
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Important changes are underway that will impact the future of the journal. During the fall of 2007, The Haworth Press was acquired by Taylor & Francis. By spring 2008, we should be transitioning to work with the Taylor & Francis production team. I would like to publicly thank Bill Cohen and Kathy Rutz of The Haworth Press for their generous support and unwavering confidence as we transitioned from the *Journal of E-Government* to the *Journal of Information Technology & Politics (JITP)* during 2007. This was a significant challenge, and it would not have succeeded without the steadfast support of Bill, Kathy, and the rest of the staff at The Haworth Press. We look forward to continuing our efforts to establish JITP, as the transition to working with Taylor & Francis proceeds in the new year.

I am, meanwhile, very pleased with the substantive direction of the journal. The lead article in this issue, "Airing Grievance Online: Search Engine Algorithms and the Fate of Minorities at Risk," puts *JITP* squarely in the domain of Internet activities, tools, and new types of measurement that was envisioned as one of the future strengths of the journal. The authors, Victor Asal and Paul G. Harwood, contend that so-called Internet effects are amorphous and diffuse, necessitating that the various sub-parts must be identified and subjected to closer study. Their focus on the search engine sub-part is a welcome and timely contribution. The new mediator, an algorithm that is a proprietary secret, holds special significance when minorities at risk wish to mobilize via the Web. This new technological gatekeeper, which is geared to quality rather than equality, is an important testing ground for social movement theory. Their findings suggest potential new tools and strategies for groups airing their grievances and mobilizing via the Web.

Similarly, we knew from the outset that one advantage of broadening the scope of the journal was that we could become an outlet for scholarly research on the political function of Web logs, or blogs. It is well known that a limited number of large-scale empirical efforts have been reported, despite the burgeoning presence of lots of interesting text, links, and photos in the political blogosphere. We need to know more about the composition and possible impact of blogs on politics. In "Political Blogs: Transmission Belts, Soapboxes, Mobilizers, or Conversation Starters?," Kevin Wallsten offers an impressive first cut at characterizing the content and uses of political blogs. Using an ambitious sampling strategy and a compelling original taxonomy of uses, Wallsten codes a significant number of blog posts. His findings about usage patterns, key events, ideology, prominence, and the dominant roles of opinion and information passing (as opposed to mobilization) provide an important benchmark for tracking the evolution of political blogs going forward.

I was particularly happy to see Undrahbuyan Baasanjav's paper work its way through *JITP*'s peer review process. In "Mediated Social and Political Participation: Examining the Use of the Internet by Mongolian Government and Civil Society Institutions," we gain an important glimpse into Internet use on the wrong side of the global digital divide. In Mongolia, the political uses of the Internet, which foster the growth of NGO voice in policy, contend with older institutional routines and "residual socialist habits" of bureaucratic governance. With a rigid social hierarchy and a historical legacy of violent suppression akin to Burma today, Mongolia presents a tough environment for aspiring Internet-based political actors. While

there are indications of increasing openness via access to documents and citizen input, Baasanjav and her interview subjects rightly question whether this is genuine or token. The generic impression that administration comes before public participation actually mirrors questions about the same dynamic in the United States.

At a time when privacy is under siege and trust in government is low, new research is needed to discover the role of online interactions countering or accelerating these trends. As Rowena Cullen and Patrick Reilly argue, trust in government and online interactions are a prerequisite for successful e-government. The demands for authentic personal information transmitted via the Internet are steadily increasing. Their article "Information Privacy and Trust in Government: A Citizen-based Perspective from New Zealand," uses a mixed methods approach to uncover significant cultural differences between the indigenous Maori people and the European settler population. They also find government is more trusted to protect personal information than private entities. However, for people with higher levels of trust, the government as a whole is not uniformly trusted; rather, some agencies tend to be better trusted than others. They point to an important, if familiar, tradeoff—that despite concerns, the ease of use and convenience of transactions generally

outweighs any privacy concerns that effectively would stop citizens from providing personal information over the Internet.

Finally, a question that provokes much speculation is whether the Internet can level the playing field in politics. Christopher P. Latimer asks: Is the Internet an agent of equalization or normalization or pre-existing patterns in campaign? His paper, "Utilizing the Internet as a Campaign Tool: The Relationship between Incumbency, Political Party Affiliation, Election Outcomes, and the Quality of Campaign Web Sites in the United States," specifically looks for factors that predict a quality Web site and how they relate to electoral success. His findings lend support to the idea that the Internet does not fundamentally reshape the patterns of American campaigns. The factors that traditionally explain candidate success (such as incumbency, major party affiliation, and money) remain central, despite the emergence of the Internet. Indeed, he presents another set of reasons to believe that offline patterns migrate onto the Web, leaving the elites who have advantages in the real world similarly well-positioned online.

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