Part II.

The Political Dimension of Information Technology

Chapter V

The World Wide Web and Local Media in the 1996 Presidential Election

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The advent of technology is reshaping the landscape of political campaigns. Cable television, satellite uplinks, cellular telephones, facsimile machines, and related communications and software applications offer ever more sophisticated ways of reaching voters. With each passing month, the advertisements in Campaigns and Elections, the trade journal of consultants and political professionals, are filled with more applications of this new information and media technology. Simply collecting and keeping track of the advertisements of a rival during a campaign is now a large part of the work of a campaign. Where candidates once coveted relationships with voters in their districts, they now purchase lists of these same voters on CD-ROM and data files on the World Wide Web as a part of the new campaign technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Few aspects of life in the late 1990s remain untouched by the exciting and sometimes unsettling changes anticipated with the end of the millennium. From anxieties of a Y2K meltdown to the elusive 20,000 Dow, observers await, with a mixture of cautious optimism and nervous anticipation, the changes which might occur as we close out not only one of the most dynamic decades of the century but take our first step across what Bill Clinton characterized during the 1996 election as the bridge to the twenty-first century, a poll-driven campaign phrase which nonetheless seemed to sum up for many the broader changes taking place. "Whereas a century ago the nation began its encounter with a bewildering urban industrialism," writes historian Sean Wilentz (1996), "it recently entered a bewildering edge-city, computer-chip, global post-industrialism with some familiar symptoms: widening gaps in income and wealth, political corruption and insider-trading scandals on a gargantuan scale, a parvenu culture of ostentation, glitz and celebrity" (p. 20). In the way that Midwestern farmers at the end of the nineteenth-century led by the Populist Movement viewed the railroad tracks stretching across the plains as undermining their lives, the fiber optic cable and the satellite dish are emblematic of a new and unsettling globalization of the

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