

Social media and presidential election: Scientists examine impact of YouTube, MySpace

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Dr. Paul Haridakis, associate professor of Communication Studies at Kent State University and a long-time scholar in the area of the impact of media on the political landscape in the U.S., is investigating the impact of hugely popular social media's impact on the upcoming presidential contest.

Haridakis, who is currently conducting research with Gary Hanson, associate professor of Journalism & Mass Communication and doctoral students on the role of YouTube in elections, says that even though expenditures by candidates on television ads continue to increase exponentially, this presidential election will be the first time in which social media, such as MySpace, YouTube and Facebook, will play a significant role in persuading the electorate. He adds that the technology and use of these tools is so new, that extensive study on the role of these social and mass media is still underway. Its impact on the 2008 presidential race, Haridakis says, can only be imagined.

"Many people," Haridakis says, "will watch videos and use traditional media like TV to acquire political information about the candidates, but they also are going to the Internet and using social networking sites to see who people they know support. The information gleaned from their social networks may be the information they find most credible and persuasive.

"They'll listen to their buddy on his MySpace page, not necessarily the traditional messengers that candidates employ to reach out to the voters, or even the candidates themselves.

"That exploits the power of social media pretty well," Haridakis says. "The candidates in this election season have not fully harnessed the power of these tools."

Source: Kent State University

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