

large numbers, others have the same capabilities to share bad news. Thus, the idea of amplification can work for or against a politician depending on the news being shared. While a campaign can control the content of information sent over social media from their own handle, they lack the ability to control whatever anyone else has to say. In this way, amplification has quickly become a double-edged sword for political consultants and politicians as unsatisfied citizens have the same tools at their disposal (although with a presumably smaller audience, at least initially).

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See Also: Facebook; Klout Score; Social Media, Definition and Classes of; Social Media Optimization; Social Media Strategies and Tactics; Twitter; YouTube.

Further Readings

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Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life aims to shed light on how new technologies of communication and innovative outreach can be used to increase political understanding and participation. Most of the institute's research efforts are therefore dedicated to applied research. Founded in 2000, the institution was named in honor of Annette Greenfield Strauss, a former Dallas



Student activists speak with an educator at an event in a series called "Why Bother? Engaging Texans in Democracy Today," cosponsored by the Annette Strauss Foundation in 2012 and 2013 to address low civic engagement in central Texas.

mayor, community leader, and philanthropist who devoted most of her life to helping others.

At the heart of the University of Texas at Austin, the institute is aligned with the university's public role of designing and testing new ways of increasing civic involvement. It benefits from the collective expertise of scholars who are nationally renowned for their contributions to the study and development of civic participation and the conditions that give rise to or suppress engagement. Through nonpartisan research, education, and outreach, the institute seeks to understand and overcome obstacles to civic engagement.

Programs and Activities

Among the current programs related to social media and politics, the institute's New Politics Forum is one of the most prominent. The forum focuses on engaging college-age adults by either providing the necessary skills to become effective as citizens, or by sharpening and honing their abilities and talents to take leadership roles in their communities. The New Politics Forum increasingly relies on social media tools to more efficiently communicate with its targeted audience, and to more readily engage youth in civic activities.

In fall 2011, the New Politics Forum organized the 21st Century Civic Engagement Conference, offering an overview of new online platforms that

citizens use to engage with politics and government uses to engage citizens. Based on the premise that there exists a new landscape in civic engagement, the focus of the conference was, in essence, how citizens can talk to each other to increase engagement and improve governing. Speakers from some of the most innovative efforts to use digital technologies to engage citizens (such as Code for America and SeeClickFix) discussed new platforms, social innovation, and global citizenship.

In spring 2012, the New Politics Forum hosted The White House Youth Town Hall in partnership with the White House Office of Public Engagement. The town hall focused on how young people can engage their government and each other to address community problems. This event leveraged several interactive technologies, including a statewide conference call, a moderated Twitter feed, and LinkedIn groups created during the town hall. Thereby, social media and communication technologies allowed viewing groups around the state to interact directly with Ronnie Cho (of the White House Office) and to discuss collectively through Twitter hashtags and LinkedIn groups the problems addressed by the event.

Every spring, the Annette Strauss Institute offers the Campaign Boot Camp, an intensive course on how to be effective working on political campaigns, and how to use social media for political organizing and mobilization. Also, the Executive Communication Training Seminar, usually offered once a year, always includes a component on social media. All activities organized by the institute encourage the use of social media, and engage external audiences by posting videos, uploading pictures, and using Facebook pages and Twitter hashtags to disseminate events.

Finally, the new initiative of the institute, called "Why Bother? Engaging Texans in Democracy Today" comprises a series of public dialogues and news stories produced in partnership with KUT Radio and KLRU-TV. This initiative is not aimed in particular at young people or college students, but instead at all citizens of central Texas, in order to discuss new forms of engagement, exploring ways to inspire more people to get involved.

"Why Bother?" has included an active social media presence. The most recent public dialogue, about how citizens can effectively engage state legislators, was also shown over Ovee (<https://>

ovee.itvs.org), a platform that allows for online interactive viewing with panelists chatting in response to viewer comments, including a "like" function. The goal is to let people have more than one option for engaging with events.

Research

The Annette Strauss Institute conducts research that furthers scholarly and public understanding of media, politics, and civic participation. In the field of digital and social media, there are several concurrent projects being conducted, one of the most prominent being the Engaging News Project. The goal of this project is to provide practical, research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. The project is directed by Natalie Jomini Stroud, associate professor of communication studies and assistant director of the Annette Strauss Institute.

Given the increasing influence today's digital media landscape exerts over citizens' civic lives, the Annette Strauss Institute recently housed and launched the new Digital Media Research Program (DMRP) led by School of Journalism Associate Professor Homero Gil de Zúñiga. This newly added research unit will develop a systematic research program generally aiming to address the influence of new technologies use in people's daily lives, as well as the effect of such use on the overall democratic process. More specifically, the DMRP will shed light over the impact of new communication technologies use (i.e., social media), and user-generated content with respect to several benchmarks of a healthy democracy: citizens' political knowledge, political discussion, and overall civic and political engagement.

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See Also: Activists and Activism, Digital; Internet Gathering; Networks, Political; Social Capital; Voter Turnout; Youth Engagement.

Further Readings

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Anonoblog

Blogs are conceptualized as tools that have been designed to promote immediate interaction between the host blogger and blog visitors. Blogs feature artifacts such as comments, trackback, blogrolls, and archives. Furthermore, blogging culture embraces a particular set of norms that encourage linking to other blogs and sharing via comments additional information regarding any subject being discussed. However, there has been an emergence of the anonoblog. The anonoblog, which is also referred to as a ghost blog, is an anonymous, easy-to-use publishing platform that arranges entries in reverse chronological order. This program is a simple content management system with a number of practical benefits, among them the automatic creation of Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds so that readers can subscribe and get information automatically rather than visiting an actual Web site. The fascinating aspect about ghost blogging technology is that it allows anyone with Internet access to have a Web presence to create, publish, and update material on the Web without knowing HTML, CSS, PHP, XML, or any other programming languages. Therefore, if individuals can write e-mail messages, they have the ability to develop an anonoblog post; and many blogging programs actually allow an individual to post by sending an e-mail. However, anonoblogs are primarily characterized by a tension between ethics and identity.

Ethics

Contemporary media ethics scholars have discussed how new technologies have enabled deception. They have written about technologies such as very small recording devices that are easily hidden and digital editing technologies that make it easier to manipulate how information is presented and processed. The ability to verify what is true or factual in the blogosphere is threatened when opinion is misrepresented as fact, when bloggers plagiarize, when conflicts of interest are not disclosed, or when a blogger lies about his or her identity, especially when the identity of the blog host is not identified from the start. Furthermore, with the advent of Web 2.0 and applications that assist in facilitating interactions among users, increased collaboration and information sharing have raised more privacy concerns in relation to regulation and enforcement. Ethicists have discussed the potential of new communication technologies to threaten transparency and accountability. For example, the following considerations must be analyzed in relation to blogging and ethics; scholar Richard Johannesen notes the following in regard to ethics:

- What is the communicator's intent, and what is the audience's degree of awareness?
- Does the communicator use ghostwriters to make him or herself appear to possess personal qualities that he or she does not have?
- What are the surrounding circumstances of the communicator's job that make ghostwriting a necessity?
- To what extent does the communicator actively participate in the writing of his or her own writing?
- Does the communicator accept responsibility for the message he or she presents?

Identity

Social media communications are rarely unilateral. Social media sites make it easy for people in vast geographical areas to leave blog comments, for example, sending Facebook or Twitter messages. As anonymity or pseudoanonymity are common online, it is not always possible for an individual to know where the initial communication originated