Information Superhighway or Information Overload?

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This original research project seeks to further the understanding of the Internet as a viable campaign tool.   It is a well documented fact that in addition to low voter turnout, a sizable portion of the American electorate is uniformed and uninterested in politics, even during election cycles.   Many democratic theorists hope that the Internet will enable voters to make more informed and better decisions in campaigns.   While many studies have been conducted to examine the actual web sites, no major empirical studies look at how well individuals learn from these information rich web sites.   This study is a first step to fill that void.

Prior research in other forms of political learning leads to the hypotheses that the Internet will **not** facilitate greater widespread learning than traditional media, and those who do benefit from candidate web sites will be those who are already knowledgeable and interested in politics. Surveying nearly 200 IWU students, and analyzing their responses to different stimuli in the 2000 Presidential campaign between George W. Bush and Al Gore, these hypotheses were confirmed. The conclusions that emerge from this study support the aforementioned hypotheses.   Candidate web sites provide far too much information for the casual visitor causing information overload. Voters simply become awash in a sea of online information with current cyber-campaigning procedures.