

Web Traffic: The Big Picture

Contributed by Matt
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Of all the things that debates about online politics have been missing, the most glaring has been a sense of perspective. Claims that the Internet is reshaping politics only make sense if the political messages posted online actually get read by citizens.

The draft graphic from the book addresses the issue of scale, and demonstrates visually just how important news sites and political sites are--or are not--in comparison to other online content. Using May 2007 data from Hitwise Competitive Intelligence, I was able to show the number of visits that various politically-relevant categories of Web content receive. The outer circle represents the total volume of Internet traffic. Within it, smaller circles represent the portion of traffic that goes to specific categories of Web usage.

Click the link below to read more about the figure.

Overall, about 10.5 percent of Web traffic goes to adult or pornographic websites. A slightly smaller portion (9.6 percent) goes to Webmail services, such as Yahoo Mail or Hotmail. 7.2 percent of traffic goes to search engines, while only 2.9 percent of Web traffic goes to news and media sites. These facts alone tells us much about citizens' priorities in cyberspace.

In the center of the figure is a small circle denoting the 0.12 percent of traffic that goes to political Websites. This tally is so low that one might be tempted to assume that important sites have been omitted from the category. Yet (as graphics below show) a closer examination finds no obvious gaps in membership. The relative ranking of political sites within their niche matches our predictions; the community itself is just a far smaller slice of the Internet pie than many have imagined.