



## THE TARRANCE GROUP

### MEMORANDUM

To: The Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government  
The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

From: Lake Snell Perry & Associates  
The Tarrance Group

Subject: Youth Attitudes Toward Information Sources<sup>1</sup>

Date: January 15, 2004

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#### SUMMARY:

- Young people use a myriad of information sources when deciding for whom to vote or support. They tend to rely most on newspapers and magazines, television, family and friends, debates, and the Internet. While the Internet is a source of information for a quarter of youth (26 percent), no demographic groups uses the Internet more than they use traditional news sources such as newspapers and television programs.
  - Young people have different attitudes toward information sources based on their age. Older youth are most likely to use more traditional news sources such as newspapers and television, while younger youth and less engaged youth are more likely to rely on friends and family members for political decision making. Likewise, older youth are also more likely than younger youth to use political venues – such as debates and candidate communication – when deciding whom to support.
- Candidates can speak to younger people using the same mediums as they do when communicating with older voters. Candidates do not need separate media budgets to reach young people.
- The Internet is probably not the best way to engage disaffected or disinterested young people in the political process. On the other hand, it is a powerful and efficient way to mobilize young people who are already supporters of candidates or organizations to stay involved or to become involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Methodology: Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,000 people between the ages of 15 and 25. The survey was conducted from November 17<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-3.1%.

- Partisan and ideological youth consistently react more positively toward receiving political communication through a number of electronic media tools. Conversely, Independent, moderate, and unregistered youth are less likely to welcome such communication. Not surprisingly, they are also less likely to use all sources for political information.
- Contact with young people and targeted media toward them should be issue-oriented. Issue-oriented communication and communication that they can choose is most likely to capture their attention. Sponsoring an online chat room where people can go to ask questions is the most popular way a candidate can communicate with young people, followed by sending emails on issues that are important to young people, weblogs geared toward people like them, and campaign events in their area organized by Meetup.org.
  - Candidates should avoid sending unwelcome text messages, weekly emails with campaign updates, emails encouraging turnout, and Internet banner ads.
  - Liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans are particularly responsive to online chat rooms, issue-oriented campaign email, and campaign events; suggesting ideological partisans use these sources to find likeminded youth.
- Women more than men tend to use the Internet for political information, especially young women, liberal women, and college educated women. Democratic men and weak liberals also disproportionately turn to the Internet for political information. Additionally, all liberals, college educated youth, and youth concerned with the situation in Iraq are particularly more intense in their use of the Internet and Internet tools. However, even these groups use more traditional sources such as newspapers and television news programs.

#### **ATTITUDES TOWARD INFORMATION SOURCES IN VOTING DECISIONS**

Young people use a myriad of information sources when deciding for whom to vote or support. Like older people, young people are likely to rely on newspapers and magazines, television news programs, friends and family members, and the Internet. Among this cohort, younger youth are likely to turn to family members and friends for political information, as well as the Internet; while older youth are more likely to use sources that are more political such as campaign material and candidate debates, or turn to more traditional news sources like newspapers and television. However, no demographic group uses the Internet more than they use television news programs or newspapers and magazines

- ***Forty-two percent say they use newspapers or magazines<sup>2</sup>.*** Equal numbers of men and women use newspapers or magazines. Generally speaking, the younger you are the less likely you are to use newspapers or magazines as sources of information, as those age 23-25 are 11 percentage points more likely to use this source than are those age 15-17 (49 percent compared to 38 percent). Those with a high school diploma (52 percent) and full-time workers (50 percent) also disproportionately use these sources. Democrats (51 percent), especially older Democrats (58 percent) and liberal Democrats (54 percent), are more likely than Independents (38 percent) and Republicans (42 percent).
- ***Thirty-nine percent use TV news programs,*** including men age 21-22 (44 percent), women age 18-20 (46 percent), Democrats and Republicans (47 percent and 45 percent, respectively), Democrats age 23-25 (46 percent), liberal Democrats (47 percent), conservative Republicans (47 percent), liberal women (52 percent), white men (44 percent), and residents of New England (47 percent). Whites (42 percent) are more likely than African Americans (30 percent) or Latinos (29 percent) to use TV programs.
- ***Thirty-eight percent rely on family members or friends for information.*** The youngest cohort (age 15-17) is the most likely call upon family members and friends for political advice (47 percent), while the older you are the less likely you are to use family members and friends (only 32 percent of 23-25 year olds use family and friends). Also relying on family and friends are college graduates (44 percent) especially male college graduates (48 percent), and people without jobs (45 percent). Independents (44 percent) are more likely than Republican or Democrats (35 percent each) to use family and friends; and African Americans (42 percent) are more likely than whites (39 percent) or Latinos (33 percent) to call on family and friends.
- ***A third (33 percent) percent use candidate debates.*** Men are more likely than women to use candidate debates when making voting decisions (35 percent compared to 30 percent); and the older you are the more likely you are to use debates as information sources (29 percent of 15-17 year olds, compared to 36 percent of 23-25 year olds). Partisans are also more likely to use debates, including 39 percent of Democrats, 36 percent of Republicans, and only 27 percent of Independents. Likewise, the more ideological you are the more likely you are to use debates as 43 percent of liberal Democrats and 42 percent of conservative Republicans use debates, placing the issue third, respectively, in their list of information sources.
- ***A quarter of young people use the Internet (26 percent).*** Women are slightly more likely than men to report using the Internet for political information (29 percent compared to 23 percent), especially women age 15-17 (35 percent). College women (37 percent) use the Internet more so than either non-college women (27 percent), college men (26 percent), or non-college men (23 percent). Liberal women (30 percent) also utilize the Internet, but no demographic group uses the Internet more than they use television news programs or newspapers and magazines.

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents were allowed to select more than one source, thus these numbers will not total 100 percent.

- ***Seventeen percent use candidate communication***, including 12 percent who use TV or radio advertisements and 5 percent who use candidate mailings. Not surprisingly, partisans are the most likely to use candidate communication including 30 percent of strong Democrats and 28 percent of strong Republicans, compared to only 16 percent of Republicans.
- ***Fewer than ten percent of youth use rallies and other public events, or mailings and telephone calls from groups they belong to***, (8 percent and 4 percent, respectively).

The lessons learned are twofold. First, by their nature, partisans and those who are ideological, are the most likely to use these sources for political information. Not surprisingly, Independents, and young people who are not registered to vote, are consistently less likely to use these media as sources of political information. This does not mean young people do not use these media as sources for other information, but clearly the less political you are the less likely you are to use the Internet, newspapers and magazines, or the television for political news.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, young people use similar news sources as older people. They rely on newspapers and magazines, television, friends and family, and the Internet. Candidates can speak to younger people, indeed they can ***target*** younger voters, by using the same mediums and same context as they do when communicating with older voters. Candidates do not need separate or new media budgets to reach young people -- they only need a renewed ambition.

#### **THE INTERNET AS A CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION TOOL**

The Internet is a unique tool because users generally ‘search’ for wanted information as opposed to having the information presented to them on the front-page of a newspaper or magazine. Likewise, for the most part, the Internet is an opt-in service, where users choose the sites they visit and the email they open. Inevitably, people – young people included – seek out information from like-minded sources and visit websites that are likely to echo their political leanings. Our research buttresses these general conclusions. Partisan and ideological youth consistently react more positively toward receiving political communication through a number of electronic media tools. Conversely, Independent, moderate, and unregistered youth are less likely to welcome such communication.

We draw these conclusions based on young people’s reactions to a list of ways political organizations or candidates might contact them. As the table below demonstrates, respondents had the opportunity to say whether they would be more or less likely to pay attention to that candidate or whether that form of communication would be so unwanted it would become a turnoff.

The analysis shows that the Internet is not a particularly effective way to engage disaffected or disinterested young people in the political process. On the other hand, it is a powerful and efficient way to mobilize young people who are supporters of candidates or organizations to stay involved or to become involved. Further, the Internet is likely a strong tool during the primary season since partisans and ideologues are generally more engaged in the political process at that time than are Independents or pragmatists.

	Much more	Somewhat more	TOTAL MORE	<u>NET</u>	TOTAL LESS/TURN OFF	Turn off	Much less	Somewhat less
Sponsoring an online chat room where you can go to ask questions of candidates or organization staff	19	41	<b>60</b>	<u>+27</u>	<b>32</b>	12	8	12
Sending email on issues that are important to you	17	38	<b>54</b>	<u>+17</u>	<b>37</b>	16	10	12
Having a weblog geared toward people like you with messages about issues that interest you	12	37	<b>50</b>	<u>+10</u>	<b>40</b>	16	10	14
Sponsoring campaign events in your area organized by Meetup.org	15	32	<b>47</b>	<u>+9</u>	<b>38</b>	14	10	15
Sending weekly emails with news about endorsement or other campaign updates.	9	33	<b>42</b>	<u>-7</u>	<b>49</b>	19	17	13
Sending emails urging you to turn out to vote on Election Day	11	30	<b>41</b>	<u>-9</u>	<b>50</b>	22	14	14
Sponsoring an Internet banner ad on a website you visit frequently	7	29	<b>36</b>	<u>-17</u>	<b>53</b>	21	16	16
Sending weekly text message campaign updates to your cell phone or other handheld device	3	19	<b>23</b>	<u>-46</u>	<b>69</b>	34	18	16

As the table shows, sponsoring an online chat room where people can go to ask questions is the most popular way a candidate can communicate with young people. Overall, 60 percent would be more likely to pay attention to the candidate, while only a third (32 percent) would be less likely, or find the communication a nuisance. Next most popular among young people would be a candidate who sends email on issues that are important to young people (54 percent more likely, 37 percent less likely/turnoff). Young people also give a net-positive rating to candidate sponsored weblogs geared toward people like them (50 percent more likely, 40 percent less likely/turnoff) and communication in the form of candidate-sponsored campaign events in their area organized by Meetup.org (47 percent more likely, 38 percent less likely/turnoff).

Young people react negatively to four forms of candidate communication – weekly text messages, Internet banner ads, e-mails encouraging voter turnout, and weekly e-mails with campaign updates. Sixty-nine percent of young people would be less likely to pay attention to a candidate who sent weekly text messages, including a third (34 percent) who would be turned-off by such communication. Fifty-three percent of young people would be less likely to pay attention to a candidate who sponsored an Internet banner ad,

including 21 percent who would be turned-off. Also receiving mixed, but overall negative ratings, include candidate communication in the form of emails urging voter turnout (50 percent less likely/turnoff, 22 percent turned off), and weekly emails about endorsements and other news (49 percent less likely/turnoff, 19 percent turned off). Not surprisingly, young people rate negatively communication that costs them money, as in text messages – especially if that communication is unwarranted or unwanted. Additionally Internet banner ads come across negatively because of the nature of the advertisement.

The following demographic trends emerge:

- ***Independents*** react positively to online chat rooms exclusively (+10) and react lukewarmly to emails on important issues (+0). They react negatively to all other forms of communication, and their reactions are more intense than reactions from Democrats or Republicans. This is not entirely surprising since Independents tend not to like political communication in any form.
- ***Republicans***, like younger people overall, react positively to chat rooms (+30), emails on important issues (+25), weblogs (+10), and sponsored campaign events (+10). Chat rooms and issue-oriented emails would be the most successful communication tools to reach young Republicans. Otherwise, Republicans are less positive than Democrats on most tools. Conservative Republicans and Republican men are the most positive toward these forms of communication.
- ***Democrats*** react positively to six of the eight tested forms of communication and Strong Democrats are especially open to Internet communication. Democrats react positively to chat rooms (+40), email on important issues (+25), weblogs (+25), campaign events like Meetup.org (+20), weekly emails about endorsements and other news (+5), and emails urging turnout (+4). Strong Democrats react especially strongly to emails on important issues (+40), campaign events on Meetup.org (+39), and chat rooms (+37). Liberal Democrats and Democratic men also tend to be more positive overall. Democrats may be more intense than Republicans in their responses due to the Presidential Primary. Finally, even liberal Democrats (as shown below) react negatively towards Internet banner ads and text messaging.

The table below demonstrates the net-percent responses by partisanship and ideology.

	<b>Liberal Dem</b>	<b>Mod/Cons Dem</b>	<b>ALL DEMS</b>	<b>Indep</b>	<b>ALL REPS</b>	<b>Lib/Mod Repub</b>	<b>Conservative Repub</b>
Sponsoring an online chat room where you can go to ask questions of candidates or organization staff	<b>+55</b>	<b>+17</b>	<b>+40</b>	<b>+10</b>	<b>+30</b>	<b>+14</b>	<b>+40</b>
Sending email on issues that are important to you	<b>+37</b>	<b>+4</b>	<b>+25</b>	0	<b>+25</b>	<b>+33</b>	<b>+22</b>
Having a weblog geared toward people like you with messages about issues that interest you	<b>+39</b>	<b>+2</b>	<b>+25</b>	-7	<b>+10</b>	<b>+5</b>	<b>+14</b>
Sponsoring campaign events in your area organized by Meetup.org	<b>+33</b>	-1	<b>+20</b>	2	<b>+10</b>	-16	<b>+25</b>
Sending weekly emails with news about endorsement or other campaign updates.	<b>+8</b>	0	<b>+5</b>	-20	-10	-13	-6
Sending emails urging you to turn out to vote on Election Day	<b>+13</b>	-10	<b>+4</b>	-15	-10	-15	-9
Sponsoring an Internet banner ad on a website you visit frequently	-1	-19	-8	-22	-19	-25	-16
Sending weekly text message campaign updates to your cell phone or other handheld device	-50	-39	-47	-54	-45	-44	-44

- **Registered voters** are more positive toward these communication tools while non-registered people are more negative. Again, this is not surprising since youth who are not registered to vote are less likely to be engaged in the electoral process or to be strong partisans.
- **College educated youth** are consistently more positive toward Internet communication than their non-college educated counterparts. Like Democrats, college educated youth react positively to six of the eight forms of communication and are especially attracted to chat rooms (+38). Non-college graduates are not overly negative, but rather have similar responses as the general youth population.
- **The youngest cohort (age 15-17)** is slightly more positive toward Internet communication than some of their older cohorts. The oldest cohort (age 23-25) is almost as open as younger youth to Internet communication, while the middle-age groups (age 18-22) are slightly less likely to pay attention to candidates who use these forms of communication. The strongest differences surround weblogs as 54 percent of 15-17 are more likely to pay attention, compared to only 45 percent of 18-20 year olds, 48 percent of 21-22 year olds, and 51 percent of 23-25 year olds.
- **Born Again Christians and frequent churchgoers** are slightly more open to Internet communication than infrequent churchgoers or non-Born Again Christians. However, while overall they are more open to these forms of communication, the intensity behind their views is similar to youth in general (60

percent of all youth are more likely to pay attention to chat room communication compared to 65 percent for churchgoers, but the numbers are closer on intensity with 19 percent of all youth much more likely compared to 21 percent of regular churchgoers). Weblogs and emails on important issues or that urge voter turnout represent areas where they are disproportionately likely to accept communication from candidates or organizations.

### **THE INTERNET'S ACCURACY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Younger people do not view the information they obtain from the Internet as either more trustworthy or more accurate than information they would find in newspapers or on the television. In most instances, a strong plurality of youth believes the Internet is only about as accurate or only about as trustworthy as the information they would get from newspapers or television. Overall, 16 percent of young people say they trust the information they find on the Internet more than the information in newspapers or on television, 20 percent say they trust Internet-based information less, and 55 percent say they trust it about the same as information in newspapers. The data is similar when it comes to the accuracy of the Internet-based information. Thirteen percent of young people say the information they find on the Internet is more accurate than information they would find in newspapers or magazines, 22 percent say it is less accurate, and 57 percent say it is about as accurate as the newspaper.

Differences among men and women are the largest factor driving the data. Women, more than men, trust information they find on the Internet. Nineteen percent of women trust the information they find on the Internet more than other information, while 17 percent trust it less. Only 14 percent of men trust Internet-based information more, compared to 23 percent who trust it less. Men are consistently more critical, especially partisan and ideological men. In fact, younger Republican men (30 percent trust it less, 29 percent find it less accurate) and conservative men (27 percent trust less, 32 percent less accurate) are nearly two to one more likely to say the Internet is both less trustworthy and less accurate than other media. Ironically, those groups who are more engaged in political advertisements on the Internet – strong partisans and ideologues – do not feel particularly more trustworthy toward information found on the Internet. College educated women (34 percent trust Internet more) and mothers (28 percent) are among those who are the most likely to trust the information they find on the Internet more than other information.

Overall, a plurality of every demographic group say the Internet is about as trustworthy and accurate as other media sources such as newspapers and television. Even among subgroups of women, including the youngest cohort, liberals, and Democrats, a strong plurality say the Internet performs only as well as other media sources.

To a certain extent young people's general cynicism about the media may be reflected in these findings. Other research we have conducted also suggests that young people who are familiar with the Internet tend to be more familiar with how some information finds its way on the Internet, and thus, are less trusting. Still, while young people do not view the Internet as *more* trustworthy or accurate, they are also reluctant to say it is *less* accurate

or trustworthy. Given all the reportedly unreliable information on the Internet and the value young people place on traditional media (newspapers and television news programs), it is encouraging that they would trust and find accurate information from the Internet. The Internet could still be a cost-effective tool for reaching this audience.

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