

Abstract

Internet use is growing in Ireland and it will continue to grow for at least another year, which is the date appointed by the government for the whole of Ireland to have broadband and internet access.

For this reason, it is important to study the effects it will have on the citizens of Ireland. Social networking is becoming a popular pastime, a form of entertainment and a gateway for information. With the development of 'Web 2.0' communication is becoming instantaneous. Information can be viewed as quick as a click and this, in turn, creates transparency online, generating information which is readily available to the masses.

Recently the effects of Web 2.0 and, in particular, social networking have been seen through the campaigning for presidency in the United States. Barack Obama's use of the internet is a prime example of just how powerful these tools can be in today's world. He utilised the internet as an additional method for communication which created a greater range of targeted audience. Barack Obama used his offline skills of communicating and organising and transferred them online to create a new wave of interaction with the public.

The public, in turn, have accepted this method and adjusted accordingly. It is evident from recent online meetings that this method has been a success. The public are more involved and have increased responsibility due to this involvement.

This thesis examines the uses of social networking that have been put in place recently and asks the question: Can these methods be used in Ireland and will they have an effect on our politics?

From research carried out it is evident the younger generation of politics in Ireland is open and willing to use these types of methods to engage and interact. From surveys, questionnaires and emails to Irish politicians, feedback was received regarding social networking and politics. The majority of politicians in Ireland at present are failing to use online methods to communicate to its full potential but from the increase in online use from Ireland's leading party, Fianna Fail, Web 2.0 tools are slowly seeping down the line to all political parties. The potential candidates for the June Elections are using social networking to a far great extent than current politicians. This is an indicator of the rising

use of social networking as a method for communication by future politicians. Therefore, it is likely to have an impact on the citizens of Ireland on a local level and eventually on a national scale.