science, but the Lev-On and Hardin article suggests a rich and important area of emerging research.

In the second research paper, Indeok Song and Erik P. Bucy bring a welcome specificity about interactivity; a term they feel is somewhat muddy in the literature. In “Interactivity

and Political Attitude Formation: A Mediation Model of Online Information Processing.” Song and Bucy use an experimental setting to test empirically the role of interactivity in political thinking. This approach builds nicely on the charge set out by Lev-On and Hardin. It focuses on the rising importance of the Internet for the delivery of political information and the divide between two-way interactive engagement and the more common Web 1.0 one-way push of digital information. While the questions are seemingly academic, real-world strategies for politics and government online will benefit from knowing more about how much interactivity is optimal, as well as the practical and theoretical challenges that must be addressed to measure such a phenomenon adequately.

One remedy for the weak theory on interactivity, argue Song and Bucy, is “specifying the locus of interactivity in the relationship between interactive technology and user perceptions.” They usefully review three visions of interactivity capable of augmenting how researchers conceive of and test online political information processing. Favoring a focus on perceptual factors, they develop a careful model of key variables that mediate and moderate the direct effects of increased objective interactivity. While political science may be late to the table in studying the effects of different technological “affordances,” Song and Bucy draw on a rich tradition in Information Science and Telecommunications that studies the effects of different technological interfaces on different users. In their experimental data, they find that different features do not evoke “the same degree of interactivity in all users.” For example, the higher the sense of self-efficacy about online activities the more accurately a user may internalize “varying degrees of interactivity.” As a result, they caution that future research on Web effects in politics should include perceptual measures as a part of the research design process.

In the article “Urban Planners, Wired for Change? Understanding Elite Support for E-Participation,” we turn to the first of three consecutive papers looking at citizen-government interactivity online. Joachim Åström and Mikael Granberg investigate the operative assumptions underlying elite attitudes about

Swedish public participation. They ask whether Swedish planning elites intend to use e-participation for “insitutional change or the reinforcement of existing institutions.” When elites involved in planning decisions in Sweden seem to favor more online interaction with citizens, the authors want to know why they do so. The elites in this case are heads of planning departments in local governments that all face typical power sharing struggles between citizens, politicians, and their own prerogatives. Åström and Granberg situate this work in a decades-old debate in Sweden touching central questions of democratic theory.

Not surprisingly, they find that the values associated with new avenues of public participation are multiple and probably somewhat murky at best. Indeed, whether an actor or institution adopts online public participation to renew existing arrangements or fundamentally transform them is a very tough question. It may be possible to do both (or neither) at once regardless of one’s intention. Nonetheless, the authors usefully map the direction of elite opinion in Swedish planning offices, noting strong overall support for electronic avenues of public participation. This is particularly true when such participation is viewed as an enhancement to, rather than replacement for, planners’ expertise.

The editorial board of *JITP* anticipates many papers updating the classics in political science to account for changes wrought by the onslaught of IT in political life. Just as we revisit Mancur Olson in light of new transaction cost economics, so, too, must we reassess the insights of Robert Dahl and the fundamentals of democratic theory in the age of electronic participation. Are Vegard Haug makes a contribution in this vein, asking if local democracy is enhanced by the presence of 434 municipal Web sites in Norway. Following Dahl’s lead, Haug asks whether provision for interactivity stimulates either “enlightened understanding” or “effective participation” via the Web. He senses a “window of opportunity for e-democracy,” but overall finds most municipalities falling well short of their potential on both counts.

A third paper centered on citizen-government interreactions, “Electronic Government-Citizen Relationships: Exploring Citizen Perspectives,” asks whether online participation

can help build relationships between citizens and government officials. The focus once again is on missed potential. Arthur D. P. Sweeney brings a marketing lens to the interactive heart of Australian e-government. He notes that it remains an open question whether e-government can “generate relational exchanges characterized by trust and commitment.” Customer-oriented public management is ascendant in some spheres. Commercially derived Customer Relations Management (CRM) systems seem to be taking root when public managers respond to or anticipate citizen demands for convenient services.

Sweeney reports exploratory qualitative findings based on interviews with citizens who contacted any level of Australian government online. The interviews were analyzed using a concept-extracting content analysis tool called Leximancer, which provides a rough first sort of the text into manageable and potentially connected categories. The article highlights the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach and provides illustrative examples of key thematic findings. Overall, there are few indications that relationships are forming; rather these citizens appear to be more comfortable as e-customers seeking a better service outcome than they are e-citizens deepening their democratic engagement with the state. In short, the apparent procedural trust in e-services may not translate into institutional trust of government more generally.

Finally, *JITP*'s inaugural “Teaching Innovation” article appropriately comes from a team featuring an innovative young professor and two PhD students. In their article, “Serious Games in the Global Affairs Classroom: Student Impressions of *Pax Warrior* as an Active Learning Tool,” R. Charli Carpenter, Vanja Lundell, and Benjamin Rubin report on Carpenter's experimental use of online games. The so-called “serious games” (or what the designer calls “interactive documentaries”) are generating greater numbers of educational users. In return for playing, Carpenter's students face “difficult trade-offs in a high stakes game” and are given a chance for deeper engagement with the issues raised back in the classroom. At issue for Carpenter and her collaborators were the reflections of students captured in an online discussion forum. Was the game a useful

supplement? Did it generate quality posts and better student understanding? At the same time, did it generate any problems or otherwise inhibit learning?

On balance, Carpenter, Lundell, and Rubin find there is value added by the game, *Pax Warrior*, which offers students a chance to role play as a United Nations commander in the midst of the Rwandan genocide. The coding of student posts did show signs of student-raised discussion dimensions inspired by the game, and it did contribute to the framing of possible research questions. The responses also lead the authors to caution game designers to “pay close attention to the risk of engendering nihilism through representations of atrocity.” One student concern in keeping with this issue focused on the limits of interactivity in the game itself, “leaving little room available for innovative thought and action.” Nonetheless, the authors felt confident predicting a greater role for simulations as the global affairs classroom goes increasingly online.

This second issue of *JITP* is a harbinger of issues and articles to come. It confronts issues of online interaction in every research paper. Having thoroughly enjoyed the recent YouTube-CNN presidential debate here in the United States, there is sense of something different in the air. Though far from a fully certified Politics 2.0 event (using CNN elites rather than collaborative filtering to select the questions, for one thing), this hybrid of citizen media and cable news worked fairly well and counts as one of many substantial changes in political campaigns as we move rapidly toward the promise of Politics 2.0.

Meanwhile, interactivity remains an important part of how we run the journal. In the first year after *JITP* issued its initial call for papers, a total of 85 manuscripts were submitted. Electronic listservs and our in-house, web-based author referral system continue to be highly useful in getting the word out about the journal. The *JITP* reviewer database is regularly updated, and our legion of willing reviewers continues to perform with incredible dedication, thereby making it possible for us to continue to fulfill the pledge for a 60-day turn around from the submission date to first editorial decision on nearly every manuscript we have received. Our longest first review to date was 72 days, with

only three manuscripts running over the 60-day goal. Many recent authors have gotten 4-5 reviews and a decision letter in 35-50 days. This is an active as well as interactive journal.

This fall, the political science core of the Senior Editorial Board meets at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in Chicago, where we will continue to nurture face-to-face relationships with the members of APSA's organized section on Information Technology & Politics (ITP). If you

are a member of the American Political Science Association, I strongly urge you join, re-join, or renew your membership in ITP (<http://www.apsanet.org/~itp/>). At APSA 2008, *JITP* will be under consideration by the ITP Executive Board and the membership for status as the official journal of the section.

*Stuart W. Shulman*  
*Editor*