

THE BOYS ON THE BLOGS: INTERMEDIA AGENDA SETTING  
IN THE 2008 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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MAY 2010

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE BOYS ON THE BLOGS: INTERMEDIA AGENDA SETTING  
IN THE 2008 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, the late Robert and Ruth Heim, for always having faith in me and encouraging my education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to many people for their contributions to this dissertation and for all their help in my journey from newspaper journalist to doctoral student to faculty member.

Thank you to the members of my committee for their insights and for their patience when the dissertation took longer to complete than expected. Dr. Wayne Wanta's calm leadership and wealth of knowledge were invaluable. Drs. Stephanie Craft and Shelly Rodgers challenged me and inspired me during my time at the University of Missouri by involving me in their research. Dr. Craft encouraged me to think more deeply and critically about the practice of journalism than I ever had before. Dr. Rodgers impressed upon me the importance of methodological and measurement rigor. Drs. Kevin Wise and Antonie Stam provided valuable observations and suggestions that helped me focus and refine my dissertation research.

A special thank you also goes to Seth Ashley for his assistance in the often tedious content analysis coding process.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes intermedia agenda setting during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign to determine the agenda-setting role of prominent political bloggers in relation to the mainstream news media and the candidates.

An online survey of newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the campaign ( $N = 80$ ) found that reporters who wrote about the campaign on a regular basis and who contributed to a blog on their news organizations' Websites had higher levels of exposure to political blogs. Reporters with low levels of journalism experience and reporters based in Washington, D.C., were more likely to say that political blogs helped satisfy their informational needs during the campaign, confirming that need for orientation, consisting of the lower-order concepts of uncertainty and relevance, can be applied to intermedia agenda setting. A separate conceptualization of reporters' need for orientation toward issues, toward frames, and toward evaluations found little support.

A content analysis of political blog posts, news articles, and candidate press releases from the month preceding the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses found that political blogs' issue and attribute agendas were strongly correlated with the agendas of the news media, but in both cases, bloggers mostly appeared to follow the news media's lead. Some evidence was found, however, that the issue agenda of liberal bloggers during the first week transferred to the news media in subsequent weeks. No evidence of intermedia agenda setting between the candidates and the political blogs was found.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Nearly four decades ago, two writings profoundly shaped how scholars and the public came to understand journalists' reporting of presidential campaigns and influence on public opinion. One was a 12-page article in an academic journal that described "the agenda-setting function of mass media" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972); the other, a best-selling book chronicling life on the road for the "boys on the bus" who followed the 1972 presidential candidates (Crouse, 1973).

In a groundbreaking study, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw determined that citizens learn how much importance to attach to political issues by reading newspapers and news magazines and watching television news. Their research in Chapel Hill, N.C., during the 1968 presidential campaign found a strong positive correlation between undecided voters' rankings of the most important political issues and the news media's ranking of the same issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This correlation led the researchers to conclude that the media had set the public's issue agenda.

One year later, Timothy Crouse described the pack journalism instincts of a gang of reporters who, despite their individual quirks, produced strikingly similar stories day after day (Crouse, 1973). Although Crouse did not use the term, his book could be considered an early study of intermedia agenda setting, the process by which the agendas of different media outlets influence one another (e.g., Boyle, 2001; Golan, 2006; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs & Lennon, 1998; Reese & Danielian, 1989; Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

In ensuing years, numerous scholars have expanded upon McCombs and Shaw's finding that the news media set the public agenda. One line of inquiry has examined contingent conditions such as need for orientation (Matthes, 2005, 2008; McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980) and media exposure (Lasorsa & Wanta, 1990; Wanta & Hu, 1996) that explain why and under what conditions agenda setting occurs. Another line has gone beyond first-level agenda setting, which considers the transfer of salience of objects such as issues or candidates, to examine second-level agenda setting, which considers the transfer of salience of the attributes linked to those objects (e.g., Craft & Wanta, 2004; Ghanem, 1997; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002).

Intermedia agenda-setting research, meanwhile, often seems trapped in a bygone era. Studies have confirmed a uniformity of news content across media outlets (e.g., Lee, 2007; Noelle-Neumann & Mathes, 1987; Shaw & Sparrow 1999), which has been said to result from journalists' reliance on information sources such as press releases; their monitoring of other news media, particularly elite news organizations such as *The New York Times*; and the basic norms and values they all share (McCombs, 2004).

Today's media environment, however, is much more complex than the one that existed decades ago. Studies of news sociology conducted before the arrival of the World Wide Web may not provide sufficient explanatory power for intermedia agenda setting in the reporting of modern-day political campaigns. Today, it is no longer necessary to board a bus to follow the candidates. The Internet has made it possible to view video clips of campaign speeches or download candidate press releases. Nor does one have to be a member of the press corps. The boys on the bus now have competition from the "boys on the blogs," who can post their political observations online.

Blogs, defined as frequently updated World Wide Web pages with posts or entries arranged in reverse chronological order (Blood, 2002), have been around since the mid-1990s, but they became much more prominent during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. As Kaid (2009) declared: “The most influential new development in campaign news coverage may be the importance of blogs” (p. 420).

When Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, during a fund-raising event in San Francisco, referred to working-class Pennsylvania voters as “bitter” people who “cling to guns or religion,” it was a blogger, Mayhill Fowler, who first reported the remark (Fowler, 2008). When Sarah Palin was announced as Republican John McCain’s running mate, liberal bloggers began to speculate that Palin’s youngest son actually may have been born to her daughter Bristol. The McCain campaign denied the rumors but had to admit that Bristol Palin was pregnant. A McCain adviser fumed:

It used to be that a lot of those smears and the crap on the Internet stayed out of the newsrooms of serious journalists. That’s not the case anymore. ... It goes right from the Internet, right to the newsroom and right to us, and we’re compelled to respond to it. (Shear & Vick, 2008, para. 7)

The campaign adviser’s comment is instructive not only because it suggests how political reporting has changed in the years since Crouse wrote *The Boys on the Bus*, but also because it suggests how agenda setting may have changed since McCombs and Shaw’s seminal study. During the 1968 presidential campaign, the salience of political issues transferred directly from journalists to the public. Today, political topics may originate on blogs, then be pursued by journalists and transmitted to the public. Bloggers may be able to influence public opinion indirectly by focusing journalists’ attention on particular themes in the hope that the resulting news stories will alter public perceptions (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; McCombs, 2005).

This study investigates intermedia agenda setting with the purpose of determining whether the high-profile political bloggers known as the “A list” (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005) made a difference during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. Were political blogs read by reporters who covered the campaign, and, if so, did the blog posts help journalists satisfy their informational needs during the reporting process? Also, what was the relationship among the agendas of the bloggers, the mainstream news media, and the presidential candidates? Did the top political bloggers appear to be leading or following the agendas of the journalists and the candidates?

Seven hypotheses are tested and 21 research questions answered through a combination of research methods. An online survey of newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the presidential campaign measures their exposure to political blogs and their use of blogs to satisfy their informational needs. An examination of hyperlinks within blog posts identifies mainstream news sources that political bloggers consulted when writing about the presidential campaign. And a content analysis of news stories, political blog posts, and candidate press releases is conducted to draw conclusions about the transfer of issue and attribute salience among the three media.

Previous intermedia agenda-setting research mostly has studied the influence of elite media such as *The New York Times* on the content of other news outlets (e.g., Golan, 2006; Reese & Danielian, 1989; Shaw & Sparrow, 1999) or has compared news and political advertising agendas (e.g., Boyle, 2001; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994). Findings often have been explained with reference to the sociology of news literature, which posits that news is socially constructed by journalists who follow individual and institutional routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978).

This dissertation, however, argues that intermedia agenda setting is as much about psychology as it is about sociology. Media exposure and need for orientation, two psychological concepts typically associated with public opinion agenda-setting research, are applied to intermedia agenda setting to provide fresh theoretical insights.

Just as members of the public need to orient themselves and develop cognitive maps when confronted with unfamiliar situations (Jones & Gerard, 1967; Lippmann, 1922; Matthes, 2005, 2008; McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Tolman, 1948; Weaver, 1980), so do journalists who write about presidential politics. Research on such diverse topics as journalistic uncertainty (Dimmick, 1974; Gans, 1979; Patterson, 1993; Sigal, 1973; Sparrow, 1999), behavioral psychology (Tolman 1932, 1948), and information subsidies (Downs, 1957; Gandy, 1982; Turk, 1986; Wigley & Fontenot, 2009) leads to the conclusion that campaign reporters use political blogs to satisfy their need for orientation.

Need for orientation is conceptualized two ways: first, in its traditional form, as a combination of the lower-order concepts of relevance and uncertainty (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980), and second, via scales that measure three separate dimensions: need for orientation toward issues, toward frames, and toward evaluations (Matthes, 2005, 2008). Survey responses are used to determine how campaign reporters' need for orientation influenced their reliance on political blogs in the reporting process. Specifically, it is hypothesized that less experienced reporters, with high levels of uncertainty, and reporters based in Washington, D.C., for whom presidential politics is highly relevant, were more likely to use political blogs to satisfy their informational needs during the 2008 campaign. Additionally, it is hypothesized that need for orientation toward frames and toward evaluations, which are concerned with the ways in which a

political campaign is contextualized and interpreted, are better predictors of journalists' use of blogs to satisfy informational needs than is need for orientation toward issues.

Results can establish whether need for orientation adds explanatory power and is worth investigating in future intermedia agenda-setting research. Results also can help political bloggers target their writing by identifying groups of reporters who have the greatest need for orientation and are therefore most susceptible to agenda-setting effects.

Although researchers have determined that journalists read blogs (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008), this dissertation aims to broaden our understanding of journalists' exposure to blogs by identifying specific political blogs that are read with the greatest frequency. Survey results also will show which variables related to journalists' demographics and their work environment are predictors of campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs. At the same time, an analysis of hyperlinking patterns in political blog posts will indicate which mainstream news sources were consulted most often by political bloggers during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Studies of intermedia agenda setting often draw conclusions about effects without addressing whether the members of one medium are attending to the messages of the other (e.g., Ku, Kaid & Pfau, 2003; Meraz, 2009). By directly measuring media exposure, this dissertation is able to compare the agendas of the blogs that are most widely read by political journalists with the agendas of the news sources that are most widely cited by bloggers, allowing for a stronger agenda-setting argument to be made.

Finally, the content analysis of news articles, blog posts, and candidate press releases from the weeks immediately preceding the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses allows the issue and attribute agendas of each medium to be compared at different time

intervals. Although causation cannot be directly established, computation of time-lagged correlations makes it possible to infer that some causal relationships are more plausible than others (Kenny & Harackiewicz, 1979; Locascio, 1982; Shingles, 1985).

The early weeks of a presidential primary campaign are of greatest concern to agenda-setting researchers because it is during this phase of the contest, when the public's impressions are beginning to be formed, that the media and the candidates battle to establish "interpretive dominance" and set the terms of the political debate (Stuckey & Antczak, 1995, p. 118). Candidates who do well in early contests such as the Iowa caucuses can carry that momentum through the primary season (Mayer & Busch, 2004).

If political bloggers are able to set the agenda during the early stages of a presidential race, it would suggest a fundamental shift in the power dynamics of political campaigns. Bloggers would be able to influence the political race not by appealing to the public directly but by making key topics or themes more salient in the minds of journalists or candidates. Bloggers might even be able to hijack the images that candidates construct through their press releases (Haynes, Flowers & Gurian, 2002; Miller, Andsager & Reichert, 1998; Tedesco, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Vermeer, 1982). On the other hand, if political bloggers simply follow the agendas set by the news media and candidates, their agenda-setting influence would appear minimal.

Scholars' observations about the power of bloggers have fallen into two schools of thought. One school argues that blog content is largely derivative or parasitic, feeding upon stories found in the mainstream media. Haas (2005) observed that "most weblog writers cover the same topics as mainstream news media and, perhaps more significantly, rely on them for information on those topics" (pp. 393-394). The other school argues that

bloggers set the news media agenda because journalists rely on bloggers' specialized knowledge and analysis. Farrell and Drezner (2008) contend that "when elite blogs concentrate their attention on a breaking story or an underreported story—the agenda-setting power of blogs may create focal points for general interest intermediaries" (p. 17).

This study aims to unite the two schools of thought by proposing a bidirectional model of intermedia agenda setting that follows different dynamics at different levels. At the first level of agenda setting, where the focus is on the salience of objects such as issues or candidates, it is hypothesized that political bloggers follow journalists' lead by looking to the mainstream media to decide what topics to write about. At the second level, where the focus is on the salience of attributes used to frame the race and the candidates (Ghanem, 1997; Golan & Wanta, 2001), it is hypothesized that journalists look to political blogs to help them interpret or contextualize the campaign. Although several scholars have begun to study blogging from an agenda-setting perspective (Lee, 2007; Meraz, 2009; Metzgar, 2007; Wallsten, 2007), none has examined first- and second-level agenda setting simultaneously.

Blogging has been called a form of "grassroots convergence" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 15) and "bottom-up power" (Singer, 2007, p. 82) that is resistant to the dominant meanings created by political and media elites. The potential of blogs to introduce new voices and new ideas into the national political discourse has been hailed (Perlmutter, 2008). If this study finds that political bloggers helped set the agenda of mainstream journalists or presidential candidates during the 2008 campaign, it will lend credence to such arguments. However, if political bloggers are shown to merely follow the agendas set by other actors, claims of blogging's democratic potential may be overstated.

## CHAPTER 2

### Blogging and Agenda Setting: An Overview

This chapter begins with a brief history of blogging, from the early bloggers who led visitors on a World Wide Web site-seeing tour to today's "A-list" political bloggers who hope their commentary will influence the news media or mobilize the grassroots. Next, agenda setting is offered as a theoretical framework to understand how topics become salient in the blogosphere and the mainstream media, and how that salience might transfer from one medium to the other. Agenda setting is traced from its origins as a theory explaining the dynamics of public opinion to its use in understanding the relationships between the content of "old" media such as print journalism and the content of "new" media such as political blogs.

#### *History of Blogging*

Blogging has become so popular that all sorts of Websites are now calling themselves blogs (Perlmutter, 2008). It was not so long ago, however, that the word was unfamiliar to most Internet users. Jorn Barger, who maintains the site Robot Wisdom, is credited with coining the term in 1997, defining a Weblog as "a Web page where a Web logger 'logs' all the other Web pages she finds interesting" (Blood, 2004, p. 54). Yet the practice of blogging arguably began several years earlier, when the World Wide Web was still in its infancy. Gillmor (2006) contends that the Web site Justin's Links from the Underground, started by Swarthmore College sophomore Justin Hall in 1994, may have been the first serious blog, even though no one used the word at the time. Others have

traced the birth of blogging to the What's New page for the early Web browser Mosaic, which, beginning in 1993, suggested sites that Internet users might enjoy (Blood, 2002).

What these early blogs had in common was an emphasis on providing a list of hyperlinks, clickable links embedded in the Web page that direct readers to other sites of interest. As blogging pioneer Rebecca Blood stated in her 2002 *Weblog Handbook*: "It is the link that creates the community in which weblogs exist. And it is the link that distinguishes the weblog ... from old-media writing that has merely been transplanted to the Web" (Blood, 2002, p. 19).

In addition to a reliance on hyperlinks, Trammell and Gasser (2004) identified four other structural differences between blogs and other types of Web pages: Bloggers incorporate a higher level of interactivity through such features as user comments, they arrange their posts in reverse chronological order with the freshest information at the top of the page, they maintain changes and additions to the blog in an archive, and they see themselves as part of a larger blogging community.

Bloggers may discuss topics ranging from what they hope to accomplish in life to what they ate for lunch, but the focus of this study is on blogs whose content is primarily political. The specific blogs sampled are drawn from the rankings of the blog search engine Technorati. As of 2007, the latest year for which numbers could be found, Technorati was tracking more than 70 million blogs, and about 120,000 new ones were being created worldwide each day (The State of the Live Web, 2007). Technorati sets some restrictions when identifying blogs for inclusion in its directory. According to its guidelines, to be counted as a blog a site should have original content, new entries posted

at least monthly, and a public Atom or RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed that allows readers to subscribe and receive updates as new material is posted (Technorati, n.d.).

Collectively, the community of blogs is known as the blogosphere, and its main currency is the hyperlinks contained within “blogrolls”—bloggers’ lists of other blogs they read and admire—and within individual posts. The resulting network of links approximates a power-law distribution, in which a select few blogs receive the vast majority of all inbound links while the rest attract little or no attention (Shirky, 2003b). Tremayne (2007) noted that the blogs at the center of the network have different characteristics from those on the periphery, making it difficult to generalize about the blogosphere as a whole.

Although early bloggers directed readers’ attention to other sites of interest, hyperlinking within posts began to diminish as new software tools made blog publishing more user-friendly (Blood, 2004). Soon, Internet users were creating blogs not to provide lists of links but simply to post whatever was on their mind. Blogging became a form of “self-presentation” (Goffman, 1959) for individuals to manage impressions of themselves on their audiences (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). A content analysis of randomly selected blogs found that a large majority (70.4%) were personal journals in which authors described their lives and personal thoughts (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper & Wright, 2007).

This study, however, focuses on a different set of blogs: the “A-list” blogs. A-list blogs are defined as those that are the most well-known and linked to by others (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Farrell and Drezner (2008) observed that within the universe of blogs, only the select few that receive the most links become salient and serve

as focal points of debate. Unlike the personal-journal blogs, which might be read by the blogger's closest friends and tend to be inwardly focused on the blogger's personal life, A-list blogs draw thousands of visitors a day and tend to be more focused on the outside world. They include such popular political commentary sites as the liberal Huffington Post and Daily Kos and the conservative Instapundit and Hot Air.

Political blogging gained momentum following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent "war on terror" as people logged on to the Internet to discuss world events (Tremayne, Zheng, Lee & Jeong, 2006). When the military coalition led by the United States and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003, blogs emerged as an alternative source of information and analysis. Readers said blogs often provided more knowledgeable, in-depth accounts of the Iraq War than the mainstream news media (Kaye & Johnson, 2004).

Over time, A-list bloggers have come to view their sites not merely as a place to offer political opinions but as a vehicle for activism and change. Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, who operates the liberal site Daily Kos, explained his motivation for blogging:

I don't have many swing voters reading Daily Kos, and I don't really want them. I'm preaching to the choir for a reason. It's because we're trying to organize, we're trying to fund-raise, we're trying to win elections. They're the activists. They're incredibly influential. And they can be the key to winning elections. (quoted in Kline & Burstein, 2005, p. 47)

One way in which political bloggers can wield power is by keeping attention focused on events that would otherwise fall off the media radar (Woodly, 2008).

Observers often point to Trent Lott's resignation as U.S. Senate majority leader as an example of this power. The Mississippi senator made a complimentary reference to Strom Thurmond's segregationist past at the South Carolina senator's 100th birthday

party in 2002. The press initially glossed over Lott's remarks, but bloggers would not ease up until Lott quit his leadership post (Grossman, 2004).

Bloggers also have been cited for exposing the documents used in a 2004 CBS News report critical of President George W. Bush's Air National Guard service as forgeries and for pressuring Eason Jordan to quit as CNN's chief news executive in 2005 after he said during an off-the-record forum that the U.S. military had targeted journalists in Iraq (Kurtz, 2005). Conservative blogger and radio talk show host Hugh Hewitt (2005) referred to these types of incidents as "blog swarms," in which several blogs begin to pick up on a theme, signaling that an "opinion storm" is brewing (p. 1).

Yet some observers have questioned how much influence the A-list political blogs really have. Hewitt (2005) noted, for example, that Trent Lott's controversial remarks had received a brief mention by ABC News before they were reported by the blogs. And Schiffer (2006) found that liberal bloggers had only modest success in creating a blog swarm around the Downing Street memo controversy. The memos, chronicling a 2002 meeting between then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair and top military and intelligence officials, have been said to show that the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq was a foregone conclusion. Although liberal bloggers pressured the U.S. news media to report the controversy and were able to penetrate the opinion pages of some newspapers, news coverage relied mostly on Bush administration statements and official sources (Schiffer, 2006).

Whatever influence bloggers have over mass public opinion is likely to be indirect because blog readership has not yet approached the audience of media such as newspapers and television. In one survey, only 12% of respondents said they had gotten

news from a blog in the past week (Hargrove & Stempel, 2007). In another survey, Americans ranked blogs lowest on the list of important news sources (WE Media/Zogby Interactive, 2007).

While much of the public may not yet pay attention to blogs, journalists are likely to be heavy consumers (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Lowrey & Mackay, 2008; Woodly, 2008). Joe Trippi (2004), who has advised several Democratic presidential candidates, said: “The little-known secret in newsrooms across the United States is that right now reporters are beginning every day by reading the blogs. They’re looking for the pulse of the people, for political fallout, for stories they might have missed” (p. 229). Realizing that journalists pay attention to the blogosphere, political bloggers have focused their energy on persuading the press rather than the general population.

In 2004, for example, a group of nine bloggers—two of whom, it would later be learned, were being paid by John Thune, the Republican U.S. Senate candidate in South Dakota—attacked South Dakota’s main daily newspaper, *The Argus Leader*, in a series of angry blog posts. Frel (2005) explained that the effort was not intended to turn the public against the newspaper but to rattle the newspaper’s staff and influence its reporting:

[T]heir postings were not primarily aimed at dissuading the general public from trusting the *Argus*’ coverage. Rather, the work of these bloggers was focused on getting into the heads of the three journalists at the *Argus* who were primarily responsible for covering the [Tom] Daschle/Thune race. (para. 3)

Four years later, during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, political bloggers took note when mainstream news accounts seemed to echo observations they had posted days or weeks earlier. “Astral66,” a blogger on the liberal site Talking Points Memo, noted that one day after she posted an item stating that Democratic candidate Barack

Obama had launched his political career with a coffee hosted by a rabbi, not, as had been claimed, in the home of radical activist-turned-educator William Ayers, a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter wrote a similar item. The blogger reflected on the similarities:

Maybe Lynn Sweet arrived at the same place I did yesterday, after hearing the Ayers living room smear one too many times. Or maybe someone did see my post here, and thought it was worth looking into a bit more. Maybe the work we do here day after day, posting our thoughts and concerns, really can effect some kind of change. (astral66, 2008, para. 10)

As these examples illustrate, at least some political bloggers believe that their writings can “get into the heads” of journalists, focusing reporters’ minds on particular topics or themes. Despite a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggesting that bloggers and journalists might be influenced by each other’s writings, empirical research is limited. Mass communication theory can guide our attempts to understand how journalists and political bloggers rely upon one another for information, and how that reliance manifests itself in the stories and posts they produce.

#### *Agenda-Setting Theory*

Agenda-setting theory provides a theoretical framework for investigating how the relative priority that mainstream journalists assign to particular topics of news coverage might transfer to the political blogosphere and vice versa. In its most basic form, the theory posits that although media messages may not alter people’s attitudes, they have indirect cognitive effects by making certain topics more salient than others in people’s minds. Entman (1993) defined salience as “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (p. 53). An examination of how agenda setting operates in today’s media environment must begin with a brief overview of the theory’s roots and its history of development.

## *Agenda Setting and Public Opinion*

Although the term “agenda setting” was not coined until 1972, Walter Lippmann’s classic work *Public Opinion* (1922) laid the foundation five decades earlier. In Lippmann’s view, the mass media serve as the main connection between the events that happen in the world and our images of these events—the “pictures in our heads.” Public opinion, then, responds not to the physical environment but to the pseudo-environment constructed by the news media.

Lippmann’s writings came at a time when most mass communication theory researchers portrayed the media as instruments of persuasion and attitudinal change. According to this “hypodermic needle” model of influence, information flowed directly from the media to the people, injecting them with opinions. But research failed to support this model, and scholars began to focus on the media’s power to inform rather than persuade. As Cohen (1963) put it: “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 13).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) turned Cohen’s observation into a testable hypothesis and found a strong positive correlation between the public’s most important issues and the issues most frequently mentioned in the news media. The researchers concluded that the news agenda had set the public’s issue agenda. An agenda was defined as a list of issues at a given point in time, ranked in a hierarchy of importance (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 565).

From this seminal study has emerged a body of scholarship spanning decades. Bryant and Miron (2004) found agenda setting tied with uses and gratifications as the

most cited theory in three premier mass communication journals from 1956 to 2000, despite the theory's relatively late arrival. Although there have been many refinements to the theory, the central findings have been replicated numerous times. Dearing and Rogers (1996) reviewed 112 agenda-setting studies and found that the majority showed a correlation between the media agenda and public agenda.

To demonstrate that the media set the public agenda, rather than the opposite, changes in the public agenda must be shown to follow, rather than precede, changes in the media agenda. Early studies established that it takes several months for the media agenda to transfer to the public (Stone & McCombs, 1981), but later research found shorter time lags, ranging from one week for network television news to eight weeks for a national news magazine (Wanta & Hu, 1994). In today's media environment, where news is posted to the Internet almost immediately and discussed online, agenda setting may occur even more quickly. Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) found lags of one to seven days in the correlation between news coverage and online discussion, with Day 7 producing the most significant correlations. This study analyzes blog and news content in four one-week increments. The issue of time lag will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Early agenda-setting studies (e.g., Stone & McCombs, 1981; Winter & Eyal, 1981) focused on the salience of objects—so-called first-level agenda setting. An object is defined as “that thing towards which our attention is directed or the thing about which we have an attitude or opinion” (McCombs, 2004, p. 69). Political issues represent one class of objects; political candidates represent another. In a primary campaign, for example, each candidate within a political party is competing for the limited attention of the media and the public.

Just as an agenda may consist of several objects, each of those objects may contain several attributes. Attribute is a broad term “encompassing the entire range of properties and traits that characterize an object” (McCombs, 2004, p. 70). In second-level agenda setting, attributes that are associated with particular objects in the news media become mentally linked to the object in the minds of the public (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar & Rey, 1997). Second-level agenda setting research thus challenges Cohen’s (1963) assertion that the mass media do not tell the public what to think, only what to think about.

Ghanem (1997) identified four categories of attributes: subtopics, framing mechanisms, cognitive elements, and affective elements. The first category of attributes, subtopics, divides an issue into smaller components. Craft and Wanta (2004) found some evidence of second-level agenda setting in their study examining several subtopics in media coverage following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The subtopics about which media users expressed the most concern—the possibility of future attacks and the effect on the economy—were the subtopics that had received extensive media coverage. Kim et al. (2002) compared local media coverage of a community development project with results of an opinion survey and found a significant correlation between the most prominent subtopics mentioned by the news media and those mentioned most frequently by respondents.

Framing mechanisms, the second category of attributes, are elements such as placement and size that influence the prominence of a news item (Ghanem, 1997).

The cognitive dimension of attributes deals with whether the media and the audience are thinking about an object in the same way (Ghanem, 1997). Cognitive

attributes may include information about issues or information about personal characteristics (Golan & Wanta, 2001). Affective attributes bring an evaluative dimension to agenda setting by focusing on the public's emotional response and their opinions about newsmakers (Ghanem, 1997).

Golan and Wanta's (2001) comparison of newspaper coverage of New Hampshire's 2000 Republican presidential primary with public perceptions of the candidates found more evidence of second-level agenda setting for cognitive attributes than for affective attributes. Citizens ranked cognitive attributes such as "gets things done" or "has a vision" to candidates George W. Bush and John McCain in direct proportion to newspaper coverage. Their positive and negative evaluations of the candidates were less likely to reflect the newspapers' coverage patterns.

Second-level agenda setting, with its focus on the attributes that become associated with objects, connects agenda-setting with framing, another stalwart theory in mass communication research. Entman (1993) said that to frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In political journalism, framing goes hand in hand with interpretive reporting, as journalists strive to tell their readers or viewers not only what happened but what it all means. According to Terkildsen, Schnell and Lang (1988), framing "refers to the broader interpretative structures of media coverage that place particular information or events within a context" (p. 47).

If attributes exist on a micro-to-macro continuum, frames fall at the macro end, referring to the dominant perspectives that organize news coverage and personal thoughts about an object (McCombs, 2004). In other words, all frames are attributes, but not all attributes rise to the level of frames.

In the relationship between the A-list political blogs and the mainstream news media during a political campaign, it is hypothesized that both first- and second-level agenda setting are operating, each following a different dynamic. Journalists and bloggers must familiarize themselves with the candidates and their issue platforms, and they must be able to frame the candidates and issues in ways that will help readers make sense of the campaign. Hypotheses about intermedia agenda setting at both levels will be presented and explained in Chapter 4.

#### *Intermedia Agenda Setting*

By examining how the media influence public opinion, most agenda-setting scholarship fits within the “effects” research paradigm. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) observed that mass communication researchers generally have studied the effects of media content on the audience, treating media messages as an independent variable. Far fewer studies have treated media content as a dependent variable, examining the factors that influence the creation of mass media messages. Shoemaker and Reese called for more theorizing about how media content is produced in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the mass media’s role in society. Gandy (1982) made a similar plea when he urged agenda-setting scholars to “go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purposes it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society” (p. 7).

These questions have been addressed through agenda-building and intermedia agenda-setting research. Agenda building considers how issues originate and become topics of news coverage (e.g., Lang & Lang, 1983; Walters, Walters & Gray, 1996; Weaver & Elliott, 1985). Intermedia agenda setting considers how various media agendas influence one another (e.g., Boyle, 2001; Golan, 2006; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Reese & Danielian, 1989; Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

Much of the agenda building and intermedia agenda-setting research finds its theoretical underpinnings in the sociology of news literature, which posits that journalists, through their individual and institutional routines, actively filter and shape reality rather than merely reflecting it. News, in other words, is socially constructed (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978), a pseudo-environment that exists in between “the world outside” and “the pictures in our heads” (Lippmann, 1922).

To say that news is socially constructed is not to deny that media coverage often is dictated by real-world events. For instance, Behr and Iyengar (1985) found that television news coverage of energy, unemployment, and inflation was at least partially driven by actual economic conditions. A study of President Nixon’s war on drugs yielded similar results: As drug arrests rose, so did media attention (Johnson et al., 1996). But real-world indicators alone cannot fully explain how journalists decide what to spotlight. Funkhouser’s (1973) examination of the U.S. news media during the 1960s found that the volume of coverage for such issues as the Vietnam War, inflation, and crime did not directly correlate with the realities of any of the issues, as measured by statistical indicators.

Because news coverage does not simply mirror real-world events, studies of agenda building and intermedia agenda setting have sought to identify other factors that shape the media agenda. Many of these factors have been located in the institutional culture of journalism and the practice of gathering and reporting the news.

Journalists often validate their sense of news by monitoring the work of their peers (McCombs, 2004). Even before the term “agenda setting” was coined, Breed’s (1955) interviews with newspaper staffers suggested an “arterial process” of influence in which the editors of smaller papers studied the work of larger papers to guide their own news judgment (p. 277). Content analysis has lent empirical support to anecdotal accounts of elite news organizations’ agenda-setting power. Reese and Danielian (1989) found that *New York Times* coverage of the illegal drug issue tended to drive coverage in other media, and Golan (2006) concluded that the *Times* influenced the international news agenda of three leading American evening newscasts. Shaw and Sparrow (1999) found that during the 1992 presidential campaign, “inner-ring” newspapers—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*—influenced “outer-ring” coverage of the campaign and the economy.

Although journalists often look to one another for guidance, their decisions still tend to be remarkably similar even when they act independently. This similarity can be attributed to journalists’ shared professional norms and values. Dearing and Rogers (1996) noted that journalists tend to agree about the news value of a particular issue because many of them took similar college courses, read similar journalism textbooks, and have followed similar career trajectories.

The end result of journalists' shared norms and values, and their monitoring of the work of their peers, is a uniformity of news content across media outlets that has been variously termed standardization (Breed, 1955), consonance (Noelle-Neumann & Mathes, 1987), congruence (Shaw & Sparrow 1999), and homogeneity (Lee, 2007). Because of this high degree of uniformity, agenda-setting researchers often merge the agendas of various news outlets to create a composite media agenda (McCombs, 2004).

#### *Intermedia Agenda Setting and the Internet*

The uniformity of agendas across print and broadcast news outlets is well-documented in the mass communication literature, but the rapid proliferation of Internet news sources has suggested that it may be time to revisit the thesis. Given the growing diversity and specialized nature of information sources available to the public, does it still make sense to speak of a uniform news agenda, or does each news outlet have its own individual agenda?

Mass communication scholars have pondered the implications of a world in which media are more specialized and fragmented, targeting niche audiences rather than the general populace. Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argued that mass media effects may be more difficult to produce or measure as message receivers exercise greater choice and have a greater variety of options. Other scholars (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Sunstein, 2001; Tewksbury, 2005) have expressed concerns about the consequences for democratic self-governance. Because the Internet allows people to seek out news sources that align with their own narrow interests and filter out the rest, society could fragment into groups of people who know a lot about specialized topics but possess very little general knowledge (Tewksbury, 2005). As a result, it is argued, people

eventually might have trouble communicating with one another (Sunstein, 2001) or taking collective action (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001) because they no longer bond around a core set of issues.

So far, these fears have been allayed by the fact that the dominant sources of online news are the Websites of established media such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and CNN (Horrigan, 2006). In fact, online media may be even more concentrated than their print and broadcast counterparts. Hindman's (2009) analysis of online traffic data showed, for example, that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both have an online market share that is roughly 2.5 times their share of the print newspaper market, suggesting that these newspapers are even more dominant online than in print. Hindman concluded:

In a world where thousands of news sources are only a few clicks away, many assumed that organizations like CNN or the *New York Times* would become less important. For those concerned that the Internet will destroy general-interest intermediaries, the continuing strength of large, national, name-brand news outlets is welcome. (2009, p. 101)

Furthermore, much of the content on the major news organizations' sites is "shovelware," produced by print, broadcast, and wire-service reporters, then uploaded to the Web with little or no modification (McCombs, 2004, p. 148). As a result, Internet news sites' agendas have tended to be more homogenous than fragmented, deviating little from the agendas of the traditional print and broadcast media.

Yu and Aikat (2005) found strong similarity in the issue agendas among the online sites of two major newspapers (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*), two broadcast outlets (CNN and MSNBC), and two Internet portals (Yahoo News and

Google News). All of the bivariate correlations were statistically significant, with a median value of +.766 (Yu & Aikat, 2005).

Blogs, however, were not included in Yu and Aikat's content analysis of online news sites. Unlike the Websites of major media organizations, the blogosphere represents a different ecosystem, one that is not as closely tied to journalistic conventions.

If all blogs were maintained by mainstream news organizations and guided by journalistic norms and values, their agendas could be expected to correlate strongly with the agenda of the established media. But blogs represent a hybrid media form, combining not only elements of participatory journalism (Lasica, 2003) but also elements of other communication genres, such as the personal diary (Herring, Scheidt, Wright & Bonus, 2005). While some bloggers subscribe to the norms of traditional journalism (Fiedler, 2008), others practice a form of journalism not tied to the profession's traditions and values (Lasica, 2003), and nearly two-thirds do not consider their blog to be journalism at all (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

Journalists and bloggers are both motivated by a desire to tell the truth, but not necessarily in the same manner. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) declared that the essence of journalism is a discipline of verification (p. 71), and the Society of Professional Journalists' ethics code implores reporters to "test the accuracy of information from all sources" (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). Bloggers' approach to truth-telling is more akin to the "marketplace of ideas" described by John Milton: Ideas are given a public airing before they have been fully verified in the hope that truth will emerge from the discussion that follows (Singer, 2003). Shirky (2003a) characterized the process as a

“publish, then filter” model rather than the traditional gatekeeping model of “filter, then publish.”

In addition to normative differences, there are functional differences between journalists and bloggers. In one of the earliest handbooks for aspiring bloggers, Blood (2002) outlined several differences between what bloggers do and what journalists do. Unlike journalists, most bloggers engage in little direct reporting, employ no fact checkers, and answer to themselves, not to an editor or publisher. Blood concluded: “What weblogs do is impossible for traditional journalism to reproduce, and what journalism does is impractical to do with a weblog” (2002, p. 19).

Blood’s observations, however, may be more applicable to personal journal-style blogs than to the A-list blogs that receive thousands of “hits” every day. The line between journalism and blogging has blurred now that many A-list bloggers have, in fact, adopted gatekeeping practices similar to those of mainstream news organizations (Haas, 2005). Visitors to the Huffington Post, for example, are greeted by a homepage featuring a dominant news story and headline, as well as section headings such as entertainment, sports, business, and living that mimic those of a print newspaper. Uglund and Henderson (2007) characterized such high-profile bloggers as “second-level” journalists—those who gather news in a regular, deliberate fashion, even if they are not necessarily committed to all of the norms that have traditionally shaped journalism (p. 253).

In recent years, political bloggers have been accorded many of the same privileges and honors that traditional journalists typically have enjoyed. For example, bloggers received official press credentials at the 2007 perjury trial of I. Lewis (“Scooter”) Libby Jr., former aide to Vice President Dick Cheney (Shane, 2007). And in

2008, journalism's prestigious George Polk Award was bestowed upon Joshua Marshall of Talking Points Memo for his blog's investigative reporting on the firing of eight U.S. attorneys, the first time an Internet-only news organization had received the award (Cohen, 2008).

Not only do A-list political bloggers and mainstream journalists now enjoy some of the same credentials and honors, but many of them share similar professional backgrounds. Hindman (2009) surveyed 75 leading political bloggers and found that 21% had been either professional journalists or regular writers for a newspaper or magazine. Overall, approximately two-fifths of respondents said they had "close familiarity with traditional reporting, periodical publishing, or opinion journalism" (p. 122). It is hardly surprising that a large number of A-list political bloggers have ties to journalism since maintaining a high-profile political blog requires many of the same skills that journalists must possess: news judgment, knowledge of current events, and the ability to write under pressure. As Hindman explained: "It is not an accident that there are no factory workers or janitors in the upper ranks of the blogosphere" (p. 123).

These similarities between A-list political bloggers and mainstream journalists could be expected to produce uniformity in the agendas of both media. Emerging research on blogs and agenda setting has provided empirical support for this thesis. Lee's (2007) content analysis of posts on eight political blogs and news stories in four mainstream news outlets between Labor Day and Election Day during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign and found that the issue agenda was quite stable across the various media, with most correlations exceeding +.80. Metzgar (2007) used a blog search engine to compare the number of blog posts mentioning the issue of immigration with the

number of immigration-related stories appearing in major newspapers and on the television networks' evening newscasts during a 179-day span. She found significant, though relatively weak, correlations of +.293 between blogs and newspapers, and +.453 between blogs and television news. Meraz (2009) compared the framing of three issues in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* with the framing of the same issues in 18 political blogs across the partisan spectrum. The attribute agendas of the liberal and moderate blogs, although not those of the conservative blogs, were strongly correlated with the media's attribute agendas.

Showing that significant positive correlations exist between the agendas of political blogs and the mainstream media is a necessary step toward understanding how agenda setting operates in today's media environment. By themselves, however, these correlations do not demonstrate that one agenda determines or influences the other, nor do they help us understand *how* such agenda setting might work. As McCombs (2005) observed, "Blogs are part of the journalism landscape, but who sets whose agenda under what circumstances remains an open question" (p. 549).

In an attempt to address the question of directionality, Wallsten (2007) tracked daily *New York Times* coverage and blog discussion of 35 issues during the 2004 presidential election campaign. Using time-series analysis, he concluded that the agenda-setting relationship is "a high-speed, two-way street rather than a slow-moving, one-way road leading from media coverage to blog discussion or vice versa" (p. 567). For some issues, news coverage preceded blog discussion by one or more days; for others, bloggers appeared to take the lead. For still other issues, no correlation was found.

Wallsten's description of agenda setting as a "two-way street" is a powerful insight, yet his study appears to conflate events and issues. Many of the 35 issues examined, such as "Mary Cheney," "missing explosives," and "Abu Ghraib," might more accurately be termed events. Rogers and Dearing (1988) defined events as "discrete happenings that are limited by space and time," and issues as "involving cumulative news coverage of a series of related events that fit together in a broad category" (p. 566). Rather than focusing on whether bloggers write about a particular event a day or two before or after print journalists (which might be partly a function of different publication schedules and writing habits), agenda setting, as it has traditionally been conceptualized, seems more focused on broader issues and more sustained effects. Furthermore, while it is useful to track issues individually, it may be more instructive to examine the rank-ordering of a set of issues, as the original Chapel Hill agenda-setting study did and as this study does. How does the *relative* importance attached to a series of issues (or attributes) in one medium affect the *relative* importance in the other?

Many of the agenda-setting studies to focus on blogging, and much intermedia agenda-setting research generally, have been an exercise in what Kosicki (1993) termed "agenda matching," not agenda setting per se (p. 106). The central finding that different media have highly correlated issue or attribute agendas has been replicated in numerous contexts, but the studies have added few new theoretical insights to explain this finding.

Kosicki said agenda-setting researchers

... have amassed a large body of empirical generalizations, but they have had trouble developing the ties to clear theories of society, news work and human psychology that would allow the perspective to become truly useful as a theory accounting for issue evolution in society. (p. 100)

Strong correlations between the news media and blog agendas might indicate an agenda-setting effect, or they may be the result of outside forces acting upon both journalists and bloggers. To understand how issue and attribute agendas are transferred between the mainstream news media and political blogs, we must begin by directing our attention to the ways in which journalists and bloggers rely upon one another to satisfy their informational needs. For example, it makes little sense to argue that political bloggers set the news agenda if journalists are not reading political blogs on a regular basis. Conversely, it is unreasonable to suggest that journalists set the agenda for political blogs if political bloggers are paying little attention to the mainstream news media. The next chapter examines the concepts of media exposure and need for orientation to fill in some of the gaps in intermedia agenda-setting scholarship.

## CHAPTER 3

### Media Exposure and Need for Orientation

This chapter theorizes about the transfer of issue and attribute salience between A-list political bloggers and mainstream print journalists, posing several hypotheses and research questions. Connecting the sociology of news work and the psychology of agenda setting, the chapter focuses on two contingent conditions typically associated with public opinion agenda-setting research: media exposure and need for orientation. Contingent conditions identify those situations in which agenda-setting effects are enhanced or diminished. Media exposure and need for orientation are the only contingent conditions for which there is unambiguous evidence (Winter, 1981). This chapter adapts these two concepts, which scholars have used to explain the public's susceptibility to agenda setting, to intermedia agenda setting to shed theoretical light on the relationship between political blogging and mainstream journalism.

#### *Media Exposure*

The importance of media exposure as a variable in agenda-setting research rests on the simple logic that individuals will not be influenced by media messages they have neither seen nor heard. In order to argue that issue or attribute agendas transfer from the news media to the public, agenda-setting theorists must be prepared to show that the public is attending to the news media. Otherwise, any correlations between the two agendas may be spurious.

Many early studies of agenda setting, including the original Chapel Hill study, treated media exposure as a given. McCombs and Shaw acknowledged that their

investigation of agenda setting during the 1968 presidential campaign did not directly establish that mass media coverage was the cause of shifts in the public's issue agenda, but they maintained that no other explanation made sense:

Any argument that the correlations between media and voter emphasis are spurious ... assumes that voters have alternative means of observing the day-to-day changes in the political arena. This assumption is not plausible; since few directly participate in presidential election campaigns, and fewer still see presidential candidates in person, the information flowing in interpersonal communication channels is primarily relayed from, and based upon, mass media news coverage. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 185)

Of course, McCombs and Shaw's research was conducted at a time when the daily newspaper, the three major television networks' evening newscasts, and the weekly news magazines were the public's only major sources of political information. As other communication channels, including cable television and the Internet, have emerged, media exposure has demanded closer scrutiny. Winter (1981) urged agenda-setting scholars to incorporate into their research media exposure measures that answer not only how much a person reads or watches but also what specific media sources they attend to.

Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) considered the role of media exposure in their "attentiveness hypothesis," positing that agenda setting is a form of social learning in which individuals who are exposed to and attend to news media coverage learn the relative importance accorded by the media to political issues (p. 805). Results of a survey of Austin, Texas, residents confirmed that the more attention an individual paid to the news media, the more likely he or she was to conform to the news media's issue agenda. A combined measure of media exposure and attention was a stronger predictor of conformity to the media agenda than either personal experience or interpersonal experience (Lasorsa & Wanta, 1990). In a path analysis of the agenda-setting process,

Wanta and Hu (1996) demonstrated that individuals who find the news media to be highly credible tend to rely on the media for information, increase their exposure to media messages, and thus become more susceptible to agenda-setting effects.

Media exposure has received considerably less attention in studies of intermedia agenda setting. Such studies typically employ content analysis to draw conclusions about the transfer of salience between two or more media, without any direct evidence that members of one medium are, in fact, attending to the messages of the other. For example, Ku et al. (2003) compared the Websites of presidential candidates George Bush and Al Gore in 2000 with newspaper and television news content. Using time-lagged correlations, the authors concluded that both candidates' sites had influenced the agendas of the mainstream news media. However, the researchers never surveyed the newspaper or television journalists to determine whether they had visited either candidate's site. Thus, one cannot necessarily assume a causal link. Meraz (2009) identified similarities in the attribute agendas among 18 political blogs and two major newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, but never established that those 18 blogs were read with any frequency by the *Times* and *Post* journalists, nor that the *Times* and *Post* were read by the authors of the 18 blogs.

Any large-scale investigation of intermedia agenda setting between the mainstream news media and political blogs ought to address the question of exposure. Surveys have offered tentative insights into journalists' exposure to blogs, finding that blogs are indeed being read and discussed in U.S. newsrooms. In a study by Sweetser, Porter, Chung and Kim (2008), journalists reported using blogs occasionally, whereas public relations practitioners said they only rarely used blogs. Journalists were more

likely to use blogs for interactive communication, whereas public relations workers were more likely to use them for research purposes. Lowrey and Mackay (2008) surveyed newspaper editors and found that 60% said blog postings had been discussed in news meetings, and 17% said blogs were discussed in meetings at least once a week.

No known studies have examined the demographic breakdown of journalists who read blogs, although surveys of blog readers in general have shown that they tend to be young, highly educated males (Kaye, 2005; Rainie, 2005). As part of a larger effort to understand how political reporters use blogs, the first research question posed by this study considers the relationship, if any, between several demographic variables and exposure to political blogs among print reporters who covered the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign:

**RQ1:** To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to age, gender, and/or education?

In addition to the demographic variables of age, gender, and education, reporters' work environment and occupational characteristics might affect their exposure to political blogs. The next set of research questions asks whether journalists' exposure to political blogs is linked to the frequency with which they write about politics in general and the frequency with which they wrote about the 2008 presidential campaign in particular:

**RQ2:** To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government?

**RQ3:** To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign?

Additionally, several other occupational variables are considered as possible predictors of campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs:

**RQ4:** To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service), location (inside or outside Washington, D.C.), years of journalism experience, and/or whether the reporter contributes to a blog on his or her news organization's Website?

Besides measuring campaign reporters' overall levels of exposure to political blogs, and identifying any demographic and occupational variables that might affect these levels, it is useful to know which particular blogs reporters read most frequently. Content analysis can then compare the agendas of those blogs that are most widely read by political journalists with the agendas of the news sources that are most widely cited by bloggers, allowing for a stronger agenda-setting argument to be made.

Farrell and Drezner (2008) surveyed 140 editors, reporters, columnists, and publishers from various news outlets in late 2003 and early 2004, asking them to name up to three blogs they read frequently. Collectively, the respondents cited more than 125 blogs, with Andrew Sullivan's Daily Dish, Glenn Reynolds' Instapundit, and Mickey Kaus' Kausfiles leading the list. The blogosphere is a constantly changing environment, however, and the most popular blogs of 2003 and 2004 may not be as popular several years later. With the emergence in recent years of political blog powerhouses such as Daily Kos and The Huffington Post, it is worth revisiting the question of which political

blogs are read most often by journalists, specifically those reporters who covered the 2008 presidential campaign:

**RQ5:** Which political blogs do campaign reporters read most frequently?

One of the most consistent findings in blog research is that political bloggers are highly opinionated, and their partisan orientation is reflected in their writing (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Wall, 2005; Woodly, 2008). The political blogosphere is divided into distinct liberal and conservative spheres, with relatively few blogs in the middle (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006). Further evidence of partisan polarity is found in blogs' hyperlinking patterns: Conservative bloggers generally provide links to other conservative blogs, and liberal to liberal, although both camps link to neutral news sources as well (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Hargittai, Gallo & Kane, 2008; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun & Jeong, 2007).

Because most political bloggers write from a strong point of view, rather than trying to offer a balanced perspective, no one political blog will provide a full picture of the national political scene. Journalists who wish to take the political pulse of the blogosphere may find it helpful to rely upon a combination of blogs. Reporters' choice of blogs might vary according to their different beats and informational needs. In a campaign context, for example, reporters who primarily write about Democratic candidates might tend to read a different set of blogs than reporters who primarily cover the Republicans:

**RQ6:** To what extent do campaign reporters who primarily write about Democratic candidates tend to read different political blogs than those who primarily write about Republican candidates?

While surveys can help us measure journalists' exposure to political blogs, it is equally important to measure bloggers' exposure to mainstream news sources. Surveying political bloggers about their media use habits poses several challenges, however.

Although some researchers have surveyed political bloggers (e.g., Hindman, 2009; McKenna & Pole, 2008), constructing a sample is difficult because there is no master list of all political bloggers, and any such list would have to be updated continually to keep pace with constant changes in the blogosphere. Furthermore, many bloggers refrain from using their full names or posting their e-mail addresses for fear of being bombarded with "spam" e-mail, making it difficult for survey researchers to contact them.

Rather than having to survey political bloggers, researchers can obtain a general measure of their news media exposure by identifying which news sources they link to within their posts. Woodly (2008) explained that hyperlinks serve as an "at-your-fingertips citation system" that allows readers to access for themselves the materials a blogger consulted in writing a post (p. 115). One study of political blogs found that almost every post contained at least one hyperlink, and more than a third contained two or more (Reese et al., 2007). Nearly half of those references were to the professional news media, compared with about a third that led to other blogs (Reese et al., 2007). *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have been identified as the news outlets that receive the most links in the political blogosphere (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006).

The *Times* and the *Post* are likely to be widely cited by political bloggers during a presidential campaign, but a hyperlink analysis might reveal that political bloggers also

rely upon other mainstream news sources during the early weeks of the campaign season, such as broadcast outlets or regional news media.

**RQ7:** Which mainstream news media received the most hyperlinks in the top political blogs' posts during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?

*Need for Orientation: Relevance and Uncertainty*

If media exposure is a condition that helps make agenda setting possible, need for orientation is a psychological concept that explains why agenda setting occurs. The greater an individual's need for orientation toward public affairs, the more likely he or she is to attend to the mass media agenda (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980). This study investigates the link between campaign journalists' need for orientation and their use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs during the reporting process. Need for orientation is conceptualized in two ways: first, as a function of the lower-order concepts of uncertainty and relevance (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980); and second, as a three-dimensional construct measured with separate scales: need for orientation toward issues, toward frames, and toward evaluations (Matthes, 2005, 2008).

The concept of need for orientation is grounded in the notion that individuals have an innate curiosity about the world and a need to familiarize themselves with their physical surroundings and cognitive environment (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980). Shoemaker (1996) posited that humans may, in fact, be biologically "hardwired" for surveillance of the world around them. Need for orientation draws upon cognitive utilitarian behavioral theories, such as Tolman's theory of purposive behavior (Tolman

1932, 1948), that view the individual as a problem solver who regards any challenge in life as an opportunity to acquire new information and coping skills (McGuire, 1974).

Tolman (1948) developed the concept of cognitive mapping by conducting experiments in which rats had to navigate a series of mazes. Tolman rejected the argument of “stimulus-response” animal psychologists that as rats move through a maze, they are helplessly responding to the bombardment of internal and external stimuli. Instead, Tolman maintained that the animals’ central nervous systems are far more sophisticated and are highly selective about which stimuli to let in. The stimuli are elaborated and worked over to create a cognitive-like map of the environment, which determines the rat’s responses (Tolman, 1948).

Just as rats form cognitive maps to make their way through a maze, humans try to “map” the world, seeking out orienting cues when confronted with unfamiliar situations so they may intellectually maneuver their way through life. As Lippmann put it: “To traverse the world, men must have maps of the world” (1922, p. 11).

Jones and Gerard (1967) observed that an individual’s motivation to seek orienting information depends on three factors: the degree of uncertainty about the topic at hand; the importance, or relevance, of the information for decision-making; and the likelihood that a reliable source of information is available. Because the pervasiveness of the mass media means that a reliable source of information is generally available for most major news topics, agenda-setting scholars have concentrated on the first two factors. Need for orientation thus has been said to consist of the two lower-order concepts of relevance and uncertainty (McCombs & Waver, 1973; Weaver, 1980).

Relevance is the initial defining condition of need for orientation. If a topic of news coverage has little relevance to the individual, his or her need for orientation is low (McCombs, 2004; Weaver, 1980). If, on the other hand, the topic is seen as highly relevant, then the level of uncertainty enters into the equation. Downs (1957) defined uncertainty as “any lack of sure knowledge about the course of past, present, future, or hypothetical events” (p. 77). For individuals who consider a topic relevant but already have all the information they desire (low uncertainty), the need for orientation is moderate. When both relevance and uncertainty are high, the need for orientation is high. Thus, low relevance is equated with a low need for orientation; high relevance and low uncertainty, a moderate need for orientation; and high relevance and high uncertainty, a high need for orientation (McCombs, 2004).

Need for orientation was explicated by McCombs and Weaver (1973) in a study comparing surveys of residents in Durham and Charlotte, N.C., with a content analysis of newspaper and television news content. The researchers reported that individuals with higher levels of need for orientation used the mass media more frequently for political information and had issue agendas that more strongly correlated with the news media agenda. In a later study, Weaver (1980) found need for orientation to be a better predictor of media-exposure and media-effects relationships than individual political gratifications such as surveillance.

In both studies, the indicators of relevance were largely measures of political interest, while the indicators of uncertainty were largely measures of the strength or weakness of political party identification and voting intention. Survey respondents with a strong interest in politics but an inconsistent voting record were considered to have high

levels of both relevance and uncertainty and thus a high susceptibility to agenda-setting effects.

As with the contingent condition of media exposure, need for orientation has frequently been mentioned in studies that examine the transfer of salience from the news media to the public. But no known studies have attempted to apply the concept to intermedia agenda setting, where the focus is on the transfer of salience among journalists or others who engage in mass communication. The only known explicit reference to journalists having a need for orientation comes from Matsaganis and Payne (2005), who wrote about media behavior in times of crisis: “The media, as a key actor in the agenda-setting process, is not immune to ambiguity, threat, and problematic environs. The need for orientation for journalists becomes greater under these conditions as well” (p. 385). The authors, however, made no attempt to measure the concept or subject it to testing.

Need for orientation would appear to be a good theoretical fit for explaining intermedia agenda setting between political blogs and the mainstream news media because, like the public, journalists and bloggers grapple with uncertainty. They, too, must develop cognitive maps as they decide what to write about and how to frame their news stories or blog posts. Ethicist Clifford Christians (2007), although himself a critic of utilitarianism, acknowledged that utilitarian rationalism has been the prevailing paradigm in communications for more than a century, and the utilitarian goal of maximizing beneficial consequences is reflected in everything from media policies to journalism textbooks. Therefore, utilitarian theories of human behavior would seem well-suited to understanding the journalistic mind and the psychology behind intermedia agenda setting.

The concept of journalistic uncertainty appears in various guises in the mass communication literature (e.g., Dimmick, 1974; Gans, 1979; Patterson, 1993; Sigal, 1973; Sparrow, 1999), although usually in qualitative studies of the sociology of news work, not in quantitative studies that have operationalized and measured the concept. Sigal (1973) was one of the first scholars to emphasize the uncertainty of news production when he observed that journalists rely on routines to cope with a world where even supposedly factual information is subject to multiple interpretations. Dimmick (1974) examined uncertainty in the gatekeeping process as editors turn to sources such as the Associated Press wire budget or the front page of *The New York Times* to mitigate their uncertainty about which stories to publish. Gans (1979) focused on journalists' uncertainty about their audiences, observing that reporters tend to write for themselves or their superiors, hoping that whatever interests them will also excite readers or viewers.

Journalistic uncertainty is particularly acute in the reporting of national politics. Political reporting involves a high level of complexity and confusion, yet nowhere is the need for clarity and insight more critical. As Sparrow (1999) observed in his book *Uncertain Guardians: The News Media as a Political Institution*:

Although any individual person, organization, or industrial sector may be viewed through the perspective of uncertainty, the uncertainty of reporting on national politics and government is especially significant. No other single industry similarly provides the texts and visual images from which other political actors and the public at large routinely learn about their elected representatives, public policy, government agencies, the national economy, and their fellow citizens. (pp. 13-14)

Patterson (1993) attributed the uncertainty of national political reporters to the fact that they have been asked to go beyond their traditional watchdog role and take on duties once reserved for the political parties: scrutinizing presidential candidates'

platforms, judging their fitness for office, and assessing their electability. In Patterson's view, the press has become a "miscast institution," leaving political journalists fraught with uncertainty and ill-equipped to handle their new demands: "The campaign is chaotic largely because the press is not a political institution and has no capacity for organizing the election in a coherent manner" (p. 28).

Utilitarian theories of human behavior would predict that political reporters, when confronted with uncertainty about how to cover campaigns, seek orienting information to help them form cognitive maps. Orienting information could come from a variety of sources. Journalists could conduct person-on-the-street interviews, hold focus group sessions, or commission opinion polls to better understand what kind of political journalism the public desires. They could schedule in-depth interviews with experts to fill any gaps in their own knowledge of political affairs. These methods, however, require a considerable expenditure of money or effort at a time when news organizations are trying to reduce newsgathering costs and remain financially viable.

In his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Downs (1957) noted that all information has a cost attached to it, even if that cost is not necessarily measured in dollars. Rational citizens are under pressure to keep the cost of obtaining information to a minimum. Gandy (1982) applied this economic logic to journalism, observing that the cheaper and more accessible information is to journalists, the more valuable it is to them. People who control information and want to increase its consumption may accomplish this aim by reducing its price, giving journalists an "information subsidy." As Gandy explained, "Information is characterized as a subsidy because the source of that

information causes it to be made available at something less than the cost a user would face in the absence of the subsidy” (p. 61).

The concept of information subsidies has been used to explain journalists’ reliance on press releases (e.g., Turk, 1986), which are defined as “textual or video information that is distributed primarily to members of the news media to be used as a basis for news stories” (Wicks & Souley, 2003, p. 129). Press releases allow public relations practitioners to subsidize news-gathering efforts by supplying journalists with information in a format that resembles that of news stories (McCombs, 2004). The information is provided free of charge, reducing journalists’ economic burden of researching and writing a news story from scratch. An examination of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* over a 20-year period found that 17.5 percent of all news stories were based at least partly on press releases (Sigal, 1973). Political actors such as state public information officers (Turk, 1986) and gubernatorial candidates (Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu & Seltzer, 2006) have succeeded in using press releases as a vehicle to obtain news coverage.

But information subsidies can take other forms besides press releases. Wigley and Fontenot (2009) found that reporters who covered the 2007 fatal shootings at Virginia Tech University frequently relied on new-technology sources, including Websites, blogs, and cell phone videos, as a form of information subsidy. Blogs, in particular, serve as a source of free information and analysis that can easily be accessed by any reporter with access to the Internet. Rosenberg (2002) explained:

Time-strapped reporters and editors in downsized, resource-hungry newsrooms are increasingly turning to blogs for story tips and pointers. No one has enough time to read everything on the Web; blogs offer a smart

reader the chance to piggyback on someone else's reading time. Good journalists would be fools not to feed off blogs. (para. 11)

Certainly, not all blogs contain information that is useful to all journalists. However, political reporters can use the top handful of political blogs as a "summary statistic" to minimize their search costs and get a quick read on the state of political opinion (Farrell & Drezner, 2008, p. 22). A-list political bloggers may serve as "wisebot scouts," alerting journalists to newsworthy items on the Web (Perlmutter, 2008, p. 111).

The literature on uncertainty and information subsidies thus leads to the hypothesis that campaign reporters with high levels of uncertainty would be more inclined to use political blogs as a subsidy to satisfy their informational needs than would journalists with low levels of uncertainty. In order to formally state this hypothesis, journalistic uncertainty must be operationalized.

Studies of agenda setting and public opinion have not asked citizens to rate their level of uncertainty directly. Rather, individuals' uncertainty has been measured by examining their voting records and the strength of their party identification (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver 1980). Strong party identification and a consistent voting record are taken to be indicators of a low level of uncertainty.

Voting and political party records are of little value in measuring journalistic uncertainty. Instead, a reporter's number of years of experience in journalism can serve as a reasonable indicator of his or her level of uncertainty. Reporters who are relatively new to journalism would have a greater need to familiarize themselves with their beats, their sources, and the topics that matter to their audiences. Veteran reporters, on the other hand, could be assumed to have acquired substantial institutional knowledge after years

of navigating the journalism “maze” and to have developed more elaborate cognitive maps. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Campaign reporters with low levels of journalism experience are more likely than campaign reporters with high levels of journalism experience to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs.

Uncertainty, however, represents only half of the need-for-orientation equation; relevance also must be taken into account. In studies of the public’s susceptibility to agenda setting, relevance has been measured using indicators of an individual’s personal interest in politics (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver 1980). Yet in studies of intermedia agenda setting, where the focus is on journalistic output rather than on public opinion, it is the reporter’s professional interest, not personal interest, that is of concern.

Coverage of a presidential campaign could be said to be more relevant to reporters who are part of the Washington, D.C., press corps than to reporters stationed outside the nation’s capital. Unlike members the Washington press corps, for whom presidential politics is a constant obsession, journalists from local and regional news outlets around the country cover presidential campaigns less frequently and from a distance (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Crouse, 1973). A presidential campaign could be considered highly relevant to a Washington-based journalist who is likely to continue writing about the political implications and the new administration once the election is over. For a journalist outside the Beltway, a presidential campaign might be regarded as just another assignment. After the election, that reporter may return to covering state or local affairs. These non-Washington-based reporters would have less of a professional stake in the political campaign. Thus, it is hypothesized that campaign reporters based in

Washington, D.C., with high levels of relevance, would be more likely to say they use political blogs to satisfy their informational needs than reporters based outside

Washington, D.C.:

**H2:** Campaign reporters based in Washington, D.C., are more likely to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs than are campaign reporters based outside Washington, D.C.

In addition to the hypotheses about the effects of uncertainty and relevance, several research questions explore the relationships, if any, between other occupational and demographic variables and campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs:

**RQ8:** To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service) and/or whether they contribute to a blog on their news organizations' Websites?

**RQ9:** To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to age, gender, and/or education?

**RQ10:** To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government?

**RQ11:** To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign?

*Need for Orientation Toward Issues, Frames, and Evaluations*

Although need for orientation typically has been thought of in terms of the two lower-order components of relevance and uncertainty, Matthes (2005, 2008) proposed new ways to operationalize and measure the classic concept. In a critique of previous research, he recommended that ordinal measures of high, medium, or low need for orientation be abandoned in favor of scales that enable more precise measurement. Matthes also divided need for orientation into three separate dimensions, each corresponding with a different form of agenda setting.

According to Matthes' model, the first dimension of need of orientation represents the individual's need for surveillance of issues or people ("objects," in agenda-setting parlance). In short, people have a need to watch how relevant topics emerge in the media. Matthes referred to this dimension as orientation toward issues. The second dimension, corresponding with cognitive attribute agenda setting, is need for orientation regarding the way in which an issue is framed. Although Matthes referred to this dimension as orientation toward facts, that label seems to be a bit of a misnomer because the focus is actually on interpretation rather than facts per se. As Matthes (2005) noted: "This dimension concerns the selection of facts or background information pertaining to a topic that has already been selected. It is therefore the way in which an issue is contextualized or framed" (p. 428). The third dimension, corresponding with affective attribute agenda setting, is orientation toward journalistic evaluations that tell an individual what to think about an issue or what to do in a particular situation.

Matthes (2005, 2008) developed separate three-item scales to measure each of the three dimensions: orientation toward issues ("I want to be instantly informed about recent

developments,” “It is important for me to observe this issue constantly,” and “I would like to hear something about the issue every day.”); orientation toward frames or attributes (“I want to know many different sides about that topic,” “I would like to be thoroughly informed about specific details,” and “For this topic, I expect detailed background information.”); and orientation toward journalistic evaluations (“I attach great importance to commentaries on this topic,” “It is interesting to see how several journalists comment on that issue,” and “Whenever appropriate, journalists should state their opinions.”). Reliability of the measures and construct validity of the three dimensions were confirmed through a series of pilot studies.

Matthes’ scales were designed to measure the need for orientation of members of the public, but in this study they are used to measure journalists’ need for orientation. Earlier, it was hypothesized that campaign reporters with a high need for orientation (high uncertainty and high relevance) would rely more heavily on political blogs to satisfy their informational needs than would campaign reporters with a low need for orientation. Matthes’ conceptualization of need for orientation, however, compels us to consider whether political reporters rely on political blogs to orient themselves primarily toward candidates and issues, toward the ways in which the candidates and issues are framed, or toward the ways in which the candidates and issues are being evaluated by bloggers and others. The answer might well be some combination of the three, but it is hypothesized that the second and third dimensions—orientation toward frames and orientation toward evaluations—would be stronger predictors of reporters’ reliance on blogs, given the nature of campaign reporting and the characteristics of political blogs.

Arguably, reporters' need for orientation toward issues or candidates already is satisfied to a large extent by the myriad sources of campaign information available to them. Press releases, stump speeches, and campaign Websites give journalists a sense of which candidates and issues are most worthy of their attention. The reporter's challenge, then, is to make sense of this information and place it within a larger interpretive framework.

In an era of increased media choice and competition, journalists are pressured to add value to their coverage by offering analysis and perspective (Stephens, 2005; Weaver et al., 2007). The past three decades have seen a shift in American journalism from the reporter as simply a narrator of events to the reporter as an interpreter of events (Barnhurst & Mutz, 2007; Bimber & Davis, 2003). Nowhere is this shift more evident than in the reporting of presidential campaigns. After critics complained that press coverage of the 1988 presidential race between George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis was too superficial and negative, journalists were encouraged to assume a more active role in the political process, one that emphasizes social responsibility over blind adherence to the tenets of objectivity (Lichter & Smith, 1996). In this new style of campaign reporting, facts often take a back seat to theme:

The interpretive style of reporting that has come to dominate election coverage is a version of truth-telling. It requires the journalist to give shape to things that cannot be seen and to understand things that are not easily grasped. The older, descriptive model of reporting was more modest in its aims. The journalist sought to tell the reader or listener what had happened; the larger meaning was left to the audience to determine. (Patterson, 1993, p. 180)

This new reporting style has been an uneasy fit for the campaign press corps, which is more accustomed to gathering surface facts than to providing deeper analysis (Patterson, 1993).

Political bloggers, on the other hand, thrive on offering analysis. Most bloggers do not engage in firsthand reporting (Blood, 2002; Scott, 2007). Their strengths lie in their specialized knowledge (Farrell & Drezner, 2008) and their ability to contextualize information (Blood, 2002). Stephens (2005) wrote that bloggers “live in a world of highly distilled interpretation” (p. 62), espousing a postmodern view of truth as constantly evolving and multiperspectival. In other words, bloggers are less focused on fact finding and news gathering than on interpreting and analyzing the issues and newsmakers.

For news reporters who are struggling to make their facts cohere into a larger narrative, political blogs are a logical source to consult. According to Farrell and Drezner (2008), “Just as the media can provide a collective interpretive frame for politicians, blogs can create a menu of interpretive frames for the media to appropriate” (p. 22). Therefore, while campaign reporters could turn to political blogs to satisfy any of the three dimensions of need for orientation, the orientations toward frames and toward evaluations (corresponding with the second level of agenda setting) are hypothesized to be stronger predictors of journalists’ use of political blogs than orientation toward issues (corresponding with object, or first-level, agenda setting):

**H3:** Need for orientation toward frames and need for orientation toward evaluations are stronger predictors of campaign reporters’ use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs than is need for orientation toward issues.

With an understanding of how journalists and political bloggers rely upon each other for information, and with knowledge of their exposure to each other's work, attention next turns to the issue and attribute content of news reports and political blogs during political campaigns—specifically, the 2008 U.S. presidential race.

## CHAPTER 4

### Presidential Campaigns and Intermedia Agenda Setting

Survey research about campaign reporters' use of political blogs, coupled with an analysis of the hyperlinks in political bloggers' posts, can lay the groundwork for making arguments about agenda-setting between the two media. Blog and news content must be analyzed, however, to capture the issue and attribute agendas and determine whether either medium appears to be setting the agenda of the other.

The 2008 U.S. presidential campaign is a logical choice for this investigation because the campaign dominated news coverage and blog discussion throughout late 2007 and all of 2008. Because it was not feasible to analyze every blog post and every news article throughout the entire campaign, parameters had to be established. The focus for this study is the content of the print news media and the A-list political blogs during the 2008 Democratic primary campaign in the month leading up to the Jan. 3, 2008, Iowa caucuses.

This chapter outlines the theoretical and practical reasons for setting these parameters. It explains that the early stages of a presidential race, and the 2008 Iowa caucuses in particular, are of great interest to agenda-setting researchers because it is during this period, before the public has formed clear impressions of the candidates and issues (Mayer & Busch, 2004; Popkin, 1994), that media can exert the most influence in defining the race (Patterson, 1993). The chapter also adds the presidential candidates' agendas to the agenda-setting model, explaining how the candidates promote their agendas and seek to influence the media through the use of press releases. Finally, several

hypotheses and research questions about intermedia agenda setting among the print news media, political blogs, and candidates are presented.

*Primary Campaigns and the Importance of Iowa*

McCombs (2004) noted that political primaries are an ideal environment for agenda-setting research because the orienting cue of party affiliation is irrelevant; all candidates belong to the same party. In this situation, journalists and bloggers, like the voting public, may feel a strong need for orientation as they try to differentiate among several similar contenders. By the time a presidential campaign reaches the general-election phase, the issues and attributes associated with each party's nominee are well-defined, and public opinion has begun to solidify. During the early stages of the primary season, however, the political environment is much more fluid, and people look to the media to provide clarity (Patterson, 1993). It is during this period that journalists have wide discretion in defining the race (Matthews, 1978) and influencing the vote (Patterson, 1993). Bloggers also play a critical role during this time, writing about preprimary events that the press ignores (Perlmutter, 2008). Therefore, if intermedia agenda occurs between the mainstream news media and the top political bloggers during a presidential campaign, evidence of it would most likely be found near the start of the primary season.

By focusing on the period before the Iowa caucuses, the first major electoral event in the U.S. presidential nominating process, this study minimizes the likelihood that the agendas of the political blogs and the news media are both being driven by public opinion, which could impair the validity of the results. Opinion polls conducted during several presidential election cycles have shown that voters learn little about the race before the primary season begins (Mayer & Busch, 2004) and are not familiar enough

with the candidates to give them even a general favorability rating until the week of the primary or caucuses in their own state (Popkin, 1994). National public opinion may not begin to take shape until the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary have concluded. Hence, it is unlikely that the issue and attribute agendas of the news media and political bloggers in the early weeks of a campaign reflect public opinion; more likely, members of the media are driving public opinion.

The weeks preceding the Iowa caucuses are of fundamental importance in the presidential race because candidates who do better than expected in the state may enjoy a burst of momentum while those who fare poorly may see their electoral chances slip away (Mayer & Busch, 2004). The “front loading” of the caucuses and primaries, in which more states are scheduling their contests near the beginning of the delegate selection season (Mayer & Busch, 2004, p. 4), forces candidates to invest considerable resources in Iowa. As one of Democrat Hillary Clinton’s campaign aides told the news site Politico.com: “Basically, the entire campaign was geared to Iowa.” Added another: “The decision was made by one and all to make Iowa *primo di primo*” (Simon, 2008, p. 13).

Clinton was the early favorite to win the 2008 Democratic nomination because of her name recognition as a former first lady and a U.S. senator from New York. Her main rivals in a crowded Democratic field were Barack Obama, a U.S. senator from Illinois; and John Edwards, a former U.S. senator from North Carolina and the party’s 2004 vice presidential nominee. Yet it was Obama who scored the first victory of the primary season by winning the Iowa caucuses and went on to become the Democratic nominee. In

November 2008, Obama defeated the Republican nominee, John McCain, to become the 44th U.S. president and the first African-American to hold the office.

The Democratic race, rather than the Republican contest, is the focus of the content analysis portion of this study for several reasons: First, the Democratic race had greater visibility in a year when national public opinion trends, such as growing disillusionment with the Iraq War and worries about the souring U.S. economy, gave that party an advantage (Pew Research Center, 2007). A study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2007b) showed that during the early weeks of the campaign, even before the first primaries and caucuses, Obama and Clinton commanded roughly the same amount of news coverage as all of the GOP candidates combined. Second, the top three Democratic candidates were evenly matched in the weeks leading up to the Iowa contest, creating a highly competitive race. *The Des Moines Register's* Iowa Poll showed that all three—Obama, Clinton, and Edwards—had been in the lead at various times since the spring, with a large gap separating them from the rest of the pack (Beaumont, 2008). In the end, Obama won the Iowa Democratic caucuses with 38% of the vote, followed by Edwards at 30% and Clinton at 29%. Finally, despite their common party affiliation, each candidate had a distinct message: Iowa exit polls showed that voters considered Obama to be the Democratic candidate who could bring about needed change, Clinton the candidate with political experience, and Edwards the candidate who “cares about people like me” (MSNBC.com, 2008). Therefore, it was believed there would be enough variance in agendas to ensure that statistical tests would yield meaningful results.

The mainstream news agenda prior to the Iowa caucuses is measured by analyzing the issue and attribute content of print news articles. The decision to focus on print rather

than broadcast media was based partly on sheer volume of coverage. Newspapers cover presidential campaigns in general, and the early weeks in particular, more extensively than does television. An examination of the media during the 1992 presidential race, for example, found that the amount of campaign coverage in a sample of four newspapers was twice as great as was the total output of local or network television news (Just et al., 1996). Print media thus allow for a larger sample of news content to be obtained.

Television news has a much tighter time frame than the print media in pursuing political campaigns. When the hot phase of the race is still weeks or months away, presidential politics may have trouble competing with more sensational stories for the networks' scarce air time (Flowers, Haynes & Crespin, 2003). Newspapers, with their greater capacity or "newshole," can begin tracking candidates and issues at an earlier stage in their life cycle (McCombs & Shaw, 1977). Consequently, print journalists tend to have an agenda-setting edge over their broadcast counterparts. Although some studies have shown no significant difference in the agenda-setting roles of newspapers and television news, those studies that have identified a difference generally show newspapers to be agenda leaders and television newscasts to be followers (McCombs, 2004).

#### *Candidates and Press Releases*

It is impossible to discuss intermedia agenda setting during a presidential contest without acknowledging the role that the candidates themselves play in shaping the campaign discourse. Cognizant of the press's heightened involvement in the primary selection process, presidential hopefuls employ a variety of strategies to capture the media limelight. The candidates' goal is not only to win their party's nomination but to

establish “interpretive dominance” in order to set the terms of the political debate for the next four years (Stuckey & Antczak, 1995, p. 118).

In the weeks before the first primaries and caucuses, financial constraints force presidential candidates to rely more on free media, in the form of press coverage, than on paid advertising (Flowers, Haynes & Crespin, 2003). During this so-called “invisible primary,” press releases are the candidates’ primary means to try to advance their agendas and influence the media (Haynes, Flowers & Gurian, 2002; Miller, Andsager & Reichert, 1998; Tedesco, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Vermeer, 1982). Candidates favor press releases because the news stories they spawn rarely specify where the information originated and therefore are less likely to be seen by the public as having come directly from the campaigns (Vermeer, 1982). Although reporters and editors recognize that many press releases are, in fact, veiled advertisements, they nonetheless rely upon them as an information subsidy (Vermeer, 1982). For example, one study of the press releases of five Republican presidential candidates in the 1996 campaign determined that 13% had generated news stories in the national press and 33% had generated stories in the state press (Flowers, Haynes & Crespin, 2003).

Press releases convey those issues and attributes that the candidates consider most salient. As Tedesco (2005a) explained, “Press releases not only provide researchers with a legitimate resource for assessing candidate issue agendas but also provide information regarding campaign strategies and appeals to target audiences” (pp. 95-96). Studies have yielded conflicting findings on whether issues or attributes dominate in press releases. Some scholars (e.g. Vermeer, 1982; Walters, Walters & Gray, 1996) have found that candidates use press releases primarily to highlight particular attributes that they hope

will form voters' images of them. However, Cho and Benoit's (2005) examination of the press releases of Democratic presidential primary contenders in 2004 concluded that the releases focused more on policy issues than on the candidates' character traits.

In earlier decades, political communication research often neglected candidate press releases because researchers had trouble acquiring an adequate sample (Walters, Walters & Gray, 1996). Now that the Internet has become central to political campaigning, the releases are much easier to collect. The 1996 U.S. presidential campaign was the first one in which candidates' press releases were readily available on their Websites (Tedesco, 2005b). By the 2008 campaign, 16 of the 19 major-party presidential candidates regularly posted press releases on their campaign Websites (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007a). In fact, press releases and news clippings were the dominant forms of information subsidies on the candidates' sites (Tedesco, 2008). Among the Democratic hopefuls, Hillary Clinton posted the most press releases (1,043), followed by John Edwards (601), Bill Richardson (441), and Barack Obama (344) (Tedesco, 2008).

As candidate Websites have become repositories for press releases, researchers have compared the content of the releases with the content of news reports. A study of the 1996 Republican presidential primary campaign determined that media coverage did not reflect the images the candidates were trying to project through their press releases (Miller, Andsager & Reichert, 1998). However, studies of subsequent elections generally have found positive correlations between the media and candidate agendas (e.g., Tedesco, 2001, 2005b). These findings echo similar research showing strong correlations between

the agendas of the news media and campaign advertising (e.g., Boyle, 2001; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

In an examination of the 2000 presidential primary campaign, Tedesco (2001) found the issue agendas of four top contenders (George Bush, John McCain, Al Gore, and Bill Bradley) were positively correlated with the television network newscasts' issue agendas. Time-lagged correlations, intended to uncover the flow of agenda-setting influence between the candidates and the television networks, revealed significant relationships in both directions, suggesting reciprocal influence. Turning to the strategy frames employed during the campaign, Tedesco found that the Republican candidates' frame agendas, but not those of the Democrats, were positively correlated with the network news frame agendas.

In a later study focusing on the 2004 presidential general-election campaign, Tedesco (2005b) found significant correlations between the issue agendas of the Republican and Democratic nominees (George Bush and John Kerry) and the issue agendas of coverage in three leading newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*). Cross-lagged correlations again yielded mixed results, suggesting that while newspapers influenced Kerry's issue agenda, they were being influenced by Bush's issue agenda.

#### *Issue and Attribute Intermedia Agenda Setting*

A content analysis of the leading print media, the top political blogs, and the main presidential candidates' press releases during the period preceding the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses can identify relationships among the various issue and attribute agendas. This study hypothesizes that agenda setting followed a different dynamic at the

first and second levels. At the first level, which is concerned with the salience of issues such as the economy or health care, it is hypothesized that the print media take the lead, focusing their attention on issues that become fodder for discussion in the blogosphere. The second level of agenda setting considers the salience of the attributes that are used to interpret the candidates and the race: For example, is it a contest about experience or about change? Here, it is hypothesized that the A-list political bloggers take the lead, providing a set of interpretive frames that journalists can draw upon to satisfy their need for orientation toward attributes. The agenda-setting role of the candidates themselves, which seems less certain, also is considered.

Consistent with previous research finding uniformity in the issue agendas of the print media and bloggers (Lee, 2007; Metzgar, 2007), and research finding uniformity in the issue agendas of the print media and candidate press releases (Tedesco, 2001, 2005b), significant positive correlations are hypothesized between the issue agenda of the print media and the issue agendas of both the top political blogs and the candidates:

**H4:** The issue agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the issue agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign.

No known studies have compared political candidates' issue agendas with bloggers' issue agendas. Such an examination will determine whether the A-list bloggers who wrote about the 2008 Democratic primary campaign were tuned in to the same issues as the candidates and assigned them the same relative priority, or whether bloggers had their own unique issue agenda:

**RQ12:** To what extent was the issue agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the issue agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?

By dividing the month prior to the Iowa caucuses into one-week increments and computing time-lagged correlations at different intervals, arguments can be made about the direction of issue agenda setting among the candidates, journalists and bloggers. In other words, does one medium appear to be leading or following the others? Although this study cannot establish causation, it can establish that some explanations are more plausible than others. (Cross-lagged correlational analysis will be addressed in Chapter 6.)

In the case of issue agenda setting, it is hypothesized that bloggers follow the lead of print journalists. Despite blogs' rising status and growing audience, even the most noteworthy political bloggers do not yet have the resources of a major news organization. Bloggers possess strong opinions, often backed by political expertise, but they need to know which issues or candidates to write about on a given day. Bloggers would be expected to scope out other sources, such as newspaper articles, to satisfy their need for orientation toward issues. The issues in mainstream news coverage would then become the inspiration for blog posts and fodder for debate in the blogosphere.

Haas (2005) maintained that "rather than influencing the coverage of mainstream news media, it appears that weblog writers not only cover the same topics, but also rely on them for information on those topics" (p. 389). Hyperlink analysis confirms political bloggers' reliance on the professional news media, particularly *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Reese et al., 2007; Tremayne et al.,

2006), as does survey research. Fully 91% of political bloggers in one survey said they inform their readers about newspaper articles as part of their blogging practices (McKenna & Pole, 2008).

Consistent with this line of research, the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H5:** Time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas are stronger leading from the print news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction.

The direction in which issue salience is transferred between the candidates and the print media seems less clear, given the mixed results of previous studies examining candidate press releases (Tedesco, 2001, 2005b), as does the direction of any issue agenda setting that might occur between the candidates and bloggers:

**RQ13:** Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction?

**RQ14:** Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction?

In addition to examining the top political blogs overall, this study considers the liberal, conservative, and neutral blog networks independently. Given the politically polarized nature of the blogosphere (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006) and the highly partisan content of most political blog posts (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Wall, 2005; Woodly, 2008), patterns of correlation might be identified by looking at the individual partisan blog networks that would not be visible in the aggregate.

**RQ15:** What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)?

Similarly, the issue agendas of the individual candidates are examined independently as well as in aggregate form. By analyzing the agendas of individual candidates, some studies (Kioussis & Shields, 2008; Tedesco, 2005a) have found evidence of intercandidate agenda setting, in which one candidate's agenda appears to be driving the agendas of other candidates in the same race.

**RQ16:** What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?

Next, several hypotheses and research questions are posed concerning second-level agenda setting. Consistent with the literature showing uniformity in the attribute agendas across various media (e.g., Meraz, 2009; Tedesco, 2001), the following hypothesis is advanced:

**H6:** The attribute agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the attribute agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign.

Previous research has not compared the attribute agendas of political candidates with the attribute agendas of political bloggers. Such a comparison will determine whether the political bloggers who chronicled the early stages of the 2008 Democratic primary campaign mimicked the "talking points" of the candidates they wrote about or whether they brought their own unique perspective to the framing of the political debate:

**RQ17:** To what extent was the attribute agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the attribute agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?

With second-level agenda setting, it is hypothesized that bloggers were the leaders and print journalists the followers during the weeks leading up to the Iowa Democratic caucuses. As discussed earlier, campaign reporters often grapple with uncertainty as they attempt to place the candidates and the issues into a larger interpretive framework. It is hypothesized that journalists, with a high level of orientation toward attributes, looked to the leading political blogs as an information subsidy to help them analyze and contextualize the 2008 presidential race:

**H7:** Time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas are stronger leading from political blogs to the print news media than leading in the reverse direction.

As with issue agenda setting, the direction of any transfer of attribute salience between the candidates and the print media seems less certain, as does the direction of any attribute agenda setting between the candidates and bloggers:

**RQ18:** Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction?

**RQ19:** Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction?

Finally, the attribute agendas of agendas of individual partisan blog networks and individual candidates are considered independently:

**RQ20:** What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)?

**RQ21:** What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?

## CHAPTER 5

### Method and Results: Survey and Hyperlink Analysis

This study used a combination of methods to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. An online survey of print reporters who covered the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign yielded data about their exposure to political blogs and their use of these blogs to satisfy informational needs. An examination of hyperlinks within blog posts identified the mainstream news sources that political bloggers consulted with the greatest frequency during the early weeks of the Democratic primary campaign. Finally, stories and posts about the campaign in the leading print news sources and political blogs, as identified by the results of the survey and hyperlink analysis, were subjected to content analysis, as were the press releases issued by the top three Democratic candidates. The content analysis made it possible to construct and compare the issue and attribute agendas of the candidates, the print reporters, and the A-list political bloggers in order to draw conclusions about intermedia agenda setting.

This chapter explains how the online survey was constructed and administered and reports the results obtained. Results of the hyperlink analysis of political blogs also are reported.

#### *Survey Methodology*

Survey research is an appropriate method for collecting a large amount of data from a large number of people who cannot be observed firsthand (Babbie, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Surveys that sample a particular population can be used to make descriptive assertions about the population or to make explanatory arguments by testing

the interaction of several variables (Babbie, 2000). Some of the main considerations in conducting survey research include ensuring that questions are clearly worded and cannot be misinterpreted, constructing an appropriate sample, and achieving an acceptable response rate.

An online survey was used in this study partly because it requires less time and expense than a traditional mail survey and partly because it was believed that it would be easier to reach campaign reporters via the World Wide Web. Because some of the reporters who covered the 2008 presidential race are based out of their news organization's Washington bureau, others work out of a state capital bureau, still others work out of the news organization's main office, and a few rotate among the various locations or work via laptop computer from home, the Internet was deemed a more reliable way of locating these journalists than a physical mailbox.

Of course, online surveys carry some disadvantages compared to traditional mail surveys. E-mail invitations to participate in online surveys may be treated as "spam," and respondents may be more worried that their privacy and security will be compromised than they otherwise would be (Manfreda et al., 2008). A meta-analysis by Manfreda et al. (2008) found that, on average, Web surveys had an 11% lower response rate than other survey modes. This, in turn, increases the risk of nonresponse bias (Shih & Fan, 2008). Also, techniques commonly used to boost response, including follow-up reminders, may be less successful with online surveys than with other types of surveys (Manfreda et al., 2008; Porter & Whitcomb, 2003; Shih & Fan, 2008).

## *Sampling*

The decision was made to construct as large a sample of print campaign reporters as practical, maximizing the potential number of survey responses. This task presented a significant challenge because the population itself is not easily defined. As the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009) noted: “There is no comprehensive registry of journalists in the nation’s capital providing a definitive database on the changing make-up of the Washington’s Fourth Estate” (p. 4). Nor does the academic literature provide much guidance. A focus on campaign reporters is rare in academic studies of presidential campaigns and their media coverage (Son & Weaver, 2003).

The sampling strategy adopted for this study was modeled after one of the few previous studies to survey campaign reporters. Son and Weaver (2003) examined campaign reporters’ perceptions of how the media covered the 2000 Bush-Gore campaign. The researchers compiled a list of campaign reporters through a database search of campaign-oriented news articles during a designated time period.

For this study, campaign-related news stories and their authors were identified for two “constructed weeks” during the 48-week period beginning December 6, 2007, one month before the Iowa caucuses, and ending on Election Day, November 4, 2008. Constructed weeks are a form of stratified sampling that allows a researcher to sample enough issues of a newspaper to make valid estimates of population parameters without sampling so many issues that time and effort are wasted (Riffe, Aust & Lacy, 1993). Constructed weeks ensure that each day of the week is equally represented. They provide better estimates than purely random samples because they avoid oversampling Saturday or Sunday newspapers, which may differ markedly from weekday editions. Riffe, Aust

and Lacy (1993) determined that one constructed week is sufficient for sampling newspaper content from a six-month period and two constructed weeks are sufficient for extrapolating to a one-year period.

A random-numbers table was used to randomly select two dates for each of the seven days of the week during the 48-week period. Database searches identified campaign-related stories and their authors for each of the 14 dates selected. In order to maximize sample size, searches were performed for all of the top 100 circulation daily U.S. newspapers, according to official Audit Bureau of Circulations statistics (BurrellesLuce, 2009), excluding the business-oriented *Investor's Daily News*; the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *Rocky Mountain News*, both of which had ended their print editions by the time the survey was conducted; and the Spanish-language newspaper *La Opinion*. Additionally, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Washington Times*, two newspapers that did not rank among the top 100 in circulation but were noted for their coverage of national politics, were included, as were five major news wire services that supply campaign coverage to newspapers throughout the country: The Associated Press, Reuters, McClatchy-Tribune News Service, Gannett News Service, and Cox News Service.

This list of newspapers and wire services provided a purposive sample of print media that had covered the 2008 presidential campaign. Smaller newspapers were not included because studies have shown that coverage of presidential campaigns is mainly confined to newspapers with a large circulation or a national presence (e.g., Just et al., 2006; Flowers, Haynes & Crespin, 2003). Budget cuts in recent years have led smaller newspapers to eliminate or scale back coverage of national politics (Project for

Excellence in Journalism, 2009) and rely on wire-service reports instead (Just et al., 1996; Perez-Pena, 2008).

Because all of the newspapers' and wire services' archives could not be accessed via a single database, a combination of Lexis-Nexis, Factiva and NewsBank was used. For Lexis-Nexis and NewsBank searches, articles were considered to be campaign-related if they contained the word "campaign" anywhere in the body of the article and the last name of one or more of the top three Democratic candidates (Obama, Clinton, or Edwards) or top three Republican candidates (McCain, Romney, or Huckabee) in the headline or lead paragraph. Factiva does not offer the option of searching headlines and lead paragraphs, so articles were located that contained "campaign" within the body of the article and the last names of one or more of the top candidates within the first 100 words. This search-string strategy was modeled after Son and Weaver's (2003) study involving the 2000 campaign, in which they searched for articles containing the words "campaign" and either "Bush" or "Gore."

Articles identified by the searches were examined, and all editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor, plus any news stories in which the presidential campaign was not a major focus, were discarded. Next, a list of the reporters whose names appeared in the bylines was compiled, yielding 502 names. Not surprisingly, large news organizations tended to have the most reporters covering the campaign. For example, 37 of the 502 campaign reporters came from *The New York Times* and 28 from *The Washington Post*. On the other hand, several smaller newspapers, such as the *Post and Courier* of Charleston, S.C., and *The Gazette* of Colorado Springs, Colo., were represented on the list by a single reporter.

Because the survey was conducted online, reporters' e-mail addresses were needed. The following strategy was employed to obtain these addresses: First, many of the news stories contained the reporter's e-mail address in the byline or at the end of the article. If the article did not include an e-mail address, the news organization's Website was consulted in order to locate a staff directory. If there was no staff directory, a search of the news organization's site was performed to locate any reference to the reporter and his or her e-mail address. If this search was unsuccessful, a Google World Wide Web search was conducted. Finally, if a particular reporter's e-mail address could not be determined, but the addresses of other reporters from the same news organization were available, it was assumed that the reporter's e-mail address followed the same convention as the others. For example, if all of the other reporters within a news organization had e-mail addresses containing the first letter of their first names followed by their full last names, it was assumed that the missing address adhered to this rule as well.

E-mail addresses were obtained for all reporters except for a handful from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* who had chosen not to make their addresses public. The Websites of both newspapers, however, provided an online form that made it possible to send a message to these reporters directly. Newspaper and Web research during the process of gathering e-mail addresses led to the discovery that two of the 502 reporters in the sample had died in the months since the campaign ended. Removing their names reduced the list to exactly 500.

#### *Survey Instrument and Pretest*

The survey was created and maintained on FreeOnlineSurveys.com, a secure survey Website that offers password protection for the researcher and does not collect

personally identifiable information from survey participants. Respondents who clicked on a link to take the survey were presented with an online consent form and information about the purpose of the research. Respondents were encouraged to contact the researcher or faculty adviser if they had questions or concerns. Respondents who answered “yes” to a question asking for their informed consent proceeded to a screen containing the 25 survey questions, which were divided into five sections. The first section asked respondents about their journalism background, the second section focused on reporters’ use of political blogs, the third section contained questions pertaining to news coverage and blogging during the 2008 election season, and the fourth section asked for demographic information. The final section consisted of a single open-ended question asking respondents to “provide any other comments you wish to add about ways in which blogs in general or political blogs in particular have impacted your work as a journalist.” The survey was approved by the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) on May 8, 2009. (The full survey is provided in Appendix 2.)

The survey instrument was pretested to ensure that respondents would not encounter problems with the instructions, the wording or order of survey questions, or the technical aspects of the Website. Babbie (1990) said there are no fixed guidelines for the selection or number of subjects in a pretest, except that the subjects should be as similar as possible to those who will complete the actual survey.

[S]ubjects should be reasonably appropriate respondents for the questions under consideration. If the study is aimed at a particular population, then any members of or any persons similar to that population can serve as pretest subjects. (Babbie, 1990, p. 222)

Because this survey targeted a specialized population—print reporters who covered the 2008 presidential campaign—and asked specific questions about that

coverage, a pretest involving local news reporters or journalism students and faculty would not have been appropriate. Therefore, an undeclared pretest, in which respondents are not told that the survey is still under construction (Converse & Presser, 1986), was used. Son and Weaver (2003) used an undeclared pretest in their study of media perceptions of 2000 presidential campaign coverage by administering their pretest to 10 campaign reporters randomly chosen from their overall sample. In this study, 40 reporters were chosen from the overall list of 500 names. E-mails to the 40 reporters explained the nature of the survey and invited them to participate by clicking on a link to the survey site.

The pretest contained the same survey questions as the final version, plus six questions requesting feedback and ways in which the survey could be improved. Four were yes/no questions: Did you encounter any technical problems or difficulties in completing this survey? Were the instructions in the e-mail message and in the survey clear? Were all of the questions in the survey clear? Were all of the questions in the survey fair? Respondents who answered “yes” to the first question or “no” to any of the other three were asked to specify and explain any problems. The fifth question asked how many minutes it took to complete the survey, and the sixth question told respondents: “Please provide any other comments you wish to add about this survey.”

E-mail invitations were sent on Monday, June 1, 2009, and reporters were instructed that they could take the survey any time before the end of the day Friday, June 5. Of the 40 e-mails that were sent, five did not reach their intended recipients,<sup>1</sup> reducing the pretest sample size to 35. A reminder e-mail was sent to the 35 functional addresses

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<sup>1</sup> Three of the messages “bounced,” indicating that the addresses were no longer valid, and two generated auto-reply messages that reporter was on vacation or on maternity leave and not checking e-mail.

later in the week. Four reporters took the survey, for a response rate of 11.4%. All four completed the entire survey. Three of them said the survey took 5 minutes to complete; the fourth said it took 12 minutes. No problems were reported, except for one respondent who said, “I update my blog from 12 to 20 times a day. There was no option to indicate that.” However, the question asking reporters how often they update their work-related blogs did include a “more than once a day” option, which the respondent had, in fact, selected.

Because no problems were encountered during the pretest, the pretest responses were added to the results of the final survey. The only changes made to the survey instrument after the pretest were to remove the feedback questions and to move demographic questions to the end of the survey.

#### *Survey Administration and Response*

On Monday, June 8, 2009, e-mails were sent to the 460 remaining reporters from the list of 500 (after eliminating the 40 reporters who were invited to participate in the pretest). The e-mail message, with the subject line “Survey on Journalism and Blogs,” told reporters they had been selected to take part in a voluntary online survey to gauge journalists’ opinions about the impact on blogs on journalism as part of a research project. They were told the survey would take about 10 minutes to complete, that their responses would remain anonymous, and that they would be not asked to give their name or place of employment. In an effort to boost participation, reporters were instructed that they could request to receive a summary of the survey results if they completed the online survey. The message contained a link to the survey site. Because the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) that was automatically generated by FreeOnlineSurveys.com

(<http://freeonlinesurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?sid=9vsv60v8p1d7grd602971>) was not user-friendly and might dissuade some reporters from participating, the TinyURL Website was used to create a customized URL (<http://tinyurl.com/journalismsurvey>). (The e-mail recruitment message is provided in Appendix 3.)

Respondents' Internet Protocol (IP) addresses were not recorded, and e-mails were not associated with survey responses. This meant it was impossible to determine which reporters chose to participate. Respondents who completed the survey and clicked the "Finish Survey" button were invited to send an e-mail to the researcher if they wished to receive a summary of the survey results. Again, e-mails were not associated with survey responses, making it impossible to link reporters who requested a copy of the results with their survey responses.

Of the 460 e-mails sent, 63 did not reach their intended recipients,<sup>2</sup> leaving a sample of 397 reporters. A total of 46 reporters participated in the survey during the opening week before a reminder e-mail was sent to all valid addresses the following week on Tuesday, June 16, 2009. This reminder informed reporters that the survey site would close after Friday, June 26. The reminder e-mail led to 32 more participants, and a final reminder was sent during the third week on Wednesday, June 24, two days before the survey site closed. The final reminder resulted in eight more participants. (The reminder e-mails are in Appendix 4.)

When the survey site closed Friday, June 26—18 days after it was launched—a total of 86 reporters had participated. Examining the responses revealed, however, that 10

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<sup>2</sup> A total of 52 were returned as undeliverable, four were returned because the recipient's mailbox was full (and remained full when later attempts were made), six generated auto-replies that the reporter no longer worked for the news organization and that no further information was available, and one generated an auto-reply that the reporter was on maternity leave during the summer and not checking e-mail.

of the respondents answered “yes” to the consent question but did not take the survey. Thus, a total of 76 reporters completed the survey out of a sample of 397, for a response rate of 19.1%. Combining the undisclosed pretest and the official survey yielded a total of 80 respondents out of a sample of 432, for a response rate of 18.5%.

The response rate is in line with those of other online surveys. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), response rates for Internet surveys can range anywhere from 1% to 30%. Sweetser, Porter, Chung and Kim (2008) reported response rates of 19.8% for journalists and 14.9% for public relations practitioners in their study of how communications professionals use blogs. Rates of 27% and 20.5%, respectively, were reported for online surveys of newspaper journalists (Cassidy, 2008) and online newspaper editors (Johnson & Kelly, 2003). Although the response rate for this study was not especially high, even a moderate rate is noteworthy because the reporters in the sample were among the most prominent journalists in the nation, and they receive a large quantity of e-mail every day.<sup>3</sup>

### *Descriptive Statistics*

This section reports descriptive statistics for several variables related to campaign reporters’ demographic makeup and their work environment.

#### *Demographics*

The average campaign reporter who completed the survey was a well-educated, middle-aged man. More than two-thirds of respondents were male (71.3%), and ages ranged from 25 to 61, with a mean of 45.62 ( $SD = 9.25$ ). When asked to give their highest level of education on a scale from 1 (did not complete high school) to 7 (graduate

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<sup>3</sup> One reporter, for example, stated in an e-mail to the researcher that he typically receives more than 100 e-mails a day, even in non-election years.

degree), responses ranged from 3 (some college education) to 7, with a mean of 5.67 ( $SD = 1.19$ ). A total of 7.5% reported having some college education, 46.3% had a bachelor's degree, 10.0% had some graduate education, and 36.3% had a graduate degree.

#### *Frequency of Political Coverage*

Overall, a little less than half of the respondents said they write about national and state politics and government regularly, with most of the rest saying they occasionally write about politics and government at the national and state levels. Percentages were lower for local politics and government. Respondents were asked to rate how frequently they write about government at each level in their work as a journalist on scales of 1 (never) to 4 (regularly). The mean scores were 3.26 ( $SD = 0.76$ ) for national politics and government, 3.18 ( $SD = 0.88$ ) for state, and 2.61 ( $SD = 0.95$ ) for local. For national politics and government, 42.5% said they wrote about it regularly, 43.8% occasionally, 11.3% rarely, and 2.5% never. For state politics and government, 43.8% said they wrote about it regularly, 31.3% occasionally, 18.8% rarely, and 3.8% never. For local politics and government, the percentages were 20.0% regularly, 33.8% occasionally, 33.8% rarely, and 12.5% never.

More than half of the respondents said they regularly wrote stories related to the 2008 U.S. presidential primary campaign, and a similar percentage said they regularly wrote stories related to the general-election campaign. On a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (regularly), the mean scores were 3.41 ( $SD = 0.83$ ) for the primary campaign and 3.38 ( $SD = 0.75$ ) for the general-election campaign. For the primary campaign, 58.8% said they wrote about the campaign regularly, 23.8% occasionally, 13.8% rarely, and 2.5%

never. For the general-election campaign, 52.5% wrote about it regularly, 33.8% occasionally, 12.5% rarely, and 1.3% never.

Most respondents said they wrote about Republican and Democratic candidates in approximately equal proportion. In the primary campaign, 56.3% said they wrote about both parties' candidates in roughly equal proportion, with 23.8% saying they wrote mostly about Democratic candidates, 16.3% saying they wrote mostly about Republican candidates, and 3.8% saying they did not write about the primary campaign. In the general-election campaign, 75.0% said they wrote about both parties' tickets equally, with 8.8% writing most often about the Democratic ticket, 15.0% writing most often about the Republican ticket, and 1.3% not writing about the general-election campaign at all.

#### *Work Environment*

Most of the respondents worked for a newspaper (82.5%) rather than a wire service (17.5%). Among newspaper reporters, 12.5% worked for papers with a daily circulation of 800,000 or more; 3.8% for papers with a circulation of 600,000 to 799,999; 3.8% for papers with a circulation of 400,000 to 599,999; 36.3% for papers with a circulation of 200,000 to 399,999; and 23.8% for papers with a circulation less than 200,000.

Out of all respondents, 30.0% said they are primarily based out of Washington, D.C., and 70.0% said they are based elsewhere.

Respondents had a mean of 22.66 years of journalism experience ( $SD = 9.38$ ), with responses ranging from 6 years to 40 years.

When asked whether blogging is part of their job as a journalist, exactly half said they currently contribute to one or more blogs on their news organization's Website, 27.5% said they do not currently contribute to a blog on their news organization's Website but have done so in the past, and 22.5% said blogging is not part of their job. Of those who said they currently contribute to a blog as part of their job, the majority (62.8%) said it is updated with new content more than once a day.

Although most respondents had blogged as part of their job, few had maintained a personal blog outside of work. Only 3.8% said they currently maintained a personal blog, 6.3% had maintained a personal blog in the past, and 90.0% had never maintained a personal blog.

#### *Campaign Reporters' Exposure to Political Blogs*

This section reports descriptive statistics for measures of campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs and answers research questions related to blog exposure.

#### *Variables*

Slightly more than half of the respondents reported reading political blogs at least once a day. Political blogs were defined as regularly updated Websites containing a series of posts or entries whose primary subject matter is related to politics. Respondents were asked to rate how often they read political blogs on a scale of 1 (never) to 6 (more than once a day). The mean was 4.49 ( $SD = 1.39$ ). Overall, 31.3% of respondents reported reading political blogs more than once a day, 21.3% about once a day, 27.5% at least once a week but not every day, 6.3% at least once a month but not every week, 12.5% less than once a month, and 1.3% never.

Separately, respondents were asked to estimate how many hours per week they spend reading political blogs. The mean was 3.09 hours ( $SD = 3.25$ ), with responses ranging from 0 to 14 hours.

In order to measure reporters' exposure to specific blogs, a list of the leading political blogs was compiled. Technorati's ranking of the Top 100 blogs (<http://technorati.com/blogs/top100>) was consulted on May 29, 2009, days before the survey pretest was launched. Additionally, the Internet Archive Wayback Machine (<http://www.archive.org>) was used to obtain archived versions of the Technorati rankings from November and December 2007, the months immediately before the 2008 U.S. presidential primaries and caucuses began. Technorati ranks blogs' popularity based primarily on the number of links they receive, and the site has been used in several other academic studies to identify the most popular blogs (e.g., Meraz, 2009; Wallsten, 2007). Technorati's rankings include blogs on all topics, not politics exclusively. Only those blogs that were primarily political in focus and showed up on one or more of the May 2009, November 2007, or December 2007 Top 100 rankings were included, yielding a list of 18 political blogs.

The 18 blogs were independently coded by the researcher and a second coder as liberal, conservative, or neutral, based on an examination of their Websites. (Content analysis methodology is discussed in the next chapter.) Liberal blogs were those that primarily supported liberal political causes or Democrats. Conservative blogs were those that primarily supported conservative political causes or Republicans. Neutral blogs were those that either adopted a neutral stance (such as blogs maintained by authors who strove for political balance) or contained a mix of liberal and conservative viewpoints and did

not logically fit into either of the other two categories. For example, Andrew Sullivan, who maintains the blog *The Daily Dish*, calls himself a conservative, but he often used his blog to criticize President George W. Bush and the Iraq War and to promote causes typically identified with liberals. Therefore, *The Daily Dish* was categorized as neutral, even though Sullivan has strong political views.

Because most bloggers are very upfront about their political beliefs, coding was relatively easy. The coders agreed on the classification of 16 of the 18 blogs for an agreement rate of 88.9%. Cohen's *kappa* (Cohen, 1960), a measure of intercoder reliability that accounts for agreement by chance, was .83. Values of *kappa* greater than .8 indicate almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977, p. 165). Differences in the classification of two blogs were resolved,<sup>4</sup> and the 18 blogs were classified as follows: six liberal (*The Huffington Post*, *Think Progress*, *Daily Kos*, *Talking Points Memo*, Glenn Greenwald at *Salon.com*, and *Crooks and Liars*); seven conservative (*Hot Air*, Michelle Malkin, *Power Line*, *The Corner* at *National Review Online*, *Instapundit/Pajamas Media*, *NewsBusters*, and *Little Green Footballs*); and five neutral (*FiveThirtyEight*, CNN's *Political Ticker*, *The Daily Dish*, Ben Smith at *Politico.com*, and *Political Punch* by ABC's Jake Tapper). The 18 blogs were listed in random order in the survey, and their political orientation was not given. Respondents were asked to rate how often they visit each blog's Website on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (every day).

### *Results*

**RQ1** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to age, gender, and/or education? The data for blog exposure, as measured

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<sup>4</sup> For the blog *Instapundit*, one coder admitted mistakenly placing the conservative blog in the liberal category. For the blog *Talking Points Memo*, there was confusion about whether the blog should be classified as liberal or neutral. After further review, however, both coders agreed to code it as liberal.

by the number of hours per week respondents said they spent reading blogs, had a strong positive skew (1.51) that exceeded the acceptable level of twice the standard error of skewness (0.28). A separate measure of exposure to blogs, in which respondents were asked to rate how often they read political blogs on a scale from 1 (never) to 6 (more than once a day), had a strong negative skew (skewness = -0.62, *SE* of skewness = 0.27). For both measures, Q-Q plots and Shapiro Wilk tests confirmed that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, blog exposure was converted into a dichotomous variable reflecting whether or not respondents said they read political blogs every day.

The variable of education consisted of seven categories from “did not complete high school” to “graduate degree.” Because the large number of categories and small number of survey respondents (80) would lead to violations of the Pearson chi-square standard that at least 80% of expected cell counts in a contingency table be 5 or greater, the variable was collapsed into two categories: “bachelor’s degree or less” and “at least some graduate education.” For consistency, the variable of age also was dichotomized through a median split: reporters older than 45 and reporters 45 and younger.

Chi-square tests for each of the three demographic variables found no significant relationships with political blog exposure (Table 5.1).

**RQ2** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters’ exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government? For each of the three levels of politics and government examined (national, state, and local), the measures of how often respondents reported writing about that level of government were converted into a dichotomous variable reflecting whether or not respondents wrote about that level of politics and government regularly.

Table 5.1  
*Campaign Reporters' Political Blog Exposure by Demographic Variables*

	Age		Gender		Education	
	45 and younger (n = 38)	Older than 45 (n = 38)	Female (n = 23)	Male (n = 57)	Bachelor's or less (n = 43)	At least some grad. (n = 37)
Every day	19 (50.0%)	21 (55.3%)	12 (52.2%)	30 (52.6%)	24 (55.8%)	18 (48.6%)
Not every day	19 (50.0%)	17 (44.7%)	11 (47.8%)	27 (47.4%)	19 (44.2%)	19 (51.4%)
$\chi^2$ (df = 1)	0.05		0.00		0.17	

†p < .10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

Table 5.2  
*Campaign Reporters' Political Blog Exposure by Frequency of Political Coverage*

	National Politics/Govt.		State Politics/Govt.		Local Politics/Govt.	
	Regularly (n = 34)	Not regularly (n = 46)	Regularly (n = 35)	Not regularly (n = 43)	Regularly (n = 16)	Not regularly (n = 64)
Every day	21 (61.8%)	21 (45.7%)	23 (65.7%)	19 (44.2%)	10 (62.5%)	32 (50.0%)
Not every day	13 (38.2%)	25 (54.3%)	12 (34.3%)	24 (55.8%)	6 (37.5%)	32 (50.0%)
$\chi^2$ (df = 1)	1.44		2.78†		0.38	

†p < .10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

Chi-square tests (Table 5.2) found no statistically significant relationships.

However, the results for the state level approached significance [ $\chi^2(1, N = 78) = 2.78, p = .095, V = .22$ ]. Campaign reporters who cover state politics and government regularly

were more likely to say they read political blogs every day (65.7%) than campaign reporters who do not cover state politics and government regularly (44.2%).

**RQ3** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters’ exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign? For both the primary campaign and the general-election campaign, the frequency with which reporters covered that campaign was dichotomized into “regularly” and “not regularly.”

For both the primary [ $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 4.30, p < .05, V = .26$ ] and general-election [ $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 3.98, p < .05, V = .25$ ] campaigns, significant relationships were found (Table 5.3). Campaign reporters who covered the primary campaign on a regular basis were more likely to say they read political blogs every day (63.8%) than campaign reporters who did not cover the primary campaign regularly (37.5%). Similarly, campaign reporters who covered the general-election campaign regularly were more

Table 5.3  
*Campaign Reporters’ Political Blog Exposure by Frequency of 2008 Presidential Campaign Coverage*

	Primary		General Election	
	Regularly (n = 47)	Not regularly (n = 32)	Regularly (n = 42)	Not regularly (n = 38)
Every day	30 (63.8%)	12 (37.5%)	27 (64.3%)	15 (39.5%)
Not every day	17 (36.2%)	20 (62.5%)	15 (35.7%)	23 (60.5%)
$\chi^2$ (df = 1)	4.30*		3.98*	

†p < .10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

likely to say they read political blogs every day (64.3%) than those who did not (39.5%).

**RQ4** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service), location (inside or outside Washington, D.C.), years of journalism experience, and/or whether the reporter contributes to a blog on his or her news organization's Website? Whether the reporter worked for a newspaper or wire service had no significant effect, nor did it matter whether the reporter was based inside or outside Washington, D.C. (Table 5.4a). In order to measure the effect of journalism experience, the variable was dichotomized at the median. No significant effect was found. Campaign reporters with 20 or more years of journalism experience were no more or less likely to read political blogs every day than campaign reporters who had less than 20 years of journalism experience (Table 5.4b).

Table 5.4a  
*Campaign Reporters' Political Blog Exposure by Employer and Location*

	Employer		Location	
	Newspaper (n = 66)	Wire service (n = 14)	Inside D.C. (n = 24)	Outside D.C. (n = 56)
Every day	37 (56.1%)	5 (35.7%)	16 (66.7%)	26 (46.4%)
Not every day	29 (43.9%)	9 (64.3%)	8 (33.3%)	30 (53.6%)
$\chi^2$ (df = 1)	1.19		2.01	

†p < .10 \*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

The variable measuring whether reporters contribute to blogs as part of their jobs was collapsed into two categories: reporters who currently contribute to one or more

blogs on their news organizations' Websites and reporters who do not currently contribute. A significant effect was found [ $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 4.06, p < .05, V = .25$ ]. Reporters who said they currently contribute to one or more blogs on their news organizations' Websites were more likely to report reading political blogs every day (65.0%) than those who do not (40.0%) (Table 5.4b).

Table 5.4b  
*Campaign Reporters' Political Blog Exposure by Years of Journalism Experience and Work Blogging Habits*

	Journalism Experience		Currently Contribute to Work Blog	
	20 years or less ( <i>n</i> = 35)	More than 20 years ( <i>n</i> = 41)	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 40)	No ( <i>n</i> = 40)
Every day	18 (51.4%)	22 (53.7%)	26 (65.0%)	16 (40.0%)
Not every day	17 (48.6%)	19 (46.3%)	14 (35.0%)	24 (60.0%)
$\chi^2$ ( <i>df</i> = 1)	0.00		4.06*	

†*p* < .10 \**p* < .05 \*\**p* < .01

**RQ5** asked: Which political blogs do campaign reporters read most frequently?

To answer this research question, respondents were asked to rate how often they visit the Websites of the 18 major political blogs, as determined by Technorati's Top 100 rankings, on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (every day). Table 5.5 reports the mean scores for each blog. In response to the research question, the three most frequently read political blogs among the campaign reporters were the liberal Huffington Post (*M* = 2.83, *SD* = 1.12) and two politically neutral blogs: Politico.com's Ben Smith (*M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.33)

and CNN's Political Ticker ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). Broken down by partisan orientation, the three most read neutral blogs were Ben Smith, CNN Political Ticker, and FiveThirtyEight. The three most read liberal blogs were The Huffington Post, Talking

Table 5.5  
*Campaign Reporters' Most-Read A-List Political Blogs*

Blog	Partisan Network	$M (SD)^a$	$N$
The Huffington Post	Liberal	2.83 (1.12)	80
Ben Smith (Politico.com)	Neutral	2.68 (1.33)	79
CNN Political Ticker	Neutral	2.38 (1.34)	77
Talking Points Memo	Liberal	2.33 (1.32)	76
Daily Kos	Liberal	2.13 (1.09)	78
FiveThirtyEight	Neutral	2.00 (1.29)	74
Political Punch (Jake Tapper)	Neutral	1.74 (1.23)	74
Daily Dish (Andrew Sullivan)	Neutral	1.66 (1.16)	73
<i>National Review</i> Online's The Corner	Conservative	1.61 (1.13)	75
Think Progress	Liberal	1.42 (0.88)	73
Michelle Malkin	Conservative	1.42 (0.86)	74
Power Line	Conservative	1.32 (0.94)	76
Glenn Greenwald (Salon.com)	Liberal	1.31 (0.72)	74
Instapundit	Conservative	1.26 (0.66)	74
Hot Air	Conservative	1.22 (0.67)	73
Little Green Footballs	Conservative	1.22 (0.73)	69
Crooks and Liars	Liberal	1.20 (0.55)	74
NewsBusters	Conservative	1.16 (0.47)	73

<sup>a</sup> 1 = Never, 2 = Less than once a month, 3 = At least once a month but not every week, 4 = At least once a week but not every day, 5 = Every day

Points Memo, and Daily Kos. The three most read conservative blogs were The Corner at *National Review* Online, Michelle Malkin, and Power Line. Overall, neutral and liberal blogs ranked much higher than conservative blogs among respondents.

A separate open-ended survey question asked the campaign reporters to name any other political blogs, besides the 18 listed, whose Websites they visited at least once a week. Reporters named a variety of blogs, many of them local or regional in focus, such as Central Florida Pulse or PhillyClout, and many that are affiliated with newspapers. Only a few blogs received multiple mentions, including The Fix, a blog maintained by *The Washington Post's* Chris Cillizza, which was named by five respondents, and Marc Ambinder's blog on *The Atlantic's* site, which received four mentions.

**RQ6** asked: To what extent do campaign reporters who primarily write about Democratic candidates tend to read different political blogs than those who primarily write about Republican candidates? To determine whether campaign reporters primarily wrote about Democrats or Republicans, responses to two survey questions were combined. Respondents were asked which party's candidates they wrote about most often during the primary campaign and which party's ticket they wrote about most often during the general-election campaign. Respondents who answered Democratic to either question were considered to have written primarily about Democratic candidates; respondents who answered Republican to either question were considered to have written primarily about Republican candidates. All remaining respondents, including those who wrote about one party's candidates during one phase of the election and the other party's candidates during the other phase, were classified as having written about both parties equally.

Table 5.6  
*Campaign Reporters' Exposure to A-List Political Blogs by Party Whose 2008  
 Presidential Candidates They Covered Most Frequently*

Blog	Partisan Network	Democrats	Republicans	Both equally
		<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 17	<i>n</i> = 41
		<i>M</i> (Rank) <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i> (Rank) <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i> (Rank) <sup>a</sup>
The Huffington Post	Liberal	2.76 (1)	2.71 (1)	2.88 (1)
Ben Smith (Politico.com)	Neutral	2.48 (2)	2.65 (2)	2.75 (2)
CNN Political Ticker	Neutral	2.25 (5)	2.56 (3)	2.37 (3)
Talking Points Memo	Liberal	2.35 (4)	2.44 (4)	2.21 (4)
Daily Kos	Liberal	2.38 (3)	1.81 (7)	2.05 (5)
FiveThirtyEight	Neutral	1.89 (6)	2.31 (5)	1.87 (6)
Political Punch (Jake Tapper)	Neutral	1.75 (7)	1.56 (9)	1.82 (7)
Daily Dish (Andrew Sullivan)	Neutral	1.75 (7)	1.87 (6)	1.53 (9)
<i>National Review</i> Online's The Corner	Conserv.	1.60 (9)	1.63 (8)	1.55 (8)
Think Progress	Liberal	1.47 (11)	1.38 (10)	1.42 (10)
Michelle Malkin	Conserv.	1.60 (9)	1.25 (13)	1.39 (11)
Power Line	Conserv.	1.40 (14)	1.25 (13)	1.30 (13)
Glenn Greenwald (Salon.com)	Liberal	1.30 (15)	1.31 (12)	1.32 (12)
Instapundit	Conserv.	1.45 (12)	1.25 (13)	1.16 (16)
Hot Air	Conserv.	1.15 (17)	1.33 (11)	1.21 (15)
Little Green Footballs	Conserv.	1.42 (13)	1.19 (16)	1.12 (18)
Crooks and Liars	Liberal	1.15 (17)	1.19 (16)	1.24 (14)
NewsBusters	Conserv.	1.16 (16)	1.19 (16)	1.16 (16)

<sup>a</sup> 1 = Never, 2 = Less than once a month, 3 = At least once a month but not every week, 4 = At least once a week but not every day, 5 = Every day

To answer the research question, the rank-ordered list of the most popular political blogs among the 21 respondents who wrote primarily about Democratic candidates was compared with the rank-ordered list of the most popular political blogs among the 17 respondents who wrote primarily about Republican candidates. The Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient showed that the lists were highly correlated ( $r_s = .87$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that campaign reporters who primarily wrote about Democratic candidates did not tend to read different political blogs from those who primarily wrote about Republican candidates (Table 5.6). Among campaign reporters who primarily wrote about Democratic candidates, the most popular political blogs were the liberal Huffington Post ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ), the neutral blog written by Ben Smith at Politico.com ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), and the liberal blog Daily Kos ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). Among campaign reporters who primarily wrote about Republican candidates, the most popular blogs were the liberal Huffington Post ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), the neutral blog written by Ben Smith at Politico.com ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ), and the neutral CNN Political Ticker ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). In both lists, neutral and liberal blogs predominated. No evidence was found that reporters who primarily covered Republican candidates were any more likely to read conservative blogs than reporters who mostly wrote about Democratic candidates.

#### *Political Bloggers' Exposure to Mainstream News Media*

This section describes how hyperlinks contained within blog posts were studied to determine which news media political bloggers consulted when writing about the 2008 presidential campaign. A research question related to the hyperlinks is then answered.

### *Hyperlink Analysis*

Hyperlinks are one of the central features of blogs in general (Blood, 2002; Trammell & Gasser, 2004) and political blogs in particular (Reese et al., 2007). Hyperlink analysis has been used by researchers as a way of understanding bloggers' news media usage and their networks of association (e.g., Adamic & Glance, 2005; Reese et al., 2007; Tremayne et al., 2006).

Because an examination of hyperlinks on numerous political blogs throughout the entire 2008 presidential campaign was not feasible, the analysis was restricted to the four-week period immediately preceding the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses (December 6, 2007-January 2, 2008), the same period used for the content analysis that will be described in the next chapter.

Blog posts that discussed the three main candidates in the Democratic primary campaign (Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards) were collected from the three most frequently read neutral A-list political blogs, the three most frequently read liberal A-list political blogs, and the three most frequently read conservative A-list political blogs, as determined by the measures of exposure in the survey of campaign reporters. Campaign reporters' three most frequently read neutral blogs were Ben Smith of Politico.com, CNN's Political Ticker, and FiveThirtyEight. Because FiveThirtyEight did not begin until March 2008, after the Iowa caucuses, the next-most-frequently-read neutral blog, Political Punch, maintained by ABC News' Jake Tapper, was substituted. The three most frequently read liberal blogs were The Huffington Post, Talking Points Memo, and Daily Kos. The three most frequently read conservative blogs were *National Review Online's* The Corner, Michelle Malkin, and Power Line.

Each blog's Website was consulted to identify all posts related to the top three Democratic candidates. Most bloggers use a "tagging" system to categorize their posts according to the people or topics discussed. Blog posts may be assigned multiple tags. To locate relevant posts, the blogs' archives were searched for posts tagged with Clinton, Obama, or Edwards. Because different bloggers follow slightly different conventions in categorizing and archiving their posts, and some do not use tags, the exact procedure for identifying campaign-related posts varied slightly from site to site. Table 5.7 lists each blog and the sampling procedure used to locate relevant posts from the four-week period.

The sample consisted of 880 blog posts. The posts were unevenly distributed among the blogs. Ben Smith (236 posts) and The Huffington Post (201 posts) had the most posts, while Michelle Malkin (26 posts), Daily Kos (25 posts), and Power Line (20 posts) had the fewest. Grouped according to partisan network, there were a total of 395 posts in the neutral blogs, 350 in the liberal blogs, and 135 in the conservative blogs.

Once the sample was drawn, each hyperlink contained within the posts was identified, and the Web address that it pointed to was recorded. The sample of 880 blog posts contained 1,231 hyperlinks. (One of the blogs, CNN's Political Ticker, did not use hyperlinks at all.) The "http://" and "www" prefixes were stripped from each hyperlink address. For example, "http://www.washingtonpost.com" became "washingtonpost.com" and "http://news.bbc.co.uk" became "news.bbc.co.uk." The list of addresses was then alphabetized, and the most commonly occurring domains within the hyperlinks were calculated.

Table 5.7  
*Sampling Procedures for A-List Political Blogs*

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- Ben Smith at Politico.com (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith>)  
Archived posts categorized as “Barack Obama,” “Hillary Clinton,” or “John Edwards” were sampled during the four-week period.
- CNN Political Ticker (<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com>)  
Archived posts filed under the categories of “Barack Obama,” “Hillary Clinton,” or “John Edwards” were sampled.
- Political Punch by Jake Tapper (<http://blogs.abcnews.com>)  
Archived posts were inspected, and those that mentioned the Democratic primary campaign and at least one of the three main candidates were sampled.
- Huffington Post (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/politics/the-blog>)  
Archived posts in the “All the Blog Posts” section of the site were inspected, and those tagged with “Obama,” “Clinton,” or “Edwards” (or other variations of their names) were sampled.
- Talking Points Memo (<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com>)  
The archives of the blog’s “Election Central” (<http://web.archive.org/web/20080108090114/tpmelectioncentral.com/archive.php>) were inspected to locate posts in the “Obama,” “Clinton,” or “Edwards” topics.
- Daily Kos (<http://www.dailykos.com>)  
The blog’s search engine was used to find archived “story” posts (those written by the blog’s main cadre of writers, as opposed to the personal “diary” posts) that were tagged as “Obama,” “Clinton,” or “Edwards.”
- National Review Online’s The Corner* (<http://corner.nationalreview.com>)  
*National Review Online’s* advanced search engine ([http://www.nationalreview.com/search/advanced\\_search.php](http://www.nationalreview.com/search/advanced_search.php)) was used to search The Corner blog section for archived posts containing “Obama,” “Clinton,” or Edwards.”
- Michelle Malkin (<http://michellemalkin.com>)  
Archived posts categorized as “Barack Obama,” “Hillary Clinton,” or “John Edwards” were sampled.
- Power Line (<http://www.powerlineblog.com>)  
Archived posts were inspected, and those mentioning the Democratic primary campaign and at least one of the three main candidates were sampled.
-

*Results*

**RQ7** asked: Which mainstream news media received the most hyperlinks in the top political blogs' posts during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign? The most frequently linked-to Internet domains (both media and non-media) among all of the blogs are reported in Table 5.8. Consistent with previous

Table 5.8  
*Most Linked-to Internet Domains  
in A-List Political Blog Sample*

Domain	Links
youtube.com	110
nytimes.com	56
washingtonpost.com	33
taylormarsh.com <sup>a</sup>	30
desmoinesregister.com	24
firstread.msnbc.com	24
politico.com	24
blog.washingtonpost.com	21
barackobama.com	19
abcnews.go.com	15
hillaryclinton.com	15
hotair.com	15

<sup>a</sup> The large number of links to taylormarsh.com is an anomaly. Taylor Marsh, a blogger for the Huffington Post, included numerous links to her personal Website in her blog posts.

Table 5.9  
*Most Linked-to Internet Domains by Partisan Political Blog Network*

Neutral		Liberal		Conservative	
Domain	Links	Domain	Links	Domain	Links
youtube.com	38	youtube.com	52	youtube.com	20
nytimes.com	16	nytimes.com	33	hotair.com	15
firstread.msnbc.msn.com	11	taylormarsh.com	30	nytimes.com	7
blog.washingtonpost.com	9	washingtonpost.com	21	abcnews.go.com	6
thepage.time.com	9	barackobama.com	14	64.233.167.104 <sup>a</sup>	4
desmoinesregister.com	8	politico.com	14	blog.washingtonpost.com	4
washingtonpost.com	8	desmoinesregister.com	13	breitbart.com	4
blogs.abcnews.com	7	thewashingtonnote.com	11	nypost.com	4
politico.com	7	firstread.msnbc.msn.com	10	washingtonpost.com	4
tpmelectioncentral.com	7	news.bbc.co.uk	10		
		pollster.com	10		
		thenation.com	10		

<sup>a</sup> The domain 64.233.167.104 is affiliated with the Google search engine.

research (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006), *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were the mainstream news media linked to most often (56 and 33 times, respectively). *The Des Moines Register*, Iowa's largest newspaper, ranked next among mainstream print and broadcast outlets, with 24 links. Other news-oriented sites that ranked high included MSNBC.com's First Read political news blog, the political news site Politico.com, *The Washington Post's* blogs, and ABC News.

Table 5.9 shows the most linked-to domains for each individual partisan blog network. Although *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* appeared among the most popular hyperlink domains in all partisan networks, some differences existed among the networks. BBC News and *The Nation* magazine's Website received several links in the liberal blog network, while *The New York Post* and Bretibart, a news aggregation site run by conservative entrepreneur Andrew Breitbart, were popular news sources for the conservative political bloggers. YouTube, the video-sharing Website launched in 2005, was the most frequently linked-to domain overall and in each of the three blog networks. Some bloggers used YouTube to post videoblog entries; other bloggers linked to candidates' campaign advertisements or political parodies that had been posted there.

#### *Need for Orientation and Use of Blogs for Informational Needs*

This section explains how scales were constructed to measure the dimensions of need for orientation as independent variables and the use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs as a dependent variable. Research findings related to need for orientation are then reported.

## *Variables*

Campaign reporters' need for orientation toward issues, need for orientation toward frames, and need for orientation toward evaluations were measured using the three-item scales developed by Matthes (2005). Because Matthes measured the public's need for orientation, the wording of the items had to be modified to address journalists.

To measure need for orientation toward issues, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following three statements on Likert-type scales of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): "I wanted to be instantly informed about the key issues in the presidential race," "Some days, I didn't want to hear anything at all about the presidential candidates" (reverse coded), and "It was important for me to monitor the key issues in the presidential race constantly." Factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed that all three items loaded on a single factor that explained 65.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.96). Cronbach's *alpha*, a measure of the reliability of the scale, was .71. *Alpha* values of .7 or higher are sufficient in early stages of research measuring a construct (Nunnally, 1978). The three items were summed to create a scale. Scores ranged from 6 to 15, and the mean was 12.11 ( $SD = 2.38$ ).

Need for orientation toward frames was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with three items: "I wanted to know the many different sides of the presidential candidates," "I wanted to be thoroughly informed about specific details behind the issues," and "I expected detailed background information about the presidential candidates." Factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed that all three items loaded on a single factor explaining 78.1% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.34). The

Cronbach's *alpha* value was .86. The three items were summed to create a scale. Scores ranged from 8 to 15, and the mean was 12.78 ( $SD = 1.84$ ).

Need for orientation toward evaluations was measured with three items: "I attached great importance to commentaries on the presidential race," "Bloggers should have refrained from stating their opinions about the presidential race" (reverse coded), and "It was interesting to see how non-journalists commented on the presidential race." Factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed that all three items loaded on a single factor that explained 54.8% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.65). However, Cronbach's *alpha* was below acceptable levels ( $\alpha = .59$ ), and removing any of the three items would have lowered the *alpha* level even further. Therefore, need for orientation toward evaluations will be dropped from further analysis.

To measure campaign reporters' use of blogs to satisfy their informational needs, the dependent variable, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with four statements related to their work as a journalist during the 2008 presidential race on scales of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items were modeled after those used by Wanta, Reinardy, and Moore (2007) to measure reporters' use of the Internet in general for informational purposes. The four items were: "Using information from political blogs allowed me to report different types of stories related to the presidential race," "Political blogs were of no help in finding story ideas related to the presidential race" (reverse coded), "Political blogs made it possible to monitor the presidential race more closely," and "I had a wider range of information available to me because of political blogs." Factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed that the four items loaded on a single factor explaining 68.6% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.74). Cronbach's *alpha* was .85.

The four items were summed to create a scale. Scores ranged from 4 to 20 with a mean of 13.00 ( $SD = 3.49$ ).

### *Results*

Hypotheses and research questions examining how need for orientation, as well as several demographic and occupational variables, predicted campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs were tested through multiple linear regression. Pearson product moment correlations among all of the variables used in the regressions are reported in Table 5.10.

Because of the small number of survey subjects ( $N = 80$ ), the results of a complex regression model with numerous predictor variables might be spurious. Scholars differ in their recommendations about the necessary ratio of independent variables to subjects in a multiple regression model. Tabachnick and Fidell (1989) suggested a bare minimum of five subjects per IV. Thus, with a sample size of 80, as many as 16 IVs would be permissible. Schmidt (1971) recommended a minimum ratio between 15:1 and 25:1, meaning that with 80 subjects, the maximum number of IVs would be three to five. Taking a conservative approach, this study limited the number of predictor variables in a single multiple regression model to four. Rather than testing all IVs together in a single model, separate regression tests were conducted using different sets of related IVs.

For the first regression model, use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs was entered as the dependent variable, and four occupational variables were entered as independent variables: years of journalism experience, location, employer, and work blogging. Location was a dummy variable indicating whether the reporter was based in Washington, D.C. (0 = outside D.C., 1 = inside D.C.). Employer was a dummy variable

Table 5.10  
*Pearson Product Moment Correlations for Survey Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Use of blogs for info. needs	—	.17	.00	-.19	.13	.17	.27*	-.12	-.04	-.00	.13	.15	.20	.20	.13
2. Need for orient. (issues)		—	.57**	-.13	.24*	-.20	.06	-.10	.19	.00	.24*	-.15	-.01	.26*	.25*
3. Need for orient. (frames)			—	-.06	.08	-.11	.00	-.03	.10	.05	.26*	-.11	.07	.22	.26*
4. Journalism experience				—	.14	.10	.05	.91**	.19	.15	.07	.08	-.08	.04	.01
5. Location (1 = D.C.)					—	-.27*	.16	.11	.05	.18	.46**	-.26*	-.34**	.28*	.37**
6. Employer (1 = Newspaper)						—	.20	.07	-.08	-.13	-.19	.33**	.30**	-.18	-.21
7. Work blogging (1 = Yes)							—	.00	-.03	-.19	.15	.23*	.01	.15	.13
8. Age								—	.21	.27*	.06	.09	.02	.03	.03
9. Gender (1 = Male)									—	-.08	.04	.03	-.12	.17	.13
10. Education										—	-.10	-.32**	-.10	-.05	.07
11. Coverage of natl. politics											—	.07	-.21	.46**	.45**
12. Coverage of state politics.												—	.49**	.00	-.08
13. Coverage of local politics													—	-.21	-.24*
14. Coverage of primary														—	.70**
15. Coverage of general election															—

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

indicating whether the reporter worked for a wire service or a newspaper (0 = wire service, 1 = newspaper), and work blogging was a dummy variable indicating whether the reporter currently contributed to one or more blogs on his or her news organization's Website (0 = no, 1 = yes).

The overall model was significant, with the four independent variables accounting for about 20% of the variance [Adjusted  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $F(4, 69) = 4.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. The Durbin-Watson statistic (2.06) was very close to the optimal value of 2, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, and Shapiro Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests confirmed no violations of normality.

**H1** predicted that campaign reporters with low levels of journalism experience are more likely than campaign reporters with high levels of journalism experience to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs. The hypothesis was supported (Table 5.11). Years of journalism experience was a significant negative predictor of campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs [ $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t(69) = -2.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

**H2** predicted that campaign reporters based in Washington, D.C., are more likely to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs than are campaign reporters based outside Washington, D.C. The hypothesis was supported (Table 5.11). Whether a campaign reporter was based in Washington was a significant predictor of that reporter's use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs [ $\beta = .26$ ,  $t(69) = 2.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

**RQ8** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service) and/or whether they contribute to a blog on their news organizations' Websites? Whether

Table 5.11  
*Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs Through Occupational Variables (N = 74)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Journalism Experience	-0.09	0.04	-.26	-2.35*
Location (1 = D.C.)	1.89	0.85	.26	2.21*
Employer (1 = Newspaper)	1.34	1.03	.15	1.30
Work Blogging (1 = Yes)	1.58	0.77	.24	2.05*

Adjusted  $R^2 = .15$

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

a reporter currently contributed to a blog on his or her news organization’s Website was a significant positive predictor of that reporter’s use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs [ $\beta = .24, t(69) = 2.05, p < .05$ ] (Table 5.11). Campaign reporters who contribute to blogs as part of their jobs were more likely to say that their use of political blogs helped satisfy their informational needs during the 2008 presidential campaign. Employer was not a significant predictor [ $\beta = .15, t(69) = 1.30, p = .20$ ]. No significant differences were found between newspaper and wire service reporters.

**RQ9** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters’ use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to age, gender, and/or education? To answer this research question, a linear multiple regression model was tested with age, gender, and education as independent variables and use of blogs to satisfy informational needs as

the dependent variable. Gender was a dummy variable (0 = female, 1 = male), and education was measured on a scale from 1 (did not complete high school) to 7 (graduate degree). The overall model was not significant [Adjusted  $R^2 = -.03$ ,  $F(3, 70) = 0.37$ ,  $p = .78$ ]. None of the three demographic variables was a significant predictor of campaign reporters' use of politics blogs to satisfy informational needs (Table 5.12).

Table 5.12  
*Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs Through Demographic Variables (N = 74)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Age	-0.05	0.05	-.13	-1.04
Gender (1 = Male)	0.15	0.90	.02	0.17
Education	0.13	0.36	.04	0.36

Adjusted  $R^2 = -.03$

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

**RQ10** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government? To answer this research question, frequency of coverage of national, state, and local politics and government, each measured on a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (regularly), were entered as the three independent variables in a linear multiple regression model. Use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs was entered as the dependent variable. The model was not significant [Adjusted  $R^2 = .03$ ,

Table 5.13

*Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs Through Frequency of Political Coverage (N = 77)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
National Politics/Govt.	0.81	0.54	.18	1.50
State Politics/Govt.	0.15	0.52	.04	0.28
Local Politics/Govt.	0.76	0.49	.21	1.55

Adjusted  $R^2 = .03$

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

$F(3, 73) = 0.37, p = .15$ ]. The frequencies with which campaign reporters covered national, state, and local politics were not significant predictors of their use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs during the 2008 presidential campaign (Table 5.13).

**RQ11** asked: To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign? To answer this research question, frequency of coverage for the presidential primary campaign and the general election campaign, each measured on a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (regularly), were entered as independent variables in a linear multiple regression model. Use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs was the dependent variable. The model was not significant [Adjusted  $R^2 = .01, F(2, 74) = 1.48, p = .24$ ]. The frequency with which campaign reporters covered the primary and general-election campaigns had no

Table 5.14

*Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs Through Frequency of 2008 Presidential Campaign Coverage (N = 77)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Primary Campaign	0.89	0.66	.21	1.34
General-Election Campaign	-0.09	0.73	-.02	-0.12

Adjusted  $R^2 = .01$

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

significant effect on their use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs during the 2008 presidential campaign (Table 5.14).

**H3** posited that need for orientation toward frames and need for orientation toward evaluations are stronger predictors of campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs than is need for orientation toward issues. To test the hypothesis, need for orientation toward frames and need for orientation toward issues were entered as independent variables in a linear multiple regression model. Need for orientation toward evaluations was not entered into the model because, as mentioned earlier, a Cronbach's *alpha* test found the scale to be unreliable. Use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs was the dependent variable. The hypothesis was not supported. The model was not significant [Adjusted  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(2, 75) = 1.69$ ,  $p = .19$ ]. Neither of the two dimensions of need for orientation was a significant predictor of journalists' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs (Table 5.15). However,

Table 5.15  
*Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs Through Need for Orientation Toward Issues and Toward Frames (N = 78)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Need for Orientation (Issues)	0.38	0.21	.26	1.84†
Need for Orientation (Frames)	-0.28	0.27	-.15	-1.07

Adjusted  $R^2 = .02$

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

need for orientation toward issues approached statistical significance [ $\beta = .26, t(75) = 1.84, p = .07$ ].

### *Conclusion*

The survey of campaign reporters and the hyperlink analysis of political blog posts yielded several noteworthy results. The most widely read political blogs among newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign were The Huffington Post, Politico.com's Ben Smith, and CNN's Political Ticker. Generally, campaign reporters favored neutral and liberal blogs over conservative blogs, regardless of whether they wrote about Republican or Democratic presidential candidates. Meanwhile, the most popular mainstream news sources that political bloggers consulted were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Des Moines Register*.

The variables that emerged as significant predictors of reporters' exposure to political blogs were whether they regularly covered the primary and general-election campaigns and whether they contributed to a blog on their news organizations' Websites.

The variables that emerged as significant predictors of reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs during the 2008 campaign were their years of journalism experience, whether they were based in Washington, D.C., and whether they contributed to a blog on their news organization's Website. Reporters who had low levels of journalism experience, who were based in Washington, D.C., and who currently contributed to a blog as part of their jobs were more likely to say that using political blogs helped satisfy their informational needs in reporting the 2008 campaign.

Although these findings supported the hypotheses about the effects of relevance and uncertainty on reporters' use of blogs as an information subsidy, a separate conceptualization of need for orientation as a three-dimensional construct found less support in the survey results. Neither need for orientation toward issues nor need for orientation toward frames was a significant predictor of reporters' use of blogs to satisfy informational needs, although need for orientation toward issues approached significance. The scale measuring the third dimension, need for orientation toward evaluations, was not reliable enough to permit testing.

## CHAPTER 6

### Method and Results: Content Analysis

This chapter explains how news articles, A-list political blog posts, and candidate press releases were sampled, coded, and analyzed to compare their issue and attribute agendas for the weeks preceding the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses. The statistical tests used to determine whether one medium's agendas appeared to be leading or following the agendas of the other media are described. Finally, several hypotheses and research questions regarding first- and second-level intermedia agenda setting are addressed.

#### *Content Analysis Methodology*

Content analysis has a long association with agenda-setting research, dating to the original Chapel Hill study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The method offers many advantages to the mass communication researcher because it is unobtrusive, context-sensitive, and can cope with large quantities of data (Krippendorff, 2004).

Definitions of content analysis vary (e.g., Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). The differences primarily center on whether its use should be confined to manifest content, which involves the denotative meaning assigned to texts, or whether latent content, which involves connotative meaning, also may be considered. Berelson (1952) advocated the former approach when he defined content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). In the same vein, Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005) said scientific objectivity dictates that the coding process be restricted to manifest

content and that latent meaning be considered only in the interpretation of research findings.

However, Krippendorff (2004) objected to making sharp distinctions between manifest and latent content. He declared that meaning is not inherent in a text; content acquires meaning only through interaction between the text and the individual. Because all content analysis necessarily involves some degree of inference, Krippendorff said the key is to limit inferences to those that are systematic, explicitly informed and verifiable. He defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18).

This study was guided by Krippendorff’s definition, recognizing the need to establish systematic procedures and reliable coding categories while also acknowledging that content analysis, particularly when coding for the framing of a political contest, inevitably involves some degree of human intervention and meaning-making.

### *Sampling*

Print news articles, A-list political blog posts, and candidate press releases were sampled for the four-week period before the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses (December 6, 2007-January 2, 2008). As explained in Chapter 4, this period is theoretically relevant because the agenda-setting literature indicates that the early stages of a presidential campaign, before the first primaries and caucuses have been held, are when opinions about the candidates are being formed, need for orientation tends to be high, and the potential for agenda-setting effects is greatest. A four-week period made it possible to test cross-lagged correlations between media at multiple one- and two-week time lags, rather than limiting the analysis to only two time periods, as is common in much agenda-setting

research (e.g., Robert & McCombs, 1994; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008). The sample was restricted to four weeks because an examination of news articles revealed that the volume of campaign coverage declined dramatically going back more than a month before the Iowa caucuses.

Press releases were sampled from the campaign Websites of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards, the three leading Democratic candidates according to public opinion polls before the Iowa caucuses (Beaumont, 2008). All three candidates maintained an archive of press releases. Releases from the four-week period were downloaded using HTTrack Website Copier software, which ensured that the releases would be available for offline reading even if the candidates' sites were later modified or deleted. The sample consisted of 257 press releases. Clinton had the most releases during the four-week period (155), followed by Edwards (55), and Obama (47).

A-list blog posts were collected from campaign reporters' three most widely read neutral political blogs (Ben Smith of Politico.com, CNN's Political Ticker, and Jake Tapper's Political Punch), three most widely read liberal political blogs (The Huffington Post, Talking Points Memo, and Daily Kos), and three most widely read conservative political blogs (*National Review Online's* The Corner, Michelle Malkin, and Power Line), as determined by the results of the survey of reporters. The sampling process for identifying blog posts was discussed in Chapter 5 and outlined in Table 5.7. The sample consisted of 880 posts. Neutral blogs had the most posts overall (395), followed by the liberal blogs (350) and conservative blogs (135).

News articles were sampled from the three newspapers that received the most hyperlinks in the blog sample: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Des*

*Moines Register*. The news sample also included articles from The Associated Press because the wire service's campaign stories are published extensively in newspapers throughout the country (Crouse, 1973; Just et al., 1996; Perez-Pena, 2008). The Associated Press would not have shown up in the hyperlink analysis because its articles typically would be accessed via the Websites of other news organizations rather than via the Associated Press site directly.

The Lexis-Nexis database was used to locate campaign-related articles from the four news sources during the four-week period. Similar to the search process used to draw the sample of reporters for the survey, articles were considered campaign-related if they contained the word "campaign" anywhere in the body of the article and the last name of one or more of the top three Democratic candidates in the headline or lead paragraph. All editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor, plus any news stories in which the presidential campaign was not a major focus, were discarded. The sample consisted of 280 articles. The Associated Press had the most articles (124), followed by *The Des Moines Register* (53), *The New York Times* (52), and *The Washington Post* (51).

#### *Coding Categories*

Coding categories for issues and attributes were created to meet the criteria of mutual exclusivity, meaning that a unit of analysis can be placed in only one category; exhaustiveness, meaning there must be a category into which every unit can be placed; and reliability, meaning that multiple coders must reach acceptable levels of agreement, as determined by statistical tests that account for agreement by chance (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Development of coding categories combined inductive and deductive approaches, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. The deductive researcher typically derives categories from the existing literature, which makes it easier to replicate the study and compare its results with previous research. But the approach may fail to identify emerging categories (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). For example, the Iraq War was a huge issue in the 2008 Democratic primary campaign but would go undetected if the researcher were using issue categories developed in studies prior to 2003.

The inductive researcher is sensitive to the evolving nature of mass communication and allows categories to emerge naturally from the texts, but this approach can become too subjective if the researcher ends up finding only those categories he or she was consciously or unconsciously looking for (Tankard, 2003).

To generate issue and candidate attribute categories, the researcher and a second coder, a journalism doctoral student, reviewed lists of issues and attributes from previous studies of agenda setting in presidential campaigns (Golan, Kioussis & McDaniel, 2007; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Kioussis & Shields, 2008) but treated the lists only as suggestions. The previous studies generally focused on a dozen or fewer issues and attributes. For example, Golan and Wanta (2001) examined eight issues (taxes, reform, campaign analysis, foreign policy, moral issues, education, the candidate's past, and race) and nine attributes (trust, reformer, leadership, patriotism, compassion, winner/electable, on the attack, has a plan/vision, and vagueness) in their study of the 2000 New Hampshire Republican primary.

Both coders examined a small subset of the news article, blog post, and press release samples. In accordance with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant-comparative

method, categories emerged by comparing each item to all previous items to determine whether it fit into existing categories or required the creation of a new category. This process continued until the categories became saturated and the coders were satisfied that no new categories were needed. The coders then compared the categories they had identified and mutually decided on a list of 12 issues and 12 attributes.

The 12 issues were Iraq; health care; economy and jobs; energy and gas prices; education; agriculture and rural issues; housing; government ethics; terrorism and national security; foreign policy; families; and equality and civil rights. The 12 attributes were populism/elitism; experience/inexperience; change/status quo; electability/unelectability; honesty/dishonesty; positivity/negativity; leadership/lack of leadership; unity/division; likability/unlikability; fighter/coward; charisma/lack of charisma; and personal background.

A codebook contained descriptions of each issue and attribute, as well as coding instructions (Appendix 5). It was expected that the interpretive nature of attributes would make them more difficult than issues to code reliably. Because the presence of keywords, stock phrases, and metaphors can signify the presence of frames in a text (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), the codebook included examples of these devices to assist coders. For example, coders were told that references to a candidate wanting to “turn the page” or end “politics as usual” should be coded as “change/status quo.”

### *Unitizing*

Krippendorff (2004) advised content analysts to become familiar with a data source’s natural “grammar” when defining coding and context units (p. 104). In the case of blogs, the post is the natural coding unit because it is the very structure that defines a

blog. Perlmutter (2008) explained that “the flagship of blogging, the essential physical element of the blog, is the short- to medium-length essay, the post” (p. 16). Agenda-setting researchers who have analyzed blogs typically have used the post as the unit of analysis (e.g., Meraz, 2009; Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008; Wallsten, 2007).

For news articles, the coding unit was the article, and for press releases, the release. Again, this unitization is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Kioussis & Shields, 2008; Tedesco, 2001, 2005a, 2005b). Pan and Kosicki (1993) found that coding units such as sentences generally are too small for purposes of political communication research and may not sufficiently emphasize the overall context of an article. Because this study examines rank-order correlations of issues and attributes, rather than interval or ratio data, counting the number of news articles and press releases that mentioned a particular issue or attribute provided sufficient measurement precision.

Some blog posts and press releases contained hyperlinks or embedded videos. Coders were instructed to click the links or view the videos only if it was necessary to understand the meaning of the item and establish the context. Coding decisions, however, were based on the text of the item itself, not on any secondary elements.

Many items mentioned multiple issues and attributes. Therefore, consistent with previous research (e.g., Kioussis & Shields, 2008), each item was coded for the presence or absence of each individual issue and attribute anywhere within the body of the item. Theoretically, a unit could be coded as containing all 12 issues and all 12 attributes.

#### *Intercoder Reliability*

As recommended by Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2002), intercoder reliability was assessed through an informal process, followed by a formal test. Both

coders familiarized themselves with the coding categories during a training session and resolved disputes. As part of this informal process, both coders independently coded several items to determine whether sufficient reliability could be attained. The coders were unable to reach consistent agreement on two issue categories (families and agriculture/rural issues) and two attribute categories (elitism/populism and personal background). None of these four categories appeared with great frequency in the sample, so they were dropped from the analysis.

The informal process also revealed that it would be too difficult and time-consuming to link each attribute to a specific candidate, as was originally planned. In many of the items, attributes were mentioned without reference to a specific candidate (e.g., “Change has become the rallying cry for the Democrats.”) or the reference was veiled. Therefore, coders only decided whether each attribute was present or absent within the body of the item, following the same process as in the issue coding. The categories were treated not as micro attributes linked to one candidate but as macro attributes that framed not only the candidates but a larger object—the race itself.

Because studies have found more support for cognitive attribute agenda setting than for affective attribute agenda setting in the context of political campaigns (e.g., Golan & Wanta, 2001), the content analysis was confined to the cognitive dimension. For example, an item would be placed in the “experience/inexperience” category whether it praised a candidate’s political experience or criticized the candidate’s lack of political experience. Coders did not evaluate whether the attributes were positive or negative.

Once the coders were confident that sufficient reliability had been achieved through the informal process, a formal test was conducted. Both coders independently

coded 11% of the overall sample, following the general recommendation that a formal reliability test contain at least 10% of the full sample (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002). Items for the formal test were randomly drawn from each sample subset: 97 blog posts, 28 candidate press releases, and 31 news articles, for a total of 156 units.

Cohen's *kappa* (Cohen, 1960), which accounts for agreement by chance, was used to calculate intercoder reliability. *Kappa* values of .81 and above indicate almost perfect agreement, and values of .61 to .80 indicate substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977, p. 165). In coding for issues, the coders agreed on 1,520 out of 1,560 decisions, for 97.4% agreement and a *kappa* of .88. Broken down by medium, *kappa* values for issue coding were .86 for news articles, .87 for candidate press releases, and .88 for blog posts. By individual issue, values ranged from .70 for equality/civil rights to .94 for Iraq.

In coding for attributes, coders agreed on 1,491 out of 1,560 decisions, for 95.6% agreement and a *kappa* value of .77. Broken down by medium, *kappa* values for attribute coding were .74 for news articles, .78 for candidate press releases, and .77 for blog posts. By individual attribute, values ranged from .66 for unity/division and likability/unlikability to .86 for positivity/negativity.

#### *Correlational Analysis*

Spearman rank-order correlations between the various agendas were computed to answer the remaining hypotheses and research questions. The nonparametric statistic is appropriate for ordinal measurements and small sample sizes (Williams & Monge, 2001). For cross-lagged correlations, in which the agenda of one medium at one time was compared with the agenda of another medium at a different time, the Spearman rank-order correlation was considered as part of an overall matrix of correlations.

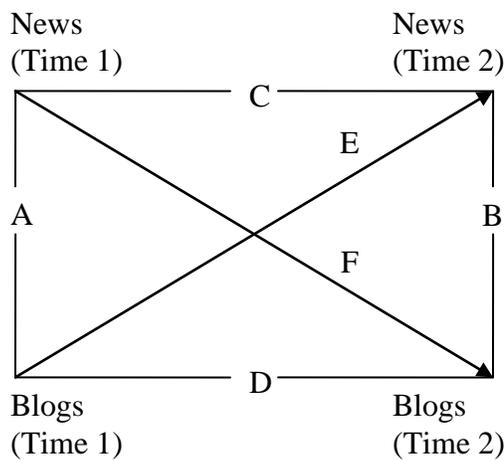
Causation can be established only through experiments in which subjects are randomly assigned to treatment conditions. Experiments have been used, for example, to study the influence of television news on the public agenda by manipulating the content of news reports and having subjects view newscasts in a controlled environment (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). But experiments are not always feasible in studies of intermedia agenda setting, where the focus is not on public opinion but on media workers' output.

Cross-lagged correlations allow researchers to make inferences about the direction of agenda setting (e.g., Ku et al., 2003; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008; Tedesco, 2001, 2005a, 2005b). Cross-lagged panel correlation is "a technique for assessing causality and causal direction from passive, observational data which is longitudinal in form" (Locascio, 1982, p. 1024). The quasi-experimental method has been used more commonly in fields such as psychology and education in situations where experiments are impossible or impractical. In a cross-lagged panel design, at least two variables are measured simultaneously at two or more points in time, and the presence or absence of a causal process is inferred by comparing the cross-lagged correlations (Kenny & Harackiewicz, 1979).

The basic design is illustrated in Figure 6.1, in which news and blog agendas are hypothetically measured at Time 1 and Time 2, resulting in a matrix of six correlations. A and B, indicated by vertical lines, are the synchronous correlations, comparing the news and blog agendas at Time 1, and the news and blog agendas at Time 2. C and D, indicated by horizontal lines, are the autocorrelations, comparing each medium's agenda at Time 1 with its agenda at Time 2. E and F, represented by diagonal lines, are the cross-lagged correlations, comparing the agenda of one medium at Time 1 with the agenda of

the other medium at Time 2. The cross-lagged correlations are of greatest interest to the researcher because they suggest whether, as in this example, bloggers appear to be driving the news agenda (if correlation E leading from blogs to news is statistically significant but correlation F leading from news to blogs is not) or the news media appear to be driving the blog agenda (if correlation F is significant but correlation E is not). Cross-lagged correlations allow the researcher to simultaneously test the twin hypotheses that X causes Y and that Y causes X (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998).

Figure 6.1  
*Cross-Lagged Correlational Analysis*



A and B = synchronous correlations  
 C and D = autocorrelations  
 E and F = cross-lagged correlations

However, interpreting the results is not as simple as determining which of the two cross-lagged correlations is greater. As with more complex time-series designs, several conditions must be met and adjustments made to increase the likelihood that the cross-lagged correlations are not spurious.

First, there must be synchronicity, which requires that both variables be measured at the same points in time (Kenny, 1975). This can be a problem in surveys that ask respondents to engage in retrospection, but it is not a problem in this study because blogs, news articles, and candidate press releases all were gathered from the same set of dates.

Next, the synchronous correlations must be examined for evidence of the model's stability. The synchronous correlations (A and B) should be .30 or greater and should not differ significantly from Time 1 to Time 2 (Kenny & Harackiewicz, 1979). If the synchronous correlations are too weak or vary significantly between the two times, the cross-lagged correlations are likely spurious (Pelz & Andrews, 1964). A modified Pearson-Filon statistic (*ZPF*), appropriate for comparing correlated but nonoverlapping correlation coefficients, is used to determine whether the synchronous correlations are significantly different (Raghunathan, Rosenthal & Rubin, 1996). The statistic tests the null hypothesis that the two correlations are equal. Nonsignificance indicates no significant differences between the synchronous correlations, suggesting a stable model.

If the synchronous correlations are not significantly different, the cross-lagged correlations (E and F) also should not differ significantly, unless a causal process is at work. However, the cross-lagged correlation coefficients may be inflated by the presence of autocorrelation. In the hypothetical example, bloggers may maintain a fairly consistent agenda over time. One of the best predictors of the blog agenda at Time 2 would be the blog agenda at Time 1. Thus, although a significant cross-lagged F correlation in Figure 6.1 would seem to suggest that the news agenda at Time 1 had an effect on the blog agenda at Time 2, the value might be artificially large because the blog agenda at Time 2 is also being influenced by the blog agenda at Time 1 (the autocorrelation indicated by

D). Fortunately, the influence of autocorrelation can be removed through partial correlation. As Shingles (1985) explained:

The use of the first-order partial correlation to correct for confounding influences when comparing changes in one variable over time with the prior state of another for the purpose of making causal inferences is well established in the literature on experimentation and change measurement. The technique, therefore, proves ideally suited for CLPA [cross-lagged panel analysis]. (p. 233)

In the hypothetical example, the blog agenda at Time 1 could be partialled out, freeing correlation F from the constraints of autocorrelation. Agenda-setting researchers have commonly used partial correlations to control for autocorrelation in cross-lagged designs (e.g., Ku et al., 2003; Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

In addition to autocorrelation, other variables may be acting upon the two variables being directly observed, affecting the cross-lagged correlations. To the extent they can be identified, these variables also can be partialled out. In the hypothetical example, bloggers and journalists both might be influenced by the agenda of the candidates. A second-order partial Spearman correlation could be calculated between the news agenda at Time 1 and the blog agenda at Time 2, controlling for the blog agenda at Time 1 (autocorrelation) and the candidate agenda at Time 1.

A final consideration is the time lag between observation points. The researcher must select an appropriate time interval for measurement. Shingles (1985) noted that it is safer to select a time interval that is too long than to choose an interval that ends before a causal process has had time to operate. For this study, one-week and two-week time lags are examined. Although agenda-setting might occur within a matter of days via the Internet (e.g., Wallsten, 2007), Roberts et al. (2002) found the strongest correlations at Day 7 in a study comparing news coverage and online discussion. Furthermore, a time

period of at least several days was needed to compile enough content to construct a rank-ordered agenda for each medium.

Once an appropriate time lag has been selected, synchronicity established, the stability of the synchronous correlations confirmed, and autocorrelation and other variables controlled through partial correlation, cross-lagged correlations can be compared. Shingles (1985) advised that standard significance tests be used. Thus, if one of the cross-lagged correlations is statistically significant (after other influences have been partialled out) but the other is not, a causal effect is inferred. If both cross-lagged correlations are significant, the effect is reciprocal.

Cross-lagged correlation analysis can never rule out the possible influence of other unidentified variables. But it can establish that certain causal explanations are more plausible than others. This plausibility is strengthened by the use of multiple-wave designs, in which variables are measured at several points in time (Kenny & Harackiewicz, 1979; Shingles, 1985). In this study, analyzing news stories, blog posts, and candidate press releases from a four-week period made it possible to compute cross-correlations at three one-week intervals (between Weeks 1 and 2, Weeks 2 and 3, and Weeks 3 and 4) and two two-week intervals (between Weeks 1 and 3 and Weeks 2 and 4), meaning that each hypothesis was tested five times. Significant correlations were then mapped to identify plausible agenda-setting patterns.

### *Results*

In this section, the issue and attribute agendas of the various media are examined, and hypotheses and research questions concerning intermedia agenda setting at the first and second levels are addressed.

### *First-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting*

Consistent with previous research finding uniformity among news outlets (Breed, 1955; Crouse, 1973; Noelle-Neumann & Mathes, 1987; Shaw & Sparrow 1999; Yu & Aikat, 2005), the issue agendas of the four print news sources during the four-week period were highly correlated. Spearman rank-order correlations ranged from .70 to .95 (Table 6.1). In three of the four news outlets (The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, and *The Des Moines Register*), health care was the issue addressed with greatest frequency. In the fourth (*The Washington Post*), Iraq ranked as the top issue.

The neutral, liberal, and conservative blog networks' issue agendas for the overall four-week period, as determined by the frequency of posts, were all significantly correlated. The Spearman rank-order correlations were .64 ( $df = 8, p < .05$ ) between the conservative and neutral blogs, .75 ( $df = 8, p < .05$ ) between the liberal and conservative blogs, and .88 ( $df = 8, p < .01$ ) between the neutral and liberal blogs (Table 6.2). Health care was the top-ranked issue in the neutral blogs, Iraq was the top-ranked issue in the liberal blogs, and foreign policy was the top-ranked issue in the conservative blogs. Foreign policy ranked highly in all three blog networks, much higher than it did in the news issue agendas.

A review of the issue agendas of each of the three major Democratic candidates for the overall four-week period, as determined by the candidates' press releases, finds that the issue agendas of Clinton and Obama were significantly correlated ( $r_s = .75, df = 8, p < .05$ ), but that Edwards' issue agenda was not significantly correlated with either of the other two candidates' agendas (Table 6.3). Health care was the dominant issue for

Table 6.1  
*Print Media Issue Agendas by Number of Articles and Rank*

	Associated Press	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Des Moines Register</i>
<b>Issues</b>				
Iraq	26 (4)	12 (2)	17 (1)	11 (4)
Health care	38 (1)	14 (1)	16 (2)	18 (1)
Economy/jobs	30 (3)	12 (2)	13 (3)	12 (2)
Energy/gas prices	12 (7)	5 (6)	5 (9)	5 (5)
Education	10 (8)	3 (9)	7 (5)	2 (8)
Housing	3 (10)	0 (10)	2 (10)	2 (8)
Government ethics	33 (2)	11 (4)	11 (4)	12 (2)
Terror/Natl. security	17 (5)	4 (7)	6 (6)	3 (7)
Foreign policy	16 (6)	7 (5)	6 (6)	5 (5)
Equality/civil rights	4 (9)	4 (7)	6 (6)	2 (8)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>				
Associated Press	—	.89**	.78**	.95**
<i>New York Times</i>		—	.80**	.95**
<i>Washington Post</i>			—	.70*
<i>Des Moines Register</i>				—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.2  
*A-List Political Blog Issue Agendas by Number of Posts and Rank*

	Neutral	Liberal	Conservative
<b>Issues</b>			
Iraq	29 (4)	76 (1)	5 (4)
Health care	52 (1)	66 (3)	6 (3)
Economy/jobs	21 (5)	29 (5)	4 (6)
Energy/gas prices	5 (9)	15 (8)	1 (8)
Education	9 (7)	13 (9)	0 (9)
Housing	3 (10)	2 (10)	0 (9)
Government ethics	38 (2)	34 (4)	3 (7)
Terror/Natl. security	20 (6)	29 (5)	12 (2)
Foreign policy	38 (2)	72 (2)	15 (1)
Equality/civil rights	9 (7)	17 (7)	5 (4)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
Neutral	—	.88**	.64*
Liberal		—	.75*
Conservative			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.3  
*Candidate Issue Agendas by Number of Press Releases and Rank*

	Clinton	Obama	Edwards
<b>Issues</b>			
Iraq	40 (2)	17 (1)	5 (7)
Health care	81 (1)	13 (2)	25 (3)
Economy/jobs	30 (3)	13 (2)	29 (2)
Energy/gas prices	24 (5)	8 (7)	12 (4)
Education	29 (4)	11 (4)	12 (4)
Housing	12 (8)	5 (10)	10 (6)
Government ethics	3 (10)	11 (4)	31 (1)
Terror/Natl. security	9 (9)	4 (8)	2 (9)
Foreign policy	21 (6)	10 (6)	2 (9)
Equality/civil rights	17 (7)	5 (8)	3 (8)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
Clinton	—	.75*	.21
Obama		—	.55
Edwards			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Clinton, and it was mentioned in more than twice as many Clinton press releases as the second-ranked issue of Iraq. Iraq was the top-ranked issue for Obama, and government ethics was the top-ranked issue for Edwards.

Table 6.4 presents the aggregate issue agendas of the print news media, A-list political blogs, and candidates for the overall four-week period. Here, the totals for each of the four news outlets, for each of the nine blogs, and for each of the three candidates were summed to create an aggregate news issue agenda, an aggregate blog issue agenda, and an aggregate candidate issue agenda. Overall, health care was the top issue in both the news articles and the candidate press releases. Foreign policy was the top issue in the blog posts.

**H4** predicted that the issue agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the issue agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign. The hypothesis was supported. The news issue agenda had a significant positive correlation with the issue agendas of the candidates ( $r_s = .71, df = 8, p < .05$ ) and the top political blogs ( $r_s = .75, df = 8, p < .05$ ) during the four-week period (Table 6.4).

**RQ12** asked: To what extent was the issue agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the issue agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign? The correlation between the issue agendas of the top political blogs and the candidates ( $r_s = .32$ ) was not statistically significant (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4  
*Aggregate News, Blog, and Candidate Issue Agendas by Number of Items and Rank*

	News	Blogs	Candidates
<b>Issues</b>			
Iraq	66 (4)	110 (3)	62 (3)
Health care	86 (1)	124 (2)	119 (1)
Economy/jobs	67 (2)	54 (6)	72 (2)
Energy/gas prices	27 (7)	21 (9)	44 (6)
Education	22 (8)	22 (8)	52 (4)
Housing	7 (10)	5 (10)	27 (8)
Government ethics	67 (2)	75 (4)	45 (5)
Terror/Natl. security	30 (6)	61 (5)	15 (10)
Foreign policy	34 (5)	125 (1)	33 (7)
Equality/civil rights	16 (9)	31 (7)	25 (9)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
News	—	.75*	.71*
Blogs		—	.32
Candidates			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

To address the next set of hypotheses and research questions regarding first-level intermedia agenda setting, the aggregate issue agendas of the print news media, the A-list political blogs, and the candidates were compared at one- and two-week time lags through cross-lagged correlational analysis.

**H5** predicted that time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas are stronger leading from the print news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction. Table 6.5 reports the full matrix of correlations, including the synchronous correlations, autocorrelations, and first- and second-order partial lagged correlations. Correlations are reported at three one-week time lags and two two-week time lags. The final two columns of numbers, containing the second-order partial lagged correlations, are used to test the hypothesis because they indicate whether the correlations leading from the news media to political blogs, or in the reverse direction, are stronger when controlling for autocorrelation and the influence of a third variable: the candidates' issue agenda.

For example, in the first row of numbers, agendas for Weeks 1 and 2 are compared. The synchronous correlations between the news and blog agendas of .49 at Week 1 and .67 at Week 2 are not significantly different, as indicated by the non-significant modified Pearson-Filon statistic (*ZPF*). Thus, the criterion of stability is met. The autocorrelations of .50 for news and .77 for blogs are controlled for via first-order partial correlations, which are calculated for the one-week lag. The first-order partial correlation between the news agenda at Week 1 and the blog agenda at Week 2, controlling for the influence of the blog agenda at Week 1, is .12. The first-order partial correlation between the blog agenda at Week 1 and the news agenda at Week 2, controlling for the news agenda at Week 1, is .24. Second-order partial correlations

control for autocorrelation and the other main variable in the agenda-setting process, the candidates' issue agenda at Week 1. The resulting correlations are .17 leading from news at Week 1 to blogs at Week 2, and -.04 leading from blogs at Week 1 to news at Week 2, neither of which is significant. This process was followed for each time lag in this analysis and those that follow. By comparing second-order partial correlations for each of the five time lags, plausible agenda-setting patterns were identified.

**H5** was supported. Time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas were stronger leading from the print news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction. Only two significant second-order partial correlations were found, and both led from the news media to bloggers: correlations of .73 between the news media at Week 2 and blogs at Week 3, and .75 between the news media at Week 2 and blogs at Week 4.

**RQ13** asked: Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction? No evidence was found that the correlations were stronger leading in one direction than the other (Table 6.6). None of the second-order partial lagged correlations, which controlled for autocorrelation and the blog issue agenda, was significant. Only one approached significance: a correlation of .66 between news at Week 2 and the candidates at Week 4 ( $p < .10$ ). Thus, no evidence of significant first-level intermedia agenda setting between the print news media and the candidates was found.

**RQ14** asked: Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction? No evidence was found that the correlations were stronger leading in one direction than in the other

Table 6.5  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	News X Blogs X	News Y Blogs Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Blogs X Blogs Y	News X Blogs Y	Blogs X News Y	News X Blogs Y	Blogs X News Y
Week 1	Week 2	.49	.67*	-0.61	.50	.77**	.12	.24	.17	-.04
Week 2	Week 3	.67*	.81**	-0.93	.90**	.83**	.40	.32	.73*	.13
Week 3	Week 4	.81**	.82**	-0.07	.83**	.98**	-.06	.46	.18	.52
Week 1	Week 3	.49	.81**	-1.25	.54	.65*	.11	.53	.18	.31
Week 2	Week 4	.67*	.82**	-1.01	.92**	.86**	.37	.54	.75*	.32

*Note.* The above results suggest that time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas were stronger leading from the news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction, as indicated by the presence of two statistically significant second-order partial lagged correlations: .73 from News at Week 2 to Blogs at Week 3, and .75 from News at Week 2 to Blogs at Week 4.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation) and the candidate issue agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.6  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Candidate Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	News X Cand. X	News Y Cand. Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Cand. X Cand. Y	News X Cand. Y	Cand. X News Y	News X Cand. Y	Cand. X News Y
Week 1	Week 2	.54	.60†	-0.18	.50	.60†	.09	.37	.24	.28
Week 2	Week 3	.60†	.73*	-0.76	.90**	.83**	.66†	-.41	.20	-.31
Week 3	Week 4	.73*	.88**	-1.48	.83**	.85**	.37	.09	-.23	.28
Week 1	Week 3	.54	.73*	-0.73	.54	.84**	.13	.47	.20	.15
Week 2	Week 4	.60†	.88**	-1.63	.92**	.65*	.88**	-.59	.66†	-.43

*Note.* Because none of the second-order partial lagged correlations was significant, the above results indicate no evidence of issue agenda setting between the news media and the candidates.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation) and the blog issue agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.7  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Candidate and Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	Cand. X Blogs X	Cand. Y Blogs Y	ZPF	Cand. X Cand. Y	Blogs X Blogs Y	Cand. X Blogs Y	Blogs X Cand. Y	Cand. X Blogs Y	Blogs X Cand. Y
Week 1	Week 2	.80**	.08	2.71*						
Week 2	Week 3	.08	.46	-1.30	.83**	.83**	-.13	.74*	-.67†	.48
Week 3	Week 4	.46	.65*	-1.18	.85**	.98**	-.28	.62†	-.33	.57
Week 1	Week 3	.80**	.46	1.78†	.84**	.65*	-.21	-.43	-.26	-.45
Week 2	Week 4	.08	.65*	-1.77†	.65*	.86**	-.18	.85**	-.71*	.56

*Note.* Because the only statistically significant second-order partial correlation is negative (-.71 leading from Candidates at Week 2 to Blogs at Week 4), the above results indicate no evidence of issue agenda setting between the candidates and the political blogs.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable (autocorrelation) and the news issue agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

(Table 6.7). The second-order partial correlations, which controlled for autocorrelation and the news media issue agenda, generally were larger leading from blogs to candidates, but none reached statistical significance. Interestingly, all of the second-order partial correlations leading from the candidates to blogs were negative, including a statistically significant  $-.71$  between the candidates' issue agenda at Week 2 and the blogs' issue agenda at Week 4. Lagged correlations between Week 1 and Week 2 were not computed because the synchronous correlations were not stable, as indicated by the significant *ZPF* statistic.

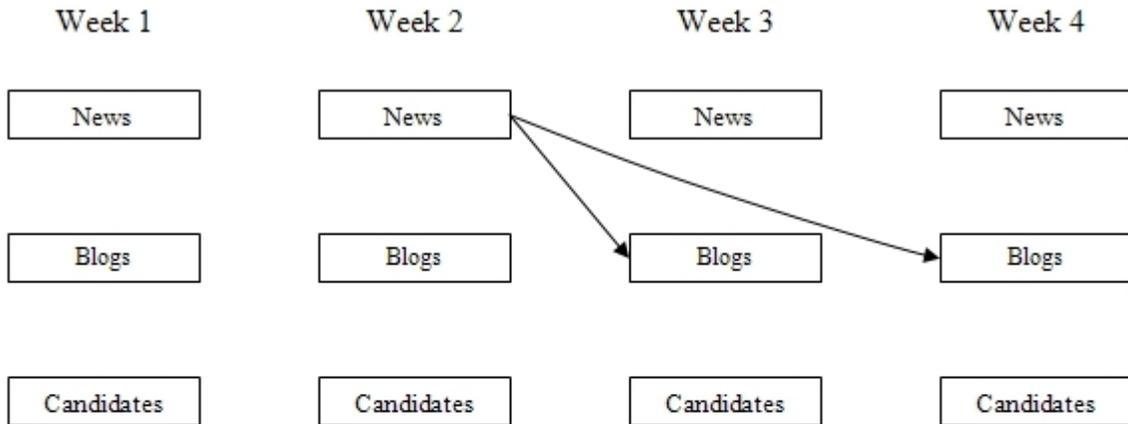
The statistically significant positive time-lagged correlations identified in response to **H5**, **RQ13**, and **RQ14** are plotted in Figure 6.2 for an overall picture of aggregate first-level intermedia agenda setting. The only evidence of agenda setting was between the news media and the A-list political blogs. The news media appeared to be the leaders and bloggers, the followers. The news media's issue agenda during Week 2 was positively correlated with the blogs' issue agenda at both Weeks 3 and 4.

To develop a fuller picture of first-level intermedia agenda setting, partisan blog networks (neutral, liberal, and conservative) and individual candidates (Clinton, Obama, and Edwards) were considered separately. Patterns were identified that might be masked by studying the blog and candidate issue agendas only in aggregate form.

**RQ15** asked: What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)?

**RQ16** asked: What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?

Figure 6.2  
*First-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting Among News Media, A-List Political Blogs, and Candidates*



Arrows indicate statistically significant positive Spearman second-order partial correlations between issue agendas ( $p < .05$ )

Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007      Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007  
 Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007      Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008

Examining every possible relationship among the blog networks, the candidates, and the news media in order to answer these two research questions would have required performing nearly two dozen cross-lagged correlational analyses. To make the task more manageable, analyses were performed only for media pairs that had significant zero-order correlations for the four-week period as a whole. If the overall issue agendas of two media were not significantly correlated, it was assumed that first-level agenda setting was unlikely to have occurred between the two media during individual weeks.

Table 6.8 reports the zero-order Spearman rank-order correlations among the issue agendas of the news media, the three blog networks, and the three candidates for the overall four-week period. Seven of the 21 correlations were significant: news and neutral

blogs ( $r_s = .88, df = 8, p < .01$ ), news and liberal blogs ( $r_s = .76, df = 8, p < .05$ ), neutral and liberal blogs ( $r_s = .88, df = 8, p < .01$ ), neutral and conservative blogs ( $r_s = .64, df = 8, p < .05$ ), liberal and conservative blogs ( $r_s = .75, df = 8, p < .05$ ), Obama and news ( $r_s = .71, df = 8, p < .05$ ), and Clinton and Obama ( $r_s = .75, df = 8, p < .05$ ).

Cross-lagged correlational analyses were performed for these seven pairs to answer **RQ15** and **RQ16**. First-order partial Spearman lagged correlations controlled for autocorrelation. Higher-order Spearman lagged correlations controlled for autocorrelation plus all of the other variables that significantly correlated with the dependent variable, as identified in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8  
*Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Issue Agendas of News, Partisan Blog Networks, and Individual Candidates*

	News	Neutral Blogs	Liberal Blogs	Conserv. Blogs	Clinton	Obama	Edwards
News	—	.88**	.76*	.43	.40	.71*	.49
Neutral Blogs		—	.88**	.64*	.28	.59†	.20
Liberal Blogs			—	.75*	.31	.56†	-.10
Conserv. Blogs				—	.09	-.00	-.53
Clinton					—	.75*	.21
Obama						—	.55
Edwards							—

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

News and liberal blogs: Results of the cross-lagged correlational analysis for the issue agendas of news and liberal blogs are reported in Table 6.9. The higher-order partial Spearman correlation between the news issue agenda at Time X and the neutral blog issue agenda at Time Y was calculated by partialing out the influence of neutral blogs at Time X (autocorrelation), as well as the influence of liberal blogs and conservative blogs at Time X because both liberal blogs and conservative blogs were found to be significantly correlated with neutral blogs in Table 6.8. The higher-order partial correlation between the neutral blog issue agenda at Time X and the news issue agenda at Time Y was calculated by partialing out the influence of the news media at Time X (autocorrelation), plus the other two influences on the news issue agenda: liberal blogs and Obama at Time X. Only one of the higher-order partial Spearman correlations between the news media and liberal blogs at the various time lags was significant and positive: a correlation of .81 between news at Week 2 and neutral blogs at Week 3.

News and liberal blogs: The higher-order partial Spearman correlations (Table 6.10) revealed that the issue agenda of the liberal blogs at Week 1 significantly correlated with the news agenda at Weeks 2 (.88) and 3 (.88). No significant correlations led in the opposite direction.

Neutral and liberal blogs: Two significant higher-order partial correlations were found, leading in opposite directions: correlations of .94 from neutral blogs at Week 3 to liberal blogs at Week 4, and .76 from liberal blogs at Week 1 to neutral blogs at Week 3 (Table 6.11).

Table 6.9  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Neutral Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	News X Neutral X	News Y Neutral Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Neutral X Neutral Y	News X Neutral Y	Neutral X News Y	News X Neutral Y <sup>c</sup>	Neutral X News Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.43	.82**	-1.36	.50	.33	.43	-.28	-.00	-.83*
Week 2	Week 3	.82**	.83**	-0.11	.90**	.76*	.61†	.51	.81*	.37
Week 3	Week 4	.83**	.81**	0.18	.83**	.78*	.09	.79*	.07	.73†
Week 1	Week 3	.43	.83**	-1.40	.54	.03	.62†	-.05	.42	-.71†
Week 2	Week 4	.82**	.81**	0.08	.92**	.62†	.23	.31	.14	.11

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of issue agenda setting between the news media and neutral political blogs, as indicated by a statistically significant positive higher-order partial correlation of .81 between News at Week 2 and Neutral Blogs at Week 3.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Neutral Blogs (autocorrelation), Liberal Blogs, and Conservative Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Liberal Blogs, and Obama at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.10  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Liberal Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	News X Liberal X	News Y Liberal Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Liberal X Liberal Y	News X Liberal Y	Liberal X News Y	News X Liberal Y <sup>c</sup>	Liberal X News Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.57†	.51	0.19	.50	.76*	.07	.45	.60	.88*
Week 2	Week 3	.51	.74*	-1.06	.90**	.73*	.42	.34	.46	.11
Week 3	Week 4	.74*	.88**	-1.16	.83**	.93**	.54	.42	-.03	-.04
Week 1	Week 3	.57†	.74*	-0.60	.54	.64*	.04	.68*	.46	.88*
Week 2	Week 4	.51	.88**	-2.63**						

*Note.* The above results suggest that time-lagged correlations were stronger leading from liberal blogs to the news media than in the reverse direction, as indicated by significant higher-order partial correlations of .88 from Liberal Blogs at Week 1 to News at both Week 2 and Week 3.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Conservative Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Obama at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.11  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Neutral and Liberal Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Neutral X Liberal X	Neutral Y Liberal Y	ZPF	Neutral X Neutral Y	Liberal X Liberal Y	Neutral X Liberal Y	Liberal X Neutral Y	Neutral X Liberal Y <sup>c</sup>	Liberal X Neutral Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.53	.72*	-0.63	.33	.76*	.04	.81**	-.43	.75†
Week 2	Week 3	.72*	.87**	-1.10	.76*	.73*	.07	.44	-.31	.72†
Week 3	Week 4	.87**	.78**	0.83	.78**	.93**	.91**	.59†	.94**	.52
Week 1	Week 3	.53	.87**	-1.37	.03	.64*	-.38	.85**	-.58	.76*
Week 2	Week 4	.72*	.78**	-0.33	.62	.84**	.38	.28	-.47	-.01

*Note.* The above results suggest no clear pattern of issue agenda setting between neutral and liberal blogs because the two significant higher-order partial correlations lead in opposite directions.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), Conservative Blogs, and News at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Neutral Blogs (autocorrelation), Conservative Blogs, and News at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.12  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Neutral and Conservative Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Neutral X Cons. X	Neutral Y Cons. Y	ZPF	Neutral X Neutral Y	Cons. X Cons. Y	Neutral X Cons. Y	Cons. X Neutral Y	Neutral X Cons. Y <sup>c</sup>	Cons. X Neutral Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.34	.44	-0.23	.33	.32	.30	-.12	.15	-.11
Week 2	Week 3	.44	-.00	1.27	.76*	.72*	-.22	.35	-.30	-.32
Week 3	Week 4	-.00	.74*	-2.21*						
Week 1	Week 3	.34	-.00	0.63	.03	.48	.67*	-.19	.72*	.12
Week 2	Week 4	.44	.74*	-1.16	.62	.81**	.34	.55	.18	.43

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of issue agenda setting between neutral and conservative blogs, as indicated by a significant higher-order partial correlation of .72 between Neutral Blogs at Week 1 and Conservative Blogs at Week 3.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Conservative Blogs (autocorrelation) and Liberal Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Neutral Blogs (autocorrelation), Liberal Blogs, and News at Time X.

†*p* < .10 \**p* < .05 \*\**p* < .01

Table 6.13  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Liberal and Conservative Blog Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Liberal X Cons. X	Liberal Y Cons. Y	ZPF	Liberal X Liberal Y	Cons. X Cons. Y	Liberal X Cons. Y	Cons. X Liberal Y	Liberal X Cons. Y <sup>c</sup>	Cons. X Liberal Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.16	.69*	-1.41	.76*	.32	.35	.36	.24	.66
Week 2	Week 3	.69*	.18	1.66†	.73*	.72*	.02	.45	.21	.32
Week 3	Week 4	.18	.76*	-1.79†	.93**	.45	.89**	-.02	.77*	.72†
Week 1	Week 3	.16	.18	-0.05	.64*	.48	.10	.07	-.38	.49
Week 2	Week 4	.69*	.76*	-0.42	.84**	.81**	.33	.22	.15	-.05

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of issue agenda setting between the liberal and conservative blogs, as indicated by a significant higher-order partial correlation of .77 between Liberal Blogs at Week 3 and Conservative Blogs at Week 4.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Conservative Blogs (autocorrelation) and Neutral Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and News at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.14  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Obama and News Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Obama X News X	Obama Y News Y	ZPF	Obama X Obama Y	News X News Y	Obama X News Y	News X Obama Y	Obama X News Y <sup>c</sup>	News X Obama Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	-.10	.79**	-2.32*						
Week 2	Week 3	.79**	.56	1.08	.68*	.90**	.40	.26	.41	.26
Week 3	Week 4	.56	.78**	-0.96	.58	.83**	.08	.45	.32	.29
Week 1	Week 3	-.10	.56	-1.40	.08	.54	.05	.18	-.70†	-.04
Week 2	Week 4	.79**	.78**	0.08	.56	.92**	-.47	.55	-.67	.55

*Note.* The above results suggest no clear evidence of issue agenda setting between Obama and the news media. None of the higher-order partial correlations is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Liberal Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Obama (autocorrelation) and Clinton at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.15  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Clinton and Obama Issue Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Clinton X Obama X	Clinton Y Obama Y	ZPF	Clinton X Clinton Y	Obama X Obama Y	Clinton X Obama Y	Obama X Clinton Y	Clinton X Obama Y <sup>c</sup>	Obama X Clinton Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.34	.35	-0.01	.62	.14	.67*	-.49	.62	-.49
Week 2	Week 3	.35	.39	-0.11	.52	.68*	.14	.76*	.14	.76*
Week 3	Week 4	.39	.13	0.62	.64*	.58	.44	-.43	.26	-.43
Week 1	Week 3	.34	.39	-0.11	.95**	.08	.33	-.10	.29	-.10
Week 2	Week 4	.35	.13	0.51	.32	.56	.15	.61†	.17	.61†

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of issue agenda setting between Obama and Clinton, as indicated by a significant higher-order partial correlation of .76 between Obama at Week 2 and Clinton at Week 3.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Obama (autocorrelation) and News at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Clinton (autocorrelation) at Time X (same as first-order partial lagged correlation).

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Neutral and conservative blogs: One higher-order partial correlation was significant: a correlation of .72 leading from neutral blogs at Week 1 to conservative blogs at Week 3 (Table 6.12).

Liberal and conservative blogs: One higher-order partial correlation was significant: a correlation of .77 leading from liberal blogs at Week 3 to conservative blogs at Week 4 (Table 6.13). The correlation of .72 leading in the opposite direction during the same time interval approached significance.

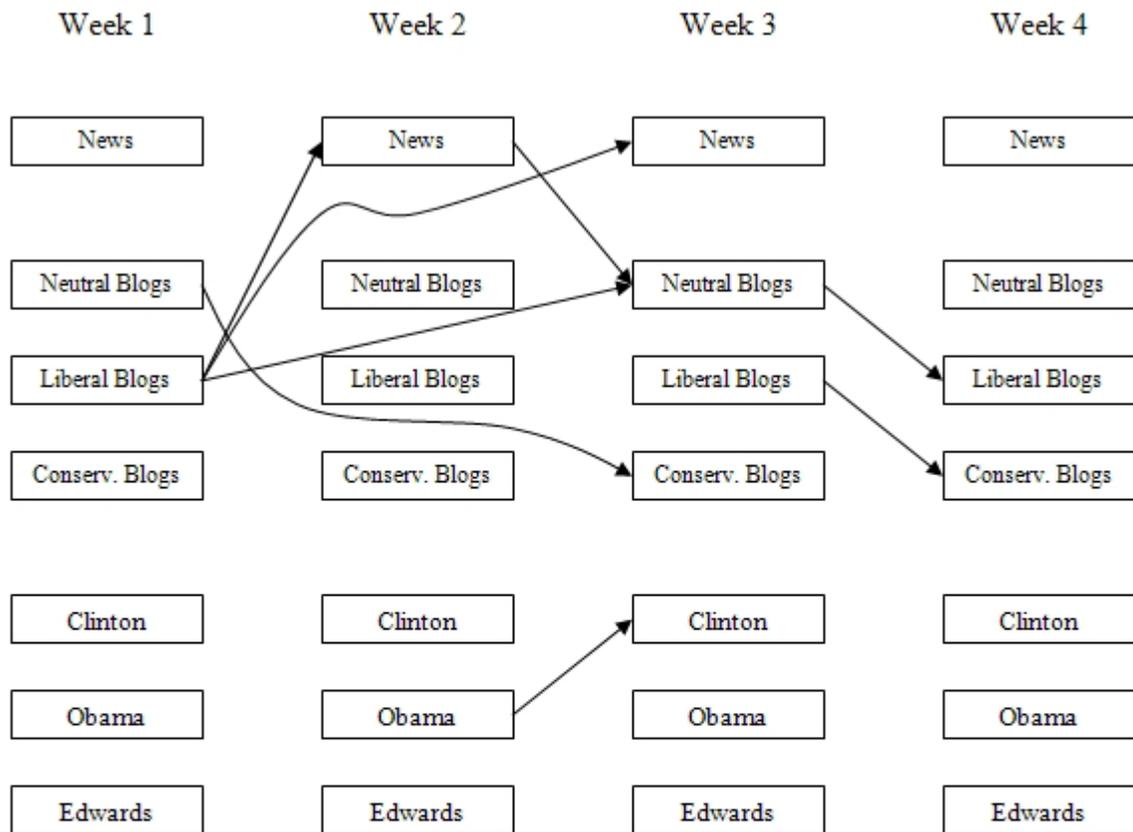
Obama and news: None of the higher-order partial correlations was significant, and the only one that approached significance, a correlation of -.70 from Obama at Week 1 to news at Week 3, was negative (Table 6.14).

Clinton and Obama: One higher-order partial correlation was significant: a correlation of .76 leading from Obama at Week 2 to Clinton at Week 3. Another correlation leading in the same direction approached significance: .61 from Obama at Week 2 to Clinton at Week 4 (Table 6.15).

The significant positive partial correlations identified in the seven separate cross-lagged correlational analyses are plotted in Figure 6.3 to visualize overall issue intermedia agenda-setting patterns. In response to **RQ15**, the A-list liberal political blogs appeared to play a first-level agenda-setting role that was not revealed by analyzing the aggregate political blog agenda. The liberal blogs' issue agenda at Week 1 was significantly correlated with the news issue agendas at Weeks 2 and 3, as well as the neutral blogs' issue agenda at Week 3. These correlations suggest that the issue priorities of the liberal bloggers during Week 1 transferred to the news media and the neutral blogs in subsequent weeks. However, this transfer of salience was not repeated later in the four-

week period. Other arrows point from the liberal blogs to the conservative blogs (Weeks 3 to 4) and from the neutral blogs to the conservative blogs (Weeks 1 to 3) and the liberal blogs (Weeks 3 to 4). Conservative blogs appeared to be agenda followers rather than leaders at the first level of agenda setting.

Figure 6.3  
*First-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting Among News Media, Partisan Blog Networks, and Individual Candidates*



Arrows indicate statistically significant positive Spearman partial correlations between issue agendas ( $p < .05$ )

Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007  
 Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007

Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007  
 Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008

In response to **RQ16**, the only suggestion that an individual candidate might have played a first-level agenda-setting role during the weeks prior to the Iowa Democratic caucuses was a significant partial correlation between Obama's issue agenda at Week 2 and Clinton's issue agenda at Week 3.

#### *Second-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting*

All four news sources that were sampled had highly correlated attribute agendas in their Democratic campaign coverage during the four-week period, with Spearman rank-order correlations ranging from .80 to .93 (Table 6.16). The frame of change vs. the status quo was the top-ranked attribute in three of the four news outlets (The Associated Press, *The Washington Post*, and *The Des Moines Register*). The frame of experience vs. inexperience was the top-ranked attribute in the fourth (*The New York Times*).

A review of the neutral, liberal, and conservative blog networks for the overall four-week period finds that the neutral and liberal blogs' attribute agendas were very strongly correlated ( $r_s = .94$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but the conservative blogs' attribute agenda was not significantly correlated with either of the other two blog networks (Table 6.17). The frame of positivity vs. negativity, which consisted largely of blog posts about negative campaigning and the overall tone of the Democratic race, was the top attribute in the neutral and liberal blog networks. The frame of experience vs. inexperience was the attribute mentioned most frequently in the conservative blogs.

A review of the attribute agendas of each of the three major Democratic candidates for the overall four-week period, as determined by the candidates' press releases, finds that none of the attribute agendas were significantly correlated, although the correlation between the attribute agendas of Obama and Edwards was on the

Table 6.16  
*Print Media Attribute Agendas by Number of Articles and Rank*

	Associated Press	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Des Moines Register</i>
<b>Attributes</b>				
Experience/inexperience	49 (2)	17 (1)	20 (2)	13 (2)
Change/status quo	52 (1)	16 (2)	22 (1)	20 (1)
Electability/unelectability	19 (5)	4 (8)	9 (5)	7 (6)
Honesty/dishonesty	17 (6)	8 (5)	9 (5)	7 (6)
Positivity/negativity	32 (4)	15 (3)	15 (3)	11 (3)
Leadership/lack of leader.	10 (9)	7 (6)	4 (9)	9 (5)
Unity/division	16 (7)	5 (7)	6 (8)	4 (8)
Likability/unlikability	13 (8)	3 (10)	2 (10)	3 (10)
Fighter/coward	34 (3)	14 (4)	11 (4)	11 (3)
Charisma/lack of charisma	2 (10)	4 (8)	8 (7)	4 (8)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>				
Associated Press	—	.80**	.90**	.83**
<i>New York Times</i>		—	.86**	.93**
<i>Washington Post</i>			—	.87**
<i>Des Moines Register</i>				—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.17  
*A-List Political Blog Attribute Agendas by Number of Posts and Rank*

	Neutral	Liberal	Conservative
<b>Attributes</b>			
Experience/inexperience	47 (3)	67 (3)	17 (1)
Change/status quo	52 (2)	73 (2)	13 (2)
Electability/unelectability	27 (5)	36 (5)	8 (5)
Honesty/dishonesty	29 (4)	33 (6)	13 (2)
Positivity/negativity	74 (1)	81 (1)	8 (5)
Leadership/lack of leader.	14 (8)	29 (7)	8 (5)
Unity/division	17 (7)	29 (7)	1 (10)
Likability/unlikability	10 (9)	20 (9)	10 (4)
Fighter/coward	25 (6)	39 (4)	3 (8)
Charisma/lack of charisma	2 (10)	18 (10)	3 (8)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
Neutral	—	.94**	.51
Liberal		—	.41
Conservative			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

threshold of significance ( $r_s = .63$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = .052$ ) (Table 6.18). Experience/inexperience was the attribute mentioned most frequently in Clinton's press releases, but it was not mentioned at all in Edwards' press releases. Change/status quo was the top-ranked attribute for Obama and the second-ranked attribute for the other two candidates. Fighter/coward was Edwards' top-ranked attribute.

Table 6.19 presents the aggregate attribute agendas of the print news outlets, blogs, and candidates for the overall four-week period. Here, the totals for each news outlet, for each blog, and for each candidate were summed to create an aggregate news attribute agenda, an aggregate blog attribute agenda, and an aggregate candidate attribute agenda.

**H6** predicted that the attribute agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the attribute agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign. The hypothesis was supported. The news attribute agenda had a significant positive correlation with the issue agendas of the candidates ( $r_s = .71$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the top political blogs ( $r_s = .92$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < .01$ ) during the time period (Table 6.19).

**RQ17** asked: To what extent was the attribute agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the attribute agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign? The correlation between the attribute agenda of the top political blogs and the attribute agenda of the candidates ( $r_s = .49$ ) was not statistically significant (Table 6.19).

To test the next set of hypotheses and research questions regarding second-level intermedia agenda setting, the aggregate attribute agendas of the print news media, the A-

Table 6.18  
*Candidate Attribute Agendas by Number of Press Releases and Rank*

	Clinton	Obama	Edwards
<b>Attributes</b>			
Experience/inexperience	107 (1)	7 (5)	0 (9)
Change/status quo	75 (2)	29 (1)	14 (2)
Electability/unelectability	20 (5)	3 (7)	3 (7)
Honesty/dishonesty	13 (7)	3 (7)	6 (4)
Positivity/negativity	16 (6)	3 (7)	4 (6)
Leadership/lack of leader.	40 (4)	15 (3)	5 (5)
Unity/division	10 (8)	21 (2)	12 (3)
Likability/unlikability	4 (10)	0 (10)	0 (9)
Fighter/coward	50 (3)	12 (4)	35 (1)
Charisma/lack of charisma	5 (9)	5 (6)	2 (8)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
Clinton	—	.52	.29
Obama		—	.63†
Edwards			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.19  
*Aggregate News, Blog, and Candidate Attribute Agendas by Number of Items and Rank*

	News	Blogs	Candidates
<b>Attributes</b>			
Experience/inexperience	99 (2)	131 (3)	114 (2)
Change/status quo	110 (1)	138 (2)	118 (1)
Electability/unelectability	39 (6)	71 (5)	26 (6)
Honesty/dishonesty	41 (5)	75 (4)	22 (8)
Positivity/negativity	73 (3)	163 (1)	23 (7)
Leadership/lack of leader.	30 (8)	51 (7)	60 (4)
Unity/division	31 (7)	46 (8)	43 (5)
Likability/unlikability	21 (9)	40 (9)	4 (10)
Fighter/coward	70 (4)	67 (6)	97 (3)
Charisma/lack of charisma	18 (10)	23 (10)	12 (9)
<b>Correlations (<math>r_s</math>)</b>			
News	—	.92**	.71*
Blogs		—	.49
Candidates			—

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranks.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

list political blogs, and the candidates were compared at three one-week lags and two two-week lags through cross-lagged correlational analysis.

**H7** predicted that the time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas are stronger leading from political blogs to the print news media than leading in the reverse direction. Examination of the second-order partial correlations, which controlled for autocorrelation and the influence of the candidates' attribute agenda, reveals that the hypothesis was not supported (Table 6.20). Although one of the correlations leading from the political blogs to news approached significance—.66 between blogs at Week 3 and news at Week 4—the only two significant correlations led in the opposite direction. The news attribute agenda at Week 1 was correlated with blog attribute agenda at Week 3 (.76), and the news attribute agenda at Week 2 was correlated with the blog attribute agenda at Week 4 (.85).

**RQ18** asked: Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction? The time-lagged correlations were stronger leading from the candidates to the news media (Table 6.21). Two of the second-order partial correlations, which controlled for autocorrelation and the influence of the blog attribute agenda, were significant: .79 leading from the candidates at Week 2 to the news media at Week 3, and .82 leading from the candidates at Week 3 to the news media at Week 4.

**RQ19** asked: Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction? No evidence was found that the correlations were stronger leading in one direction than in

Table 6.20  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Blog Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	News X Blogs X	News Y Blogs Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Blogs X Blogs Y	News X Blogs Y	Blogs X News Y	News X Blogs Y	Blogs X News Y
Week 1	Week 2	.61†	.82**	-1.37	.80**	.87**	-.15	.62†	-.03	.60
Week 2	Week 3	.82**	.88**	-0.45	.84**	.78**	.77*	-.21	.66†	.14
Week 3	Week 4	.88**	.90**	-0.28	.79**	.92**	.52	.19	.09	.66†
Week 1	Week 3	.61†	.88**	-1.70†	.82**	.87**	.75*	.39	.76*	.36
Week 2	Week 4	.82**	.90**	-0.67	.83**	.67*	.89**	-.26	.85**	.04

*Note.* The above results suggest that time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas were stronger leading from the news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction, as indicated by the presence of two statistically significant second-order partial lagged correlations (.76 from News at Week 1 to Blogs at Week 3, and .85 from News at Week 2 to Blogs at Week 4).

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation) and the candidate attribute agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.21  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Candidate Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	News X Cand. X	News Y Cand. Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Cand. X Cand. Y	News X Cand. Y	Cand. X News Y	News X Cand. Y	Cand. X News Y
Week 1	Week 2	.56	.52	0.18	.80**	.90**	.39	.18	.44	.09
Week 2	Week 3	.52	.73*	-1.00	.84**	.89**	.40	.79*	.11	.79*
Week 3	Week 4	.73*	.85**	-0.92	.79**	.95**	-.21	.68*	-.06	.82*
Week 1	Week 3	.56	.73*	-1.14	.82**	.98**	-.03	.48	-.29	.45
Week 2	Week 4	.52	.85**	-2.29*						

*Note.* The above results suggest that time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas were stronger leading from the candidates to the news media than in the opposite direction, as indicated by the presence of two statistically significant second-order partial lagged correlations (.79 from Candidates at Week 2 to News at Week 3, and .82 from Candidates at Week 3 to News at Week 4).

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation) and the blog attribute agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.22  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Candidate and Blog Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Second-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>c</sup>	
X	Y	Cand. X Blogs X	Cand. Y Blogs Y	ZPF	Cand. X Cand. Y	Blogs X Blogs Y	Cand. X Blogs Y	Blogs X Cand. Y	Cand. X Blogs Y	Blogs X Cand. Y
Week 1	Week 2	.46	.25	0.93	.90**	.87**	-.30	.02	-.27	-.21
Week 2	Week 3	.25	.52	-0.98	.89**	.78**	.54	.41	.20	.15
Week 3	Week 4	.52	.68*	-1.13	.95**	.92**	.69*	-.21	.54	-.06
Week 1	Week 3	.46	.52	-0.32	.98**	.87**	.15	.43	-.25	.51
Week 2	Week 4	.25	.68*	-1.53	.91**	.67*	.75*	-.01	.66†	-.16

*Note.* The above results suggest no clear evidence of attribute agenda setting between the candidates and the political blogs because none of the second-order partial lagged correlations is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

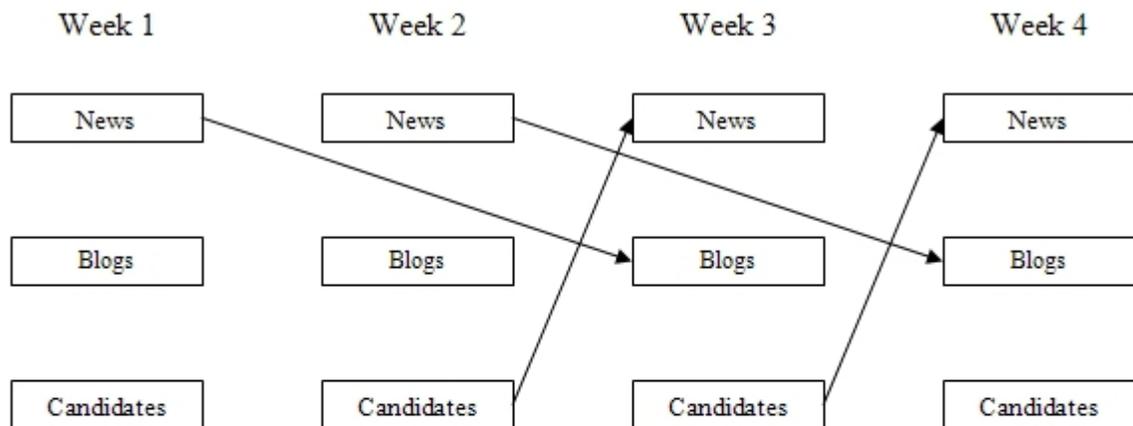
<sup>c</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation) and the news attribute agenda at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

the other (Table 6.22). None of the second-order partial correlations, which controlled for autocorrelation and the news attribute agenda, was significant, and only one approached significance: a correlation of .66 leading from candidates at Week 2 to blogs at Week 4.

The statistically significant positive time-lagged correlations identified in response to **H7**, **RQ18**, and **RQ19** are plotted in Figure 6.4 to examine aggregate second-level intermedia agenda-setting patterns. The news media appeared to be agenda leaders, at least in the early weeks, with their attribute agendas in Weeks 1 and 2 transferring to the A-list blogs after a two-week lag. The candidates also appeared to be agenda leaders, with their attribute agendas in Weeks 2 and 3 transferring to the news media one week later. No significant time-lagged correlations were found between the blog and candidate attribute agendas, and no evidence suggested that bloggers had an agenda-setting effect.

Figure 6.4  
*Second-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting Among News Media, A-List Political Blogs, and Candidates*



Arrows indicate statistically significant positive Spearman second-order partial correlations between attribute agendas ( $p < .05$ )

Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007      Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007  
 Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007      Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008

To develop a fuller picture of second-level agenda setting and answer the remaining research questions, partisan blog networks (neutral, liberal, and conservative) and individual candidates (Clinton, Obama, and Edwards) were considered separately. **RQ20** asked: What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)? **RQ21** asked: What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?

As with first-level intermedia agenda setting, analysis was confined to media pairs that had significant zero-order correlations for the four-week period as a whole, under the assumption that second-level agenda setting was unlikely to have occurred between media whose overall attribute agendas were not significantly correlated.

Table 6.23 reports the zero-order Spearman rank-order correlations among the attribute agendas of the news media, the three blog networks, and the three candidates for the overall four-week period. Five of the 21 correlations were significant: news and neutral blogs ( $r_s = .93, df = 8, p < .01$ ), news and liberal blogs ( $r_s = .94, df = 8, p < .01$ ), neutral and liberal blogs ( $r_s = .94, df = 8, p < .01$ ), liberal blogs and Clinton ( $r_s = .75, df = 8, p < .05$ ), and Clinton and the news media ( $r_s = .78, df = 8, p < .01$ ). Cross-lagged correlational analyses were performed for the five pairs to answer **RQ20** and **RQ21**. First-order partial Spearman lagged correlations controlled for autocorrelation. Higher-order correlations controlled for autocorrelation plus all of the other variables that significantly correlated with the dependent variable, as identified in Table 6.23.

News and neutral blogs: Higher-order partial Spearman correlations were stronger leading from the news media to the neutral blogs than in the opposite direction (Table

6.24). There was a significant correlation of .84 between the news media's attribute agenda at Week 1 and the neutral blogs' attribute agenda at Week 3, and a significant correlation of .83 between the news media's attribute agenda at Week 2 and the neutral blogs' attribute agenda at Week 4.

Table 6.23  
*Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Attribute Agendas of News, Partisan Blog Networks, and Individual Candidates*

	News	Neutral Blogs	Liberal Blogs	Conserv. Blogs	Clinton	Obama	Edwards
News	—	.93**	.94**	.51	.78**	.30	.35
Neutral Blogs		—	.94**	.51	.60†	.08	.24
Liberal Blogs			—	.41	.75*	.17	.29
Conserv. Blogs				—	.41	-.20	-.32
Clinton					—	.52	.29
Obama						—	.63†
Edwards							—

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

News and liberal blogs: Partial Spearman correlations generally were stronger leading from the news media to the liberal blogs than in the opposite direction (Table 6.25). However, only one of the correlations was significant: a correlation of .82 leading

Table 6.24  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Neutral Blog Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	News X Neutral X	News Y Neutral Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Neutral X Neutral Y	News X Neutral Y	Neutral X News Y	News X Neutral Y <sup>c</sup>	Neutral X News Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.64*	.95**	-3.72**						
Week 2	Week 3	.95**	.68*	2.29*						
Week 3	Week 4	.68*	.86**	-1.10	.79**	.80**	.76*	-.01	.39	-.06
Week 1	Week 3	.64*	.68*	-0.20	.82**	.68*	.66†	.42	.84*	.22
Week 2	Week 4	.95**	.86**	1.24	.83**	.71*	.74*	-.17	.83*	.04

*Note.* Time-lagged correlations were stronger leading from the news media to neutral blogs than in the reverse direction. Significant higher-order partial correlations led from News at Week 1 to Neutral Blogs at Week 3 (.84), and from News at Week 2 to Neutral Blogs at Week 4 (.83).

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Neutral Blogs (autocorrelation) and Liberal Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Liberal Blogs, and Clinton at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.25  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for News and Liberal Blog Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	News X Liberal X	News Y Liberal Y	ZPF	News X News Y	Liberal X Liberal Y	News X Liberal Y	Liberal X News Y	News X Liberal Y <sup>c</sup>	Liberal X News Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.39	.72*	-1.25	.80**	.74*	.74*	.52	.49	.10
Week 2	Week 3	.72*	.93**	-1.70†	.84**	.77**	.81**	.25	.57	.32
Week 3	Week 4	.93**	.91**	0.24	.79**	.93**	.08	.53	-.05	.65
Week 1	Week 3	.39	.93**	-2.89**						
Week 2	Week 4	.72*	.91**	-1.55	.83**	.84**	.87**	.49	.82*	.53

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of attribute agenda setting between news and liberal political blogs: a significant higher-order partial correlation of .82 leading from News at Week 2 to Liberal Blogs at Week 4.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Clinton at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Clinton at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.26  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Neutral and Liberal Blog Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Neutral X Liberal X	Neutral Y Liberal Y	ZPF	Neutral X Neutral Y	Liberal X Liberal Y	Neutral X Liberal Y	Liberal X Neutral Y	Neutral X Liberal Y <sup>c</sup>	Liberal X Neutral Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.91**	.71*	1.37	.83**	.74*	.81**	-.20	.75†	-.11
Week 2	Week 3	.71*	.78**	-0.36	.72*	.77**	.62†	.38	-.11	.34
Week 3	Week 4	.78**	.97**	-2.40*						
Week 1	Week 3	.90**	.78**	1.04	.68*	.67*	.77*	.06	.19	.69†
Week 2	Week 4	.71*	.97**	-3.04**						

*Note.* The above results suggest no clear evidence of attribute agenda setting between the neutral and liberal blogs. None of the higher-order partial correlations is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), News, and Clinton at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Neutral Blogs (autocorrelation) and News at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.27  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Liberal Blog and Clinton Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Liberal X Clinton X	Liberal Y Clinton Y	ZPF	Liberal X Liberal Y	Clinton X Clinton Y	Liberal X Clinton Y	Clinton X Liberal Y	Liberal X Clinton Y <sup>c</sup>	Clinton X Liberal Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.53	.52	0.04	.74*	.80**	-.21	.36	-.27	-.57
Week 2	Week 3	.52	.50	0.06	.77**	.73*	-.04	.78*	-.04	.75†
Week 3	Week 4	.50	.70*	-0.97	.93**	.81**	.72*	.14	.69†	.51
Week 1	Week 3	.53	.50	0.09	.67*	.82**	-.48	.73*	-.47	.48
Week 2	Week 4	.52	.70*	-0.88	.84**	.84**	.15	.61	-.11	.31

*Note.* The above results suggest no clear evidence of attribute agenda setting between the liberal blogs and Clinton. None of the higher-order partial correlations is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for Clinton (autocorrelation) and News at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Liberal Blogs (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and News at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.28  
*Cross-Lagged Spearman Rank-Order Correlations for Clinton and News Attribute Agendas*

Time Interval <sup>a</sup>		Synchronous Correlations			Autocorrelations		First-Order Partial Lagged Correlations <sup>b</sup>		Higher-Order Partial Lagged Correlations	
X	Y	Clinton X News X	Clinton Y News Y	ZPF	Clinton X Clinton Y	News X News Y	Clinton X News Y	News X Clinton Y	Clinton X News Y <sup>c</sup>	News X Clinton Y <sup>d</sup>
Week 1	Week 2	.63*	.63*	0.00	.80**	.80**	.61	.38	.43	.41
Week 2	Week 3	.63*	.60†	0.13	.73*	.84**	.81**	-.02	.77*	.00
Week 3	Week 4	.60†	.83**	-1.26	.81**	.79**	.45	.52	.57	-.45
Week 1	Week 3	.63*	.60†	0.15	.82**	.82**	.49	-.22	.28	-.21
Week 2	Week 4	.63*	.83**	-1.14	.84**	.83**	.64†	.39	.64	.38

*Note.* The above results suggest only one plausible instance of attribute agenda setting between Clinton and the news media, as indicated by a statistically significant higher-order partial correlation of .77 leading from Clinton at Week 2 to News at Week 3.

<sup>a</sup> Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007; Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007; Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007; Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008.

<sup>b</sup> Controlling for the dependent variable at Time X (autocorrelation).

<sup>c</sup> Controlling for News (autocorrelation), Neutral Blogs, and Liberal Blogs at Time X.

<sup>d</sup> Controlling for Clinton (autocorrelation) and Liberal Blogs at Time X.

† $p < .10$  \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

from the news media's attribute agenda at Week 2 to the liberal blogs' attribute agenda at Week 4.

Neutral and liberal blogs: Partial Spearman correlations revealed no pattern (Table 6.26). None of the correlations was significant. Two correlations approached significance, but they led in opposite directions: a correlation of .75 between neutral blogs' attribute agenda at Week 1 and liberal blogs' attribute agenda at Week 2, and a correlation of .69 between liberal blogs' attribute agenda at Week 1 and neutral blogs' attribute agenda at Week 3.

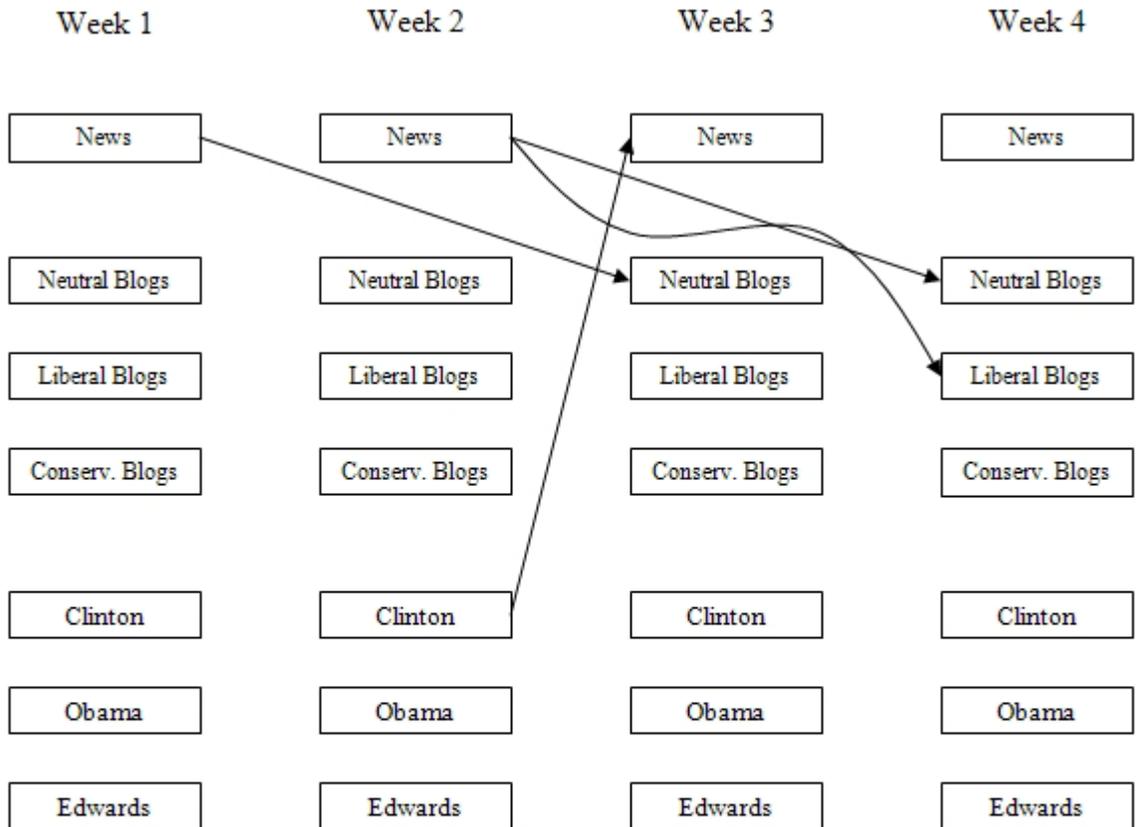
Liberal blogs and Clinton: Partial Spearman correlations revealed no pattern (Table 6.27). None of the correlations was significant. Two correlations approached significance, but they led in opposite directions: a correlation of .75 leading from Clinton's attribute agenda at Week 2 to liberal blogs' attribute agenda at Week 3, and a correlation of .69 leading from liberal blogs at Week 3 to Clinton at Week 4.

Clinton and news: Partial Spearman correlations were consistently stronger leading from Clinton to the news media (Table 6.28), but only one of the correlations was significant: a correlation of .77 between Clinton's attribute agenda at Week 2 and the news media' attribute agenda at Week 3.

The significant positive higher-order partial correlations identified in the cross-lagged correlational analyses are plotted in Figure 6.5 to visualize overall attribute agenda-setting patterns. In response to **RQ20**, the neutral and liberal blog networks appeared to be agenda followers rather than agenda setters. The attribute agendas of the news media during the first two weeks of the period transferred to the neutral and liberal blog networks two weeks later. In response to **RQ21**, the attribute agenda of Clinton in

Week 2 transferred to the news media one week later. No other evidence of second-level agenda setting involving specific candidates was found.

Figure 6.5  
*Second-Level Intermedia Agenda Setting Among News Media, Partisan Blog Networks, and Individual Candidates*



Arrows indicate statistically significant positive Spearman partial correlations between attribute agendas ( $p < .05$ )

Week 1 = Dec. 6-12, 2007      Week 3 = Dec. 20-26, 2007  
 Week 2 = Dec. 13-19, 2007      Week 4 = Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008

### Conclusion

The content analysis of news articles, A-list political blog posts, and candidate press releases from the four weeks prior to the January 2008 Iowa caucuses, followed by

computation of the rank-order correlations among the various issue and attribute agendas, identified several examples of agenda similarity across media and some plausible instances of intermedia agenda setting.

At both the issue and attribute levels, the print news media agenda had a strong positive correlation with the overall agenda of the A-list political blogs. When the political blogs were divided by partisan orientation, however, the news agendas at both the issue and attribute levels were highly correlated with only the neutral and liberal blogs, not the conservative blogs. The print news outlets, the neutral blogs, and the liberal blogs all had very similar issue and attribute agendas for the overall four-week period.

At both the issue and attribute levels, the print news media agenda also had a significant positive correlation with the aggregate agenda of the three leading Democratic candidates. When each candidate was considered separately, however, significant correlations were found only between the news media and Barack Obama at the issue level and between the news media and Hillary Clinton at the attribute level. Thus, news coverage appeared to be in sync with the issue agenda of Obama and the attribute agenda of Clinton but neither the issue nor attribute agenda of the third candidate, John Edwards.

At both the issue and attribute levels, no significant correlation was found between the aggregate political blog agenda and the aggregate candidate agenda. Even when the individual partisan blog networks and individual candidates were studied separately, only one significant positive correlation emerged: between the attribute agenda of Clinton and the attribute agenda of the liberal blogs.

Time-lagged correlations at one- and two-week intervals showed that at the first level of intermedia agenda setting, as predicted, correlations were stronger leading from

the news media to the political blogs than leading in the reverse direction. Specifically, the news issue agenda during Week 2 was significantly correlated with the aggregate political blog issue agenda at both Weeks 3 and 4. When each partisan blog network was considered separately, however, some evidence was found of significant correlations leading in the opposite direction: specifically, from the liberal political blogs during Week 1 to the news agenda at both Weeks 2 and 3. No evidence was found, either in the aggregate or individually, of the candidates setting the issue agenda of the news media or the political blogs.

At the second level of intermedia agenda setting, time-lagged correlations between the news media and the political blogs were not in the expected direction. Significant correlations led from the news attribute agenda at Weeks 1 and 2 to the blogs' attribute agendas at Weeks 3 and 4, respectively. The same pattern emerged when considering each partisan blog network independently. The news attribute agenda during Week 1 was positively correlated with the neutral blog attribute agenda at Week 3, and the news attribute agenda at Week 2 was positively correlated with both the neutral and liberal blogs' attribute agendas at Week 4.

Time-lagged correlations at the second level of intermedia agenda setting were stronger leading from the candidates to the news media than in the reverse direction. The aggregate candidate attribute agendas at Week 2 and 3 were significantly correlated with the aggregate news attribute agendas at Week 3 and 4, respectively. When the candidates were considered separately, only Clinton was found to have a significant time-lagged correlation with the news media, from Week 2 to Week 3. No significant time-lagged

correlations were found between the attribute agendas of the candidates and the attribute agendas of the political blogs.

## CHAPTER 7

### Discussion

This study sought to determine whether high-profile political bloggers made a difference during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. Specifically, the study examined whether newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the campaign read political blogs and used them to help satisfy their informational needs during the reporting process. The relationships among the issue and attribute agendas of the political bloggers, the mainstream news media, and the presidential candidates were analyzed to determine whether bloggers appeared to be leading or following the agendas of the other actors. A summary of the study's results is provided in Appendix 1.

One weakness of intermedia agenda-setting research has been a lack of theorizing about why intermedia agenda setting occurs and the conditions in which it is most likely to occur. Studies comparing the agendas of different media frequently cite the news sociology literature, which has attributed the similarity in news content across media to journalists' reliance on information sources such as press releases, their monitoring of one another's work, and the norms and values they share (McCombs, 2004). Although journalists today still use press releases and monitor their colleagues' work, they also have access to hybrid media forms such as blogs that challenge traditional journalistic norms of objectivity (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Wall, 2005; Woodly, 2008) and verification (Shirky, 2003a; Singer, 2003). Intermedia agenda-setting research must account for changes in the modern media landscape and explain how issue and attribute salience is transferred between new and old media forms.

This study engaged in theory building by introducing media exposure and need for orientation, two concepts typically used to explain the transfer of salience from the news media to the public, to intermedia agenda-setting research. These concepts helped bridge the sociology of news and the psychology of agenda setting.

This chapter reviews the major findings of the dissertation, considers their theoretical and practical implications, and offers suggestions for further research. Individual sections address the major concepts of media exposure, need for orientation, and intermedia agenda setting. Finally, several limitations of the study are presented.

### *Media Exposure*

Journalists' exposure to blogs has been documented through survey research (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008), and this study found that newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign read political blogs in particular. More than half of the respondents in the online survey reported reading political blogs daily, and only 1.3% said they never read political blogs. When asked to estimate how many hours per week they spend reading political blogs, the average was slightly more than three hours, but some reporters said they spend as many as 14 hours per week reading political blogs.

When the focus shifted to specific political blogs, however, the data suggested more limited exposure. The most widely read A-list political blog among the campaign reporters was The Huffington Post, but only 7.5% of respondents said they read The Huffington Post every day and only 20% said they read it at least once a week. The second most widely read political blog was Ben Smith's blog at Politico.com, but only 10.1% of respondents said they read Smith's blog every day and only 21.5%, every week.

How can the lack of exposure to specific blogs be reconciled with reporters' fairly wide exposure to political blogs in general? One explanation might center on the 18 blogs that were listed in the online survey. These A-list blogs were selected for inclusion in the survey because they ranked among the Top 100 overall blogs, as measured by the Technorati blog search engine. Perhaps journalists' blog-reading habits differ considerably from the habits of Internet users in general, and the 18 political blogs that led the Technorati rankings are not as popular among newspaper and wire service reporters who covered the 2008 campaign. Responses to an open-ended question asking reporters to name other political blogs, besides the 18 listed in the survey, that they read at least once a week lend some credence to this possible explanation. Respondents cited a number of state- and local-oriented blogs, as well as several political blogs maintained by mainstream news organizations. However, few of the additional blogs named by the reporters received multiple mentions.

A related possibility is that journalists' blog-reading habits are so diverse that no one political blog is widely read by a large number of reporters. As of May 2010, Technorati's directory of political blogs listed more than 7,000 sites (<http://technorati.com/blogs/directory/politics/>). Given the huge number of political blogs, it is possible that nearly all campaign reporters were reading political blogs, but they were reading different blogs. Such an exposure pattern, however, would contradict research showing a tendency toward a power-law distribution in the blogosphere. Typically, a select few blogs attract a wide audience while the overwhelming majority languish in obscurity (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Shirky, 2003b).

Given the network properties of the blogosphere, political journalists, like other Internet users, would be expected to gravitate toward a core group of blogs.

Yet another possibility is that some survey respondents underestimated their exposure to specific blogs because even though they were willing to admit reading political blogs in general, they were less willing to admit reading any particular blog with great frequency. If so, this might be indicative of journalists' love-hate relationship with bloggers. Journalists may see bloggers who write about news events as a threat to their occupational jurisdiction (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008). When blogging became popular shortly after the dawn of the new millennium, many journalists initially dismissed bloggers as unskilled amateurs (Lasica, 2003). Yet many of the same news organizations that originally criticized bloggers have now embraced blogging and set up blogs of their own. One survey respondent expressed journalists' mixed feelings regarding blogging in response to an open-ended question about the impact blogs have had on journalism:

They are a two-edged sword: it is always good to have more information; it is when we stop seeking more information that stories become predictable and shallow. At the same time, searching out blogs takes up so much time that it precludes deeper thought that might be more helpful to readers.

Thus, it is possible that campaign reporters, still feeling some discomfort about blogging and bloggers, were reluctant to admit exactly how often they read particular political blogs.

Whatever the actual amount of time spent reading specific political blogs, one of the most interesting patterns to emerge from the survey data about exposure was that neutral and liberal blogs were far more widely read among the campaign reporters than conservative blogs. The most widely read A-list political blog, The Huffington Post, is a

left-leaning Website launched in 2005 by author and pundit Arianna Huffington and co-founders Kenny Lerer and Jonah Peretti (Siklos, 2007). The site features a veritable army of liberal bloggers, many of them prominent political figures and celebrities, and has expanded to include news articles from sources such as The Associated Press. (For this study, only blog content in the section titled “All the Blog Posts” was analyzed.) The second-most widely read A-list political blog among campaign reporters was Ben Smith’s neutral blog at Politico.com, a political news site launched by former *Washington Post* journalists John F. Harris and Jim VandeHei. Smith is a former political columnist for the *New York Daily News* who started several prominent New York City political blogs before joining Politico (Politico.com, n.d.). During the 2008 presidential campaign, Smith primarily blogged about the Democratic primaries. The third-most widely read political blog among campaign reporters was Political Ticker, the politics-oriented blog established by cable news giant CNN.

The most widely read conservative A-list political blog among the campaign reporters was *National Review Online*’s The Corner, a multi-authored blog on the biweekly magazine’s Website. The Corner ranked only ninth, however, among the 18 blogs on the list in terms of exposure, and 66.3% of the campaign reporters said they never visit The Corner’s Website. In fact, for each of the seven conservative blogs on the list, a majority of the campaign reporters said they had never visited the site. The blog that ranked lowest on the list, NewsBusters, proclaims its dedication to “exposing and combating liberal media bias.” Yet if the authors of NewsBusters intend to make political reporters aware of their supposedly liberal slant, the results of the online survey suggest

that the reporters are not listening. Fully 80% of respondents said they had never visited the NewsBusters site, and none reported visiting the site at least once a week.

Campaign reporters' lack of exposure to conservative blogs might not be surprising after an election year in which public opinion trends gave the Democratic Party an advantage and much of the nation's attention was focused on the intense primary battle between Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, whose candidacies had historic significance. However, the survey results showed that even reporters who primarily covered Republican candidates rarely read conservative blogs. Among the 17 respondents who said they primarily wrote about the Republican presidential primary candidates or the Republican presidential ticket, the liberal Huffington Post was the most widely read A-list political blog, and the top seven most-read blogs were all politically neutral or liberal.

Several factors might account for campaign reporters' tendency to avoid conservative political blogs. One possibility is that the reporters themselves are more likely to be liberal than conservative and seek out political blogs that align with their own political beliefs. Weaver et al. (2007) found that U.S. journalists are less likely to think of themselves as leaning to the right politically than is the public at large (25% of journalists vs. 41% of the public) and much more likely to consider themselves on the left (40% vs. 17%). Reporters' preference for liberal blogs thus could add fuel to conservative critics' argument that the news media have a liberal bias.

Another possibility is that reporters' preference for liberal and neutral blogs has less to do with politics than with the sophistication of the blog sites and their similarity to the sites of mainstream news organizations. Generally, the liberal blogs contained more

frequent posts about the presidential campaign than did the conservative blogs, and their Websites in many ways resembled traditional news sites. The homepages of The Huffington Post and Talking Points Memo, the two most widely read liberal blogs among the campaign reporters, mimic the look of a newspaper site, with a dominant item and accompanying headline, surrounded by smaller headlines categorized by topic. Both also feature many bloggers who have mainstream journalism experience. The most widely read conservative political blog, *National Review Online's* The Corner, also has obvious ties to established media, given its association with *National Review* magazine. However, the other conservative blogs, including Power Line and Michelle Malkin's blog, are smaller operations with fewer bloggers and less of a direct connection with mainstream journalism.

Whatever the reasons, campaign reporters' reliance on liberal and neutral political blogs, but not conservative political blogs, as an information subsidy could jeopardize journalistic standards of fairness and balance. Downs (1957) warned of the dangers when the selection principles used by the creators of an information subsidy differ from the principles of the individuals who accept the subsidy. In such cases, the economic gain of using the subsidy may be offset by the loss of control over the selection principles associated with the information. Bloggers select information to advance their political objectives, while reporters traditionally have selected information in an effort to achieve fairness and balance. The danger, then, is that reporters who read liberal blogs but not conservative blogs in order to broaden their political knowledge might lose their editorial balance and adopt a liberal perspective in the stories they write.

At least one survey respondent acknowledged the danger of reporters relying on plainly partisan blogs for information, writing in response to an open-ended question: “Most [blogs] are empty-headed rants by big egos who recycle or invent facts to suit an agenda. With most, if there are journalistic standards, they are absent from the work, and opinion without thought or fact is worthless, if not reckless.” Other respondents, however, expressed confidence in their ability to detect partisan spin and keep it from influencing their reporting. One campaign reporter wrote: “It’s a ‘know-the-source’ for me. ... Too many blogs just spew opinions passing as facts. Entertaining, yes; factual, not usually. [I] tend to be more cynical and discerning when it comes to political blogs, but younger reporters are enamored of them.”

Chi-square tests of the relationship between campaign reporters’ exposure to political blogs and several demographic and occupational factors identified three variables as predictors of blog exposure. Reporters who regularly covered the presidential primary campaign, who regularly covered the presidential general-election campaign, and who contributed to blogs on their news organizations’ Websites were significantly more likely to say they read political blogs every day than reporters who did not cover the primary or general-election campaigns regularly or did not contribute to blogs.

The association between reading blogs and contributing to a blog suggests that bloggers tend to monitor one another’s work in much the same way that journalists monitor their colleagues’ reporting to validate their news judgment (Breed, 1955; Crouse, 1973; Golan, 2006; Reese & Danielian, 1989). As more reporters begin to engage in blogging, they can be expected to spend more time reading others’ blogs to look for ideas and to make sure they are not missing important developments.

In addition to measuring campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs, this study measured bloggers' exposure to the mainstream news media by examining the hyperlinks contained within blog posts. In posts pertaining to the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign during the month before the Iowa caucuses, the news sources receiving the most links in the sample of political blogs were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Des Moines Register*. This finding echoes the results of previous studies (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006) and confirms that, for all of their criticism of mainstream journalists, bloggers depend heavily on them for information. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were among the most popular link recipients in all three partisan blog networks: neutral, liberal, and conservative. Interestingly, the list of the top hyperlink domains found relatively few instances of the A-list political bloggers linking to one another.

The Internet site that received the most links overall in the blog sample was not affiliated with any news organization or blogger. YouTube received about twice as many links as *The New York Times* and more than three times as many as *The Washington Post*. The 2008 campaign was the first presidential race in which video-sharing sites such as YouTube and other social-media sites such as Facebook played an active role. Future studies of intermedia agenda setting might consider whether "viral" videos on sites such as YouTube have an agenda-setting influence, particularly among young people who are interested in politics.

From a research standpoint, the survey and hyperlink data underscore the importance of including media exposure measures in studies of intermedia agenda setting. Researchers who compare the agendas of two or more media must ensure that the

members of each medium are, in fact, attending to the messages of the others. The survey data also suggest avenues for research beyond intermedia agenda setting. For example, future studies might explore journalists' criteria for choosing which blogs to follow regularly, or examine how journalists assess the credibility of individual blogs. Studies also might examine how bloggers decide which media to link to and whether they view hyperlinking as an endorsement of the recipient site.

### *Need for Orientation*

The concept of need for orientation has enriched agenda-setting scholarship by capturing the psychological process involved in the transfer of issue or attribute salience from the mass media to members of the public. The concept also has provided predictive power, enabling researchers to determine which types of individuals are most susceptible to agenda-setting effects. This is the first known study to apply the concept directly to intermedia agenda setting, positing that journalists and bloggers, like members of the public, have a need for orientation as they write about national politics. Journalists and bloggers must develop cognitive maps to help them manage the complexity of covering political campaigns.

Traditionally, need for orientation has been defined in public opinion agenda-setting research as consisting of the lower-order concepts of relevance and uncertainty (McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Weaver, 1980). Individuals with high levels of relevance and uncertainty have a higher need for orientation that makes them more likely to adopt the agenda of the news media. Measures of political interest have been used as indicators of relevance, and measures of the strength of political party identification and voting intention have been used as indicators of uncertainty.

This study used reporters' levels of journalism experience as an indicator of their uncertainty in covering the 2008 presidential campaign. Whether reporters were based in Washington, D.C., was used as an indicator of relevance. A multiple regression analysis confirmed the construct validity of this conceptualization of need for orientation. As hypothesized, a reporter's number of years of journalism experience was a negative predictor of the reporter's use of blogs to satisfy his or her informational needs during the reporting process. Whether a reporter was based in Washington, D.C., was a positive predictor of the reporter's use of blogs to satisfy informational needs. Use of blogs to satisfy informational needs was measured using a four-item scale (Wanta, Reinardy & Moore, 2007) that asked reporters whether they agreed that political blogs helped them report different types of stories related to the presidential race, find story ideas, monitor the race more closely, and acquire a wider range of information related to the race.

By incorporating measures of need for orientation into intermedia agenda-setting studies, researchers can determine which types of journalists are most likely to adopt the agendas of other media to which they are exposed. This knowledge also can benefit organizations that are trying to "get inside the heads" of journalists and influence their reporting. Terkildsen, Schnell and Ling (1988) observed that political interest groups wishing to mobilize support for their causes must "rely on the media to have their interpretations of reality inserted into the public debate" (p. 46). The results of this study suggest that political bloggers could expect to have greater success getting their messages picked up by the mainstream news media if they target political reporters who are relatively inexperienced and who are part of the Washington, D.C., press corps.

Some caveats are in order, however. The survey results did not establish that reporters with high relevance and high uncertainty actually adopted the issue or attribute agendas of the political blogs, only that they were more likely to say the blogs helped them satisfy their informational needs during the reporting process, a precursor to intermedia agenda setting. In addition to relevance and uncertainty, whether a reporter contributed to a blog on his or her news organization's Website also was a significant predictor of the use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs. A fourth occupational variable, whether the reporter worked for a newspaper or a wire service, also was included in the regression analysis, and the overall model accounted for only about 20% of the total variance. This suggests there may be other variables that are even better predictors of a reporter's use of blogs to satisfy informational needs. Future studies can attempt to identify these other variables.

Researchers also might develop more precise scales that measure journalistic uncertainty and relevance more directly, rather than relying on indicators such as years of journalism experience and a reporter's base location. The promising results of this study suggest that the concept of journalistic need for orientation, consisting of relevance and uncertainty, is worth pursuing further.

A separate conceptualization of need for orientation as consisting of three dimensions appears less promising. Following the advice of Matthes (2005, 2008), this study measured campaign reporters' need for orientation toward issues, toward frames, and toward evaluations by using separate three-item scales. Although the scales for need for orientation toward issues and toward frames proved reliable, the scale for need for orientation toward evaluations did not and therefore could not be tested. When need for

orientation toward issues and toward frames were entered as predictor variables in a regression model, with use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs as the dependent variable, the overall model was not significant.

Contrary to expectations, campaign reporters' need for orientation toward frames was not a better predictor of their use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs than was need for orientation toward issues. To the extent that there was any predictive power at all, it was in the opposite direction. Need for orientation toward issues approached statistical significance as a predictor, whereas the standardized beta coefficient for need for orientation toward frames was nonsignificant and negative.

These results might suggest that Matthes' scales for each of the three dimensions, developed to explain need for orientation among members of the public, do not easily transfer to the intermedia agenda-setting context. It should be noted that Matthes himself encountered some difficulties in using the scales. In one of his follow-up studies, the three dimensions of need for orientation were so strongly correlated that they were combined to form an overall scale of need for orientation (Matthes, 2008). Thus, Matthes' own research raises some doubts about the validity of separating need for orientation into different dimensions. In the present study, it may be the case that different scales are needed to more effectively tap the three-dimensional construct of need for orientation, or it may be that reporters' need for orientation does not neatly separate into three dimensions. Finally, it may be the case that the dimensions and scales are valid, but that the individual dimensions of need for orientation simply do not have significant effects on reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy their informational needs.

Clearly, further research is needed to address these questions, but for now, this study suggests that the traditional conceptualization of need for orientation as consisting of relevance and uncertainty may hold more overall promise for intermedia agenda-setting research.

### *Intermedia Agenda Setting*

This study used content analysis to compare the agendas of three sets of media: the print news sources consulted most often by political bloggers, as identified through a hyperlink analysis of blog posts; the A-list political blogs read most often by print journalists, as identified via the online survey; and the press releases of the top three Democratic presidential candidates, as downloaded from their campaign Websites. The issue and attribute content of the news articles, blog posts, and press releases was analyzed for a four-week period prior to the January 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses. Spearman rank-order correlations were computed to determine the strength of association among the various agendas for the overall four-week period and at one- and two-week time lags.

Several patterns emerged from the content analysis and statistical tests. Overall, at both the issue and attribute levels, there were strong correlations between the aggregate agendas of the news media and the political blogs. In fact, when the aggregate agendas of the news media, the political blogs, and the candidates were compared, the strongest correlations were between the news media and the blogs: .75 at the issue level and .92 at the attribute level. Significant, but weaker, correlations were found between the news media and the candidates: .71 at both levels. The correlation between the blog and

candidate agendas was not significant at either level: .32 for issues and .49 for attributes (Tables 6.4 and 6.19).

At the first level, health care was the issue mentioned most frequently in both the news articles and the candidate press releases, while foreign policy was the issue mentioned most often in the blog posts. Although the blog issue agenda was very similar to the news issue agenda, bloggers' greater emphasis on foreign policy was the one noticeable difference. At the second level, the theme of promoting change vs. continuing the status quo was the attribute mentioned most often in both the news articles and the candidate press releases. This attribute ranked second in the blog posts, behind the attribute of running a positive campaign vs. engaging in negative campaigning.

The growth of Internet information sources in general and blogs in particular has prompted a debate between scholars who fear that media are becoming so specialized and fragmented that it may no longer make sense to speak of a singular "media agenda" (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Tewksbury, 2005), and those who argue that online media exhibit the same tendency toward uniformity and homogeneity found in traditional media (e.g., Hindman, 2009; Lee, 2007; McCombs, 2004, 2005; Yu & Aikat, 2005). Scholars who belong to the "fragmentation" camp worry that democracy might be imperiled if members of the public no longer share a common body of knowledge (e.g., Sunstein, 2001; Tewksbury, 2005).

Results of this study lend more support to the uniformity argument. A-list political bloggers may not follow all the same rules as the traditional news media, and they may frequently criticize mainstream journalists, but if their posts in the weeks before the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses are any indication, their issue and attribute agendas

do not differ significantly from the agendas of the leading news outlets. This finding also echoes the results of previous studies that have found strong correlations between the agendas of blogs and the mainstream news media (Lee, 2007; Meraz, 2009; Metzgar, 2007; Wallsten, 2007).

At the same time, however, agenda uniformity between the print news media and political blogs undercuts some claims of blogs' democratic potential. Blogs have been hailed for giving ordinary citizens the power to engage in a form of mass communication once reserved for political and media elites. As Perlmutter (2008) observed: "People who in a previous era would have had no political capital ... can write memos to the powerful that instantly become public documents" (p. 5). Popular press accounts tell stories of individual bloggers, sitting in their pajamas in front of their computers, writing posts that end up having far-reaching impact.

Although blogs certainly do give ordinary citizens the power to speak their mind freely, there is no guarantee that others are listening. The A-list blogs read most frequently by reporters who covered the 2008 presidential campaign tended to assign roughly the same relative importance to the issues and attributes as the top print news outlets. Blogs might be influential in mobilizing partisan activists, but when examined from an agenda-setting perspective, the leading political blogs appear more redundant and repetitive than bold and innovative. To the extent that they introduce new voices into the national political debate, those voices appear to be speaking the same language as the elite news media. This finding supports Hindman's (2009) observation about the influence of blogging: "Ultimately, blogs have given a small group of educational,

professional, and technical elites new influence in U.S. politics. Blogs have done far less to amplify the political voice of average citizens” (p. 103).

The one exception to uniformity of blog and news agendas was in the issue and attribute content of the conservative blogs. When the A-list political blogs were divided into neutral, liberal, and conservative partisan networks, the strongest correlations existed among the news media, the neutral blogs, and the liberal blogs. Conservative bloggers, on the other hand, often appeared to resist the agendas of the other media.

At the issue level, the correlations among the news media, neutral blogs, and liberal blogs were all significant and strong, ranging from .76 to .88 (Table 6.8). Conservative blogs had significant but weaker correlations with the neutral (.64) and liberal (.75) blogs, and a non-significant correlation with the news media (.43). The top-ranked issue in the conservative blogs was foreign policy, which was mentioned frequently in the other blogs and the news reports as well. The second-ranked issue in the conservative blogs was terror and national security, which was mentioned much less frequently in the other blogs and news reports.

At the attribute level, the correlations among the news media, neutral blogs, and liberal blogs were extremely high (.93 and .94), but the conservative blogs’ correlations with the other media were all non-significant: .51 with news, .51 with neutral blogs, and .41 with liberal blogs (Table 6.23). The attribute mentioned most often in the conservative blogs—experience vs. inexperience—also ranked highly in the other blogs and news articles. But the attribute of honesty vs. dishonesty also appeared frequently in the conservative blogs, tied for No. 2 with change vs. status quo, while appearing much less often in the other blogs and news articles.

On one hand, the dearth of significant correlations between conservative blogs and the other media might not be surprising, given that the content analysis focused exclusively on the Democratic presidential primary. Conservatives, who generally would not support any of the Democratic candidates, could be expected to have a different set of issue and attribute priorities when discussing the Democratic race. Conservative bloggers also would tend to be more focused on the Republican primary candidates.

On the other hand, the finding that the conservative blog agendas did not strongly correlate with the agendas of the other media is consistent with previous research in a non-campaign context. Meraz (2009) examined the ways in which liberal, moderate, and conservative bloggers framed three issues: General David Petraeus' report to Congress on the status of the Iraq War, U.S. Attorney Alberto Gonzales' testimony before a Senate committee on the federal government's domestic wiretapping program, and the airport sex scandal involving Republican Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho. Only on the Craig issue did the conservative blogs have an attribute agenda that significantly correlated with the news media and the other blog networks.

In addition to comparing the overall agendas of bloggers and journalists during the four-week period, this study examined time-lagged correlations among the various agendas to determine which medium appeared to be leading and which medium appeared to be following.

At the issue level, as predicted, correlations generally were stronger leading from the news media in a given week to the political blogs in subsequent weeks than leading in the reverse direction. This finding suggests that the issue agenda of the news media

transferred to the political blogs as bloggers looked to mainstream news reports for orienting cues on which issues were worth writing about.

However, when the individual blog networks were considered separately, some significant correlations were found leading in the opposite direction. Specifically, the issue agenda of the liberal blogs during Week 1 was significantly correlated with the news agenda in Weeks 2 and 3. In other words, even though the news media generally appeared to be the agenda leaders, liberal bloggers might have been able to set the issue agenda in the initial weeks of the primary season.

This finding runs counter to the expectation that journalists would not turn to bloggers for orienting information about issues because they already have access to many sources of issue information, including press releases and campaign speeches. If reporters were to rely upon bloggers for information, it was predicted that it would be information regarding the framing of the candidates to help them analyze and interpret the race. Perhaps, however, the interpretive style of reporting has become so routine in the past decade or so, especially with the rise of political punditry and cable-news commentators, that deciphering the issues now presents the greatest uncertainty to campaign reporters. This might be especially true in a primary campaign, in which all candidates belong to the same political party and any differences in their issue platforms are quite subtle. Matthews (1978) suggests that reporters also might have a high need for orientation toward issues because they tend to be more knowledgeable about process than policy:

Political reporters tend to be fascinated by the process, the mechanics of politics. They are not particularly interested in, or knowledgeable about, policy issues. Issues tend to be covered by other reporters—specialists on economics or foreign policy or what have you—in the relatively large news organizations where full-time political reporters work. (p. 67)

These explanations of why reporters may have greater need for orientation toward issues than toward frames also might account for the unexpected findings at the second level of intermedia agenda setting. Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, significant correlations led from the news attribute agenda to the aggregate attribute agenda of the political bloggers two weeks later. The same pattern emerged when each partisan blog network was examined independently. The news attribute agenda during Week 1 was positively correlated with the neutral blog attribute agenda at Week 3. The news attribute agenda at Week 2 was positively correlated with both the neutral and liberal blogs' attribute agendas at Week 4. These time-lagged correlations suggest that when it came to framing the Democratic presidential candidates and the Democratic primary race, journalists were the leaders and political bloggers, the followers. Attribute salience transferred from the news media in a given week to the political blogs after a two-week time lag.

At both the issue and attribute levels, no evidence was found of intermedia agenda setting between the news media and the conservative blogs. Of course, it is possible that conservative blogs' intermedia agenda-setting role was confined to the Republican primary contest. However, given the survey results showing that even campaign reporters who covered Republican candidates rarely read conservative blogs, this seems unlikely. Overall, the results of this study suggest that conservative bloggers had markedly different issue and attribute agendas from the other bloggers and the news media, but they were unable to get campaign reporters to pay much attention to their writings and were unable to have an impact on the agendas of the other media.

Although several significant correlations were found between the agendas of the news media and the political blogs, no significant correlations were found when comparing the aggregate political blog agenda with the aggregate candidate agenda. Even when the three partisan blog networks and the three individual candidates were studied separately, only one significant positive correlation emerged: between the attribute agenda of Clinton and the attribute agenda of the liberal blogs. However, when this relationship was examined in more detail by computing time-lagged correlations, no evidence was found that the attribute agenda of Clinton was either leading or following the attribute agenda of the liberal blogs.

The lack of significant correlations between the blog and candidate agendas indicates that political bloggers were not functioning as candidate mouthpieces, mimicking the platforms and talking points of the leading Democratic contenders. For the presidential candidates, of course, this might be viewed as discouraging news. The Democratic candidates could not depend on the leading political blogs to help them achieve “interpretive dominance” (Stuckey & Antczak, 1995, p. 118). Rather, bloggers appeared to resist the issue and attribute agendas that the candidates had constructed through their press releases. This finding suggests that if political blogs continue to grow in popularity and influence, they could become a disruptive force in political campaigns, effectively hijacking the candidates’ agendas.

The lack of significant correlations between the blog and candidate agendas also fits with popular press accounts of the cool relationship between bloggers and the leading Democratic candidates during the 2008 campaign. Garofoli (2007), for example, noted that liberal bloggers detested Hillary Clinton because she, like many Democrats, voted in

2002 to authorize President George W. Bush to pursue military action in Iraq. In monthly presidential straw polls on the liberal blog Daily Kos, “No Freaking Clue” frequently attracted more votes than Clinton (Garofoloi, 2007). Barack Obama was viewed more favorably by bloggers, but he mostly ignored the blogosphere in favor of social-networking sites such as Facebook. Boehlert (2009) observed that “the Obama team’s lack of blogger outreach remained a constant, mostly off-line topic of conversation throughout the campaign” (p. 262).

If the candidates were unable or unwilling to reach out to political bloggers, they had somewhat better luck conveying their agendas via the news media, but only at the attribute level. Although the issue agenda of the news media and the aggregate issue agenda of the candidates was a statistically significant .71, time-lagged correlations revealed no evidence that either the news media or the candidates appeared to be leading the other. Even when each candidate was considered separately, no significant time-lagged correlations were found at the issue level.

At the attribute level, however, a clear pattern emerged. Time-lagged correlations were stronger leading from the candidates to the news media than in the reverse direction. The aggregate candidate attribute agendas at Weeks 2 and 3 transferred to the news media one week later. When the candidates were considered separately, only Clinton had a significant time-lagged correlation with the news media, from Week 2 to Week 3. Thus, intermedia agenda setting between the news media and the candidates, although limited, occurred exclusively in the direction from the candidates to the journalists, suggesting that candidates still retained some control over the ways in which the race is framed.

### *Study Limitations*

Several limitations of this dissertation must be noted. The study focused on the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign because it was widely discussed in both the news media and the blogosphere, and because national elections “create a natural laboratory for the examination of media effects” (McCombs, 2004, p. 11). The content analysis portion focused exclusively on the weeks before the Iowa Democratic caucuses because the Democratic race was hotly contested and the early stages of a presidential contest are when agenda-setting effects are most likely to be observed. Still, the narrow focus of this study makes it difficult to generalize to other political campaigns or to non-political contexts. Also, blogs and political campaigns represent moving targets for researchers because the blogosphere and the national political climate can change rapidly. Intermedia agenda setting could vary along with these changes. Agenda-setting patterns identified in the 2008 presidential election season might not hold true in future campaigns.

Follow-up studies could include a content analysis of news and blog content related to the 2008 Republican primary campaign in order to contrast intermedia agenda setting in the Democratic and Republican contests. Future intermedia agenda-setting research also could extend beyond politics to focus on other types of widely read blogs, such as technology or popular-culture blogs.

Other limitations of the study center on the online survey methodology. Because of the response rate (18.5%) and the small number of respondents ( $N = 80$ ), the survey results must be viewed with some caution. One difficulty encountered in conducting the survey was news organizations’ rapidly shrinking reporting staffs in a time of economic turmoil. In the months between Election Day and the launch of the survey, many

reporters who had covered the presidential campaign were laid off or quit their jobs. For these campaign reporters, Election 2008 appeared to have been their last hurrah. Several e-mail invitations to participate in the survey “bounced” with a message indicating that the reporter no longer worked for the news organization.

Additionally, the nature of the survey created the potential for nonresponse bias. Because the survey was conducted online and the invitation to participate was sent via e-mail, respondents may have tended to be reporters who are the most comfortable using the Internet. These reporters also might be more likely to read blogs. Reporters who are less comfortable with the Internet and less likely to read blogs might have been less inclined to answer the online survey. Therefore, the survey results may have overestimated political reporters’ exposure to political blogs and their reliance on political blogs to satisfy their informational needs.

Another limitation is that the survey required reporters to engage in retrospection by asking them in mid-2009 to recall how they had used political blogs during the 2008 presidential campaign, as well as the extent of their need for orientation toward issues, frames, and attributes related to the campaign. Babbie (1990) warned that the further back respondents must reach into their memories, the less accurate their responses are likely to be.

Finally, the survey was limited to newspaper and wire service reporters. Although political bloggers are a difficult population to sample, future studies might attempt surveying them in order to establish whether bloggers have a need for orientation similar to that of journalists.

The content analysis of news articles, blog posts, and candidate press releases posed some limitations because content analysis provides only descriptive data and does not permit the direct measurement of media effects. Like many other agenda-setting studies, this study sought to overcome the limitation by comparing time-lagged correlations to determine which media were agenda leaders and which media were agenda followers. By employing a cross-lagged design, commonly used in disciplines where experiments are not always feasible or practical, this study was able to argue that certain patterns of intermedia agenda setting appeared more plausible than others. Also, the use of partial correlations provided some degree of statistical control. Still, this study should be considered exploratory and the results tentative. If possible, replication through experiments that use reporters and bloggers as subjects and control for confounding factors through random assignment to treatment conditions can strengthen the validity of this study's findings.

Another limitation of the study is that attribute agenda setting was examined only at the cognitive level, not at the affective level. In the online survey, the three-item scale measuring need for orientation toward evaluations, which corresponds with affective attribute agenda setting, was not reliable enough to permit testing. In the content analysis, attributes were not analyzed for their affective content. For example, an item was coded as containing the attribute experience/inexperience whether it touted a candidate's impressive political résumé or criticized a candidate's lack of political experience. Although studies have found less support for agenda setting at the affective level than at the cognitive level (e.g., Golan & Wanta, 2001), future studies of blogs and intermedia agenda setting might include the affective dimension.

Finally, this study is limited by its focus on aggregate rather than individual-level data. Wanta (1997) noted that although agenda setting may be a societal effect, it is a process of social learning that takes place within individuals. Agenda-setting studies, then, should move beyond aggregate data to examine individuals as the unit of measurement. This study took a step in that direction by examining the agendas of individual candidates and individual blog networks, in addition to the aggregate candidate and blog agendas. Also, the online survey collected the responses of individual reporters.

Ideally, however, individual survey responses would be linked with the campaign stories produced by those individual reporters. This would make it possible to determine, for example, whether campaign reporters who had higher levels of exposure to blogs and higher need for orientation wrote stories that more closely aligned with the bloggers' agendas than campaign reporters with lower levels of blog exposure and need for orientation. Linking specific news stories with specific survey responses, however, would have compromised the anonymity of the online survey.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

The “boys on the bus” in 1972 could not have imagined how technology would change presidential campaigns and their coverage in the media. Political reporters of that era could not have anticipated that four decades later, the World Wide Web would allow ordinary citizens to become publishers by posting their political thoughts on blogs. Agenda-setting scholars also could not have foreseen the ways in which new forms of communication such as blogs would prompt a re-examination of what constitutes “the media” and “the public.”

In 2008, the blogosphere was buzzing with discussion about the U.S. presidential race. Observers noted that many campaign-related stories appeared to originate on blogs. It was a blogger who first reported that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama had called working-class Pennsylvania voters “bitter.” It was bloggers who raised questions about Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin’s past and questioned whether her youngest son was really hers, not her daughter’s.

But did all of the discussion in the blogosphere actually make a difference? The audience for blogs may not yet be large enough to influence mass public opinion, but some scholars contend that bloggers can influence journalists and their reporting (e.g., Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Woodly, 2008). Others take the opposite view, arguing that bloggers simply feed upon stories found in the mainstream media (e.g., Haas, 2005).

Although this study was not able to measure influence directly, results of an online survey of campaign reporters and a content analysis of blog posts, news articles,

and candidate press releases suggest a very limited intermedia agenda-setting role for the top-ranked political blogs. Nearly anyone can create a blog, but the “A-list” blogs that receive the most attention tend to be operated largely by an elite group of commentators, many of whom have ties to mainstream journalism (Hindman, 2009). Although these political blogs are read by journalists, no one blog was read with great regularity among the campaign reporters surveyed. Conservative blogs were barely read at all.

With the notable exception of the conservative blogs, the issue and attribute agendas of the leading political blogs were strikingly similar to the agendas of the news media during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic primary campaign. When time-lagged correlations were computed to determine whether bloggers were agenda leaders or followers, the limited evidence of intermedia agenda setting mostly pointed toward bloggers following the news media’s lead. Some evidence was found, however, that the issue agenda of liberal bloggers during the initial week of the study period transferred to the news media in subsequent weeks.

The general lack of intermedia agenda setting by political blogs does not fit the common narrative of bloggers driving press coverage and influencing journalistic decision-making. Even many of the campaign reporters seemed convinced that political bloggers had great power during the 2008 election season. One survey respondent said:

I think blogs wrongly drove a lot of coverage and wrongly led to various editorial and management decisions during the 2008 elections. Mainstream and even alternative media are willingly being led astray. It’s one thing to ask questions driven by a blog posting but it’s another to let blogs drive editorial and employee deployment decisions without confirming or ruling out what’s on the blogs.

Another complained: “I often had to spend time and energy refuting false statements found on blogs because editors asked me to check on what they were claiming.”

This study sought to reconcile opposing views of blogs' agenda-setting power or lack of power by hypothesizing that the news media controlled the issue agenda during the 2008 Democratic primary campaign while political bloggers controlled the attribute agenda. Results of the content analysis, however, did not support this bidirectional model of intermedia agenda setting.

Perhaps the proper distinction to be made is between issues and attributes on one hand and events on the other hand. Political bloggers' greatest power may lie in their ability to focus journalists' attention on particular events, such as Obama's "bitter" remark during the 2008 Democratic primary campaign or Trent Lott's praise for Strom Thurmond's segregationist past in 2002. Bloggers can post their thoughts about these events immediately without having to wait for verification or a comment from the opposing side. When it comes to the broader categories of issues and attributes, the traditional focus of agenda-setting research, the mainstream news media may still have the advantage. Bloggers' influence, then, might be shallow and fleeting while the news media's influence is deeper and more lasting. Future studies can test these claims in an effort to broaden our understanding of intermedia agenda setting.

While this study drew distinctions between the agenda-setting roles of journalists and bloggers, it is impossible to deny the increasing similarities between the two media. As one campaign reporter stated: "I suspect in 5 years the term 'blog' will be meaningless as boundaries blur between traditional news products and online offerings."

Today, the "boys on the blogs" find themselves competing with the "boys on the bus" for attention and recognition. Four decades from now, the boys on the blogs may be indistinguishable from the boys on the bus.

## APPENDIX 1

### Summary of Study Results

#### Media Exposure

**RQ1:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to age, gender, and/or education?*

None of the three demographic variables had a significant relationship with campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs (Table 5.1, p. 83).

**RQ2:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government?*

No significant relationships were found, but the results for the state level approached significance. Campaign reporters who covered state politics and government regularly were more likely to say they read political blogs every day than campaign reporters who did not cover state politics and government regularly (Table 5.2, p. 83).

**RQ3:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign?*

Reporters who covered the primary campaign regularly and reporters who covered the general-election campaign regularly were more likely to say they read political blogs every day than reporters who did not cover either phase of the campaign regularly (Table 5.3, p. 84).

**RQ4:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' exposure to political blogs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service), location (inside or outside Washington, D.C.), years of journalism experience, and/or whether the reporter contributes to a blog on his or her news organization's Website?*

Employer and location had no significant effects (Table 5.4a, p. 85). Years of journalism experience also had no significant effect. However, reporters who said they currently contribute to one or more blogs on their news organizations' Websites were more likely to say they read political blogs every day than those who do not (Table 5.4b, p. 86).

**RQ5:** *Which political blogs do campaign reporters read most frequently?*

The most frequently read political blog among campaign reporters was the liberal Huffington Post, followed by two politically neutral blogs: Politico.com's Ben Smith and CNN's Political Ticker (Table 5.5, p. 87).

**RQ6:** *To what extent do campaign reporters who primarily write about Democratic candidates tend to read different political blogs than those who primarily write about Republican candidates?*

Campaign reporters who primarily wrote about Democratic candidates did not tend to read different political blogs from those who primarily wrote about Republican candidates (Table 5.6, p. 89).

**RQ7:** *Which mainstream news media received the most hyperlinks in the top political blogs' posts during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?*

*The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Des Moines Register* received the most hyperlinks (Table 5.8, p. 94).

#### Need for Orientation and Use of Political Blogs to Satisfy Informational Needs

**H1:** *Campaign reporters with low levels of journalism experience are more likely than campaign reporters with high levels of journalism experience to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs.*

The hypothesis was supported (Table 5.11, p. 102).

**H2:** *Campaign reporters based in Washington, D.C., are more likely to use political blogs to satisfy informational needs than are campaign reporters based outside Washington, D.C.*

The hypothesis was supported (Table 5.11, p. 102).

**RQ8:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to employer (newspaper or wire service) and/or whether they contribute to a blog on their news organizations' Websites?*

Whether a reporter currently contributed to a blog on his or her news organization's Website was a significant positive predictor of that reporter's use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs. Employer was not a significant predictor (Table 5.11, p. 102).

**RQ9:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to age, gender, and/or education?*

None of the three demographic variables was a significant predictor of campaign reporters' use of politics blogs to satisfy informational needs (Table 5.12, p. 103).

**RQ10:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they cover national, state, and/or local politics and government?*

The frequencies with which campaign reporters covered national, state, and local politics were not significant predictors of their use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs (Table 5.13, p. 104).

**RQ11:** *To what extent does campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs vary according to how frequently they covered the 2008 presidential primary campaign and/or general-election campaign?*

The frequencies with which campaign reporters covered the primary and general-election campaigns were not significant predictors of their use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs (Table 5.14, p. 105).

**H3:** *Need for orientation toward frames and need for orientation toward evaluations are stronger predictors of campaign reporters' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs than is need for orientation toward issues.*

The hypothesis was not supported. Neither need for orientation toward issues nor need for orientation toward frames was a significant predictor of journalists' use of political blogs to satisfy informational needs. However, need for orientation toward issues approached significance (Table 5.15, p. 106). The scale measuring need for orientation toward evaluations was not reliable enough to permit testing.

#### First-Level (Issue) Intermedia Agenda Setting

**H4:** *The issue agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the issue agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign.*

The hypothesis was supported (Table 6.4, p. 127).

**RQ12:** *To what extent was the issue agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the issue agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?*

The correlation between the issue agendas of the top political blogs and the candidates was not significant (Table 6.4, p. 127).

**H5:** *Time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas are stronger leading from the print news media to political blogs than leading in the reverse direction.*

The hypothesis was supported (Table 6.5, p. 130).

**RQ13:** *Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction?*

No evidence was found that time-lagged correlations were stronger leading in one direction than the other (Table 6.6, p. 131).

**RQ14:** *Are time-lagged correlations of the issue agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction?*

No evidence was found that time-lagged correlations were stronger leading in one direction than the other (Table 6.7, p. 132).

**RQ15:** *What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)?*

The liberal political blogs' issue agenda at Week 1 was significantly correlated with the news issue agendas at Weeks 2 and 3 (Table 6.10, p. 138), as well as the neutral blogs' issue agenda at Week 3 (Table 6.11, p. 139). Significant correlations also were found leading from the liberal blogs at Week 3 to the conservative blogs at Week 4 (Table 6.13, p. 141), from the neutral blogs at Week 1 to the conservative blogs at Week 3 (Table 6.12, p. 140), and from the neutral blogs at Week 3 to the liberal blogs at Week 4 (Table 6.11, p. 139).

**RQ16:** *What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the issue agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?*

Obama's issue agenda at Week 2 was significantly correlated with Clinton's issue agenda at Week 3 (Table 6.15, p. 143).

#### Second-Level (Attribute) Intermedia Agenda Setting

**H6:** *The attribute agenda of the print news media was positively correlated with the attribute agendas of the candidates and the top political blogs during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign.*

The hypothesis was supported (Table 6.19, p. 151).

**RQ17:** *To what extent was the attribute agenda of the top political blogs correlated with the attribute agenda of the candidates during the early weeks of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign?*

The correlation between the attribute agendas of the top political blogs and the candidates was not significant (Table 6.19, p. 151).

**H7:** *Time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas are stronger leading from political blogs to the print news media than leading in the reverse direction.*

The hypothesis was not supported. The only two significant time-lagged correlations led from the print news media to the political blogs (Table 6.20, p. 153).

**RQ18:** *Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to the print news media or leading in the reverse direction?*

Time-lagged correlations were stronger leading from the candidates to the news media than in the reverse direction (Table 6.21, p. 154).

**RQ19:** *Are time-lagged correlations of the attribute agendas stronger leading from the candidates to political blogs or leading in the reverse direction?*

No evidence was found that time-lagged correlations were stronger leading in one direction than the other (Table 6.22, p. 155).

**RQ20:** *What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of partisan political blog networks (liberal, conservative, and neutral)?*

The news media's attribute agendas at Weeks 1 and 2 were significantly correlated with the neutral blogs' attribute agendas at Weeks 3 and 4, respectively (Table 6.24, p. 159). Also, the news media's attribute agenda at Week 2 was significantly correlated with the liberal blogs' attribute agenda at Week 4 (Table 6.25, p. 160).

***RQ21:** What patterns of time-lagged correlation, if any, exist among the attribute agendas of individual candidates (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards)?*

Clinton's attribute agenda at Week 2 was significantly correlated with the news media's attribute agenda at Week 3 (Table 6.28, p. 163).

## APPENDIX 2

### Survey Instrument

#### **A Study of Blogging's Impact on Journalism**

You are invited to participate in an online survey that examines whether journalists read political blogs and whether they believe blogging is having an impact on journalism. You were selected as a potential participant because your byline appeared on one or more news stories related to the 2008 elections. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the survey.

This survey is being conducted by Kyle Heim, a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The faculty adviser is Wayne Wanta, a professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

#### **Procedures**

If you participate in this survey, you will be asked a series of questions. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question. The survey takes only about 10 minutes to complete. Some questions may appear to be redundant, but please go ahead and answer each item. There are no risks involved in this study, and your participation will not affect your current employment status.

#### **Confidentiality**

Your responses to the survey questions will remain anonymous and will be reported only as part of the aggregate results. These aggregate results may be included in research studies and presentations. Only the primary researcher will have access to survey responses, and your name and place of employment will not be associated with any of the data. You will not be asked to provide your name or e-mail address, and your IP (Internet protocol) address will not be recorded.

#### **Survey Results**

If you agree to participate in the survey, you may request to receive a summary of the aggregate results once the research has been completed. Instructions on how to obtain a summary of the results will be provided at the end of the survey.

#### **Contacts and Questions**

You may ask any questions you have now by e-mailing them to Kyle Heim at [krhhcf@mizzou.edu](mailto:krhhcf@mizzou.edu) or Wayne Wanta at [wantaw@missouri.edu](mailto:wantaw@missouri.edu). If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of

Missouri's Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (573) 882-9585 or  
umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

## Consent

By selecting "yes" below, you are acknowledging that you have read the information above and consent to participate in this study.

1) After reading the information above, do you consent to participate in this study?

YES, I have read the information above and consent to participate in the study.

NO, I do not consent to participate in the study.

If you answered "yes," click the "Next Page" button to proceed to the survey questions.

---

## Part I. Your Journalism Background

In this section, we would like to learn some general information about your journalism background and experience.

2) In your work as a journalist, how often do you write about **national** politics and government?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Regularly

3) In your work as a journalist, how often do you write about **state** politics and government?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Regularly

4) In your work as a journalist, how often do you write about **local/municipal** politics and government?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Regularly

5) Is blogging part of your job as a journalist?

- 1 Yes, I currently contribute to one or more blogs on my news organization's Web site.
- 2 I do not currently contribute to any blogs on my news organization's Web site, but I have done so in the past.
- 3 No, blogging is not part of my job as a journalist.

6) If you answered "yes" to question 5 (indicating that you currently contribute to one or more blogs on your news organization's Web site), how often is the blog(s) updated with new content?

- 1 Less than once a month
- 2 At least once a month but not every week
- 3 At least once a week but not every day
- 4 About once a day
- 5 More than once a day

7) Do you maintain a personal blog outside of work?

- 1 Yes, I currently maintain one or more personal blogs.
- 2 I do not currently maintain any personal blogs, but I have done so in the past.
- 3 No, I have never maintained a personal blog.

8) If you answered "yes" to question 7 (indicating that you currently maintain one or more personal blogs outside of work), how often is the blog(s) updated with new content?

- 1 Less than once a month
- 2 At least once a month but not every week
- 3 At least once a week but not every day
- 4 About once a day
- 5 More than once a day

9) Is your current employer a wire service or a newspaper?

- 1 Newspaper
- 0 Wire service

10) If your current employer is a newspaper, what is the newspaper's daily circulation?

- 5 800,000 or more
- 4 600,000 or 799,999
- 3 400,000 to 599,999
- 2 200,000 to 399,999
- 1 Less than 200,000

11) Are you primarily based out of Washington, D.C.?

1 Yes

0 No

12) How many total years of work experience do you have in journalism (including newspapers, magazines, television, radio, wire services, and/or online publications)?

---

## **Part II. Use of Political Blogs**

In this section, we would like to learn which political blogs you read and how often you read them. For purposes of these questions, a political blog is defined as a regularly updated Web site containing a series of “posts” or entries whose primary subject matter is related to politics.

13) How often do you read political blogs?

1 Never

2 Less than once a month

3 At least once a month but not every week

4 At least once a week but not every day

5 About once a day

6 More than once a day

14) Approximately how many hours per week do you spend reading political blogs?

15) The next set of questions asks how often you visit the Web sites of specific political blogs. For each blog, select the answer that most closely reflects how often you visit the blog’s Web site.

1 Never

2 Less than once a month

3 At least once a month but not every week

4 At least once a week but not every day

5 Every day

Hot Air

The Huffington Post

Think Progress

FiveThirtyEight

Michelle Malkin

CNN’s Political Ticker

Daily Kos

The Daily Dish (Andrew Sullivan)

Talking Points Memo

Power Line  
Ben Smith at Politico.com  
The Corner (National Review Online)  
Glenn Greenwald at Salon.com  
Instapundit/PajamasMedia  
NewsBusters  
Political Punch (Jake Tapper)  
Crooks and Liars  
Little Green Footballs

16) Please list any other political blogs, besides those listed above, whose Web sites you visit at least once a week.

---

### **Part III. News Coverage and Blogging in the 2008 Election Season**

In this section, we would like to learn more about your work as a journalist during the 2008 U.S. presidential race.

17) During the 2008 U.S. presidential **primary** campaign, how often did you write stories related to the campaign (including stories about the candidates, their supporters, the key issues, local reaction, and/or the campaign itself)?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Regularly

18) During the 2008 U.S. presidential **primary** campaign, which party's candidates did you write about most often?

- 1 I most often wrote about Democratic presidential candidates.
- 2 I most often wrote about Republican presidential candidates.
- 3 I wrote about Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in roughly equal proportion.
- 4 I most often wrote about independent or third-party presidential candidates.
- 5 I did not write about candidates in the presidential primary campaign.

19) During the 2008 U.S. presidential **general-election** campaign, how often did you write stories related to the campaign (including stories about the candidates, their supporters, the key issues, local reaction, and/or the campaign itself)?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Regularly

20) During the 2008 U.S. presidential **general-election** campaign, which party's ticket did you write about most often?

- 1 I most often wrote about the Democratic presidential ticket.
- 2 I most often wrote about the Republican presidential ticket.
- 3 I wrote about the Democratic and Republican presidential tickets in roughly equal proportion.
- 4 I most often wrote about independent or third-party presidential candidates.
- 5 I did not write about the candidates in the presidential general-election campaign.

21) Below are various statements related to your work as a journalist during the 2008 U.S. presidential race. Please rate from 1 to 5 your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement:

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

I wanted to be instantly informed about the key issues in the presidential race.  
Some days, I didn't want to hear anything at all about the presidential candidates.  
It was important for me to monitor the key issues in the presidential race constantly.  
I wanted to know the many different sides of the presidential candidates.  
I wanted to be thoroughly informed about specific details behind the issues.  
I expected detailed background information about the presidential candidates.  
I attached great importance to commentaries on the presidential race.  
Bloggers should have refrained from stating their opinions about the presidential race.  
It was interesting to see how non-journalists commented on the presidential race.

22) Below are more statements related to your work as a journalist during the 2008 U.S. presidential race. Please rate from 1 to 5 your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement:

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

Using information from political blogs allowed me to report different types of stories related to the presidential race.  
Political blogs were of no help in finding story ideas related to the presidential race.  
Political blogs made it possible to monitor the presidential race more closely.  
I had a wider range of information available to me because of political blogs.

---

#### **Part IV. Demographic Information**

In this section, we would like to know a little more about you in order to see how different groups of people feel about the issues we are examining.

23) What is your gender?

- 1 Male
- 0 Female

24) What is your age?

25) Which of the following best describes your highest level of education?

- 7 Graduate degree
- 6 Some graduate education
- 5 Bachelor's degree
- 4 Associate's degree
- 3 Some college education
- 2 High school diploma or GED
- 1 Did not complete high school

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#### **Part V. Additional Comments**

26) Please provide any other comments you wish to add about ways in which blogs in general or political blogs in particular have impacted your work as a journalist.

Please click the "Finish Survey" button in order to record your responses.

---

Thank you for responding to this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Any of your colleagues who also received an e-mail invitation may take the survey, too.

If you would like to receive a summary of the survey results once the research study is completed, or if you have any questions or concerns regarding the survey, you may e-mail Kyle Heim at [krhhcf@mizzou.edu](mailto:krhhcf@mizzou.edu).

## APPENDIX 3

### Initial Survey Recruitment E-mail

Subject: Survey on Journalism and Blogs

You have been selected to take part in a brief online survey to gauge journalists' opinions about the impact of blogs on print journalism. The survey (at the link below) requires only about 10 minutes of your time and can be taken at your convenience. Your responses will remain anonymous, and you will not be asked to give your name or place of employment.

The survey is part of a research project conducted by Kyle Heim, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. If you complete the survey, you may request to receive a summary of the research findings.

Please click this link for instructions: <http://tinyurl.com/journalismsurvey>

(If you have trouble accessing the site, copy and paste the address into your Web browser.)

Thank you.

Kyle Heim  
University of Missouri School of Journalism  
[krhhcf@mizzou.edu](mailto:krhhcf@mizzou.edu)

## APPENDIX 4

### Survey Recruitment Reminder E-mails

Subject: Your help is appreciated

This is a reminder that you have been selected to take part in a brief online survey to gauge journalists' opinions about the impact of blogs on print journalism. The survey (at the link below) takes about 10 minutes to complete, and it is anonymous.

If you have already taken the survey, thank you for your participation. You may ignore this reminder. If you have not yet taken the survey, you may do so any time until Friday, June 26.

The online survey is part of a research project conducted by Kyle Heim, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. If you complete the survey, you may request to receive a summary of the research findings.

Please click this link for instructions and more information:  
<http://tinyurl.com/journalismsurvey>

You will receive one final e-mail reminder before the survey site closes.

Thank you.

Kyle Heim  
University of Missouri School of Journalism  
[krhhcf@mizzou.edu](mailto:krhhcf@mizzou.edu)

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Subject: Final reminder - Survey on journalism and blogs

I apologize for the intrusion, but this is your last reminder that you have been selected to take part in a brief online survey about the impact of blogs on print journalism.

If you have already taken the survey, thank you for your participation. You may ignore this reminder, and you will not receive any more e-mails.

If you have not yet taken the survey, you may do so any time until the end of the day Friday, June 26, at the link below. After Friday, the survey site will close.

The survey, which is anonymous and takes about 10 minutes to complete, is part of a research project conducted by Kyle Heim, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of

Missouri's School of Journalism. If you complete the survey, you may request to receive a summary of the research findings.

Please click this link for instructions and more information:  
<http://tinyurl.com/journalismsurvey>

You will not receive any more e-mails regarding this survey.

Thank you,  
Kyle Heim  
University of Missouri School of Journalism  
[krhhcf@mizzou.edu](mailto:krhhcf@mizzou.edu)

## APPENDIX 5

### Content Analysis Codebook

In this content analysis, you will identify the presence of 12 political issues and 12 candidate attributes in a series of news articles, blog posts, and candidate press releases from the 2008 Democratic presidential primary season.

#### **Coding units and decisions**

The coding unit is the news article, blog post, or press release. This includes the full text of the item, plus any accompanying headlines or subheadings.

For each numbered item, decide which of the 12 political issues and which of the 12 candidate attributes are mentioned within the item. Some items will mention multiple issues or attributes; others will mention none at all. Select each issue and attribute that is mentioned, even if the mention is brief or incidental. For example, if an item mentions that Barack Obama is “a strong leader who is fighting for better schools, renewable fuels, and an end to the Iraq war,” that item would be coded for the issues of education, energy/gas prices, and Iraq, as well as for the attributes of leadership/lack of leadership and fighter/coward.

The focus is on the three Democratic front-runners from the 2008 presidential primary season: Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John Edwards. When making coding decisions, ignore any sentences or paragraphs devoted exclusively to the other Democratic candidates or to the Republican candidates. However, if one of the other candidates is referring to Obama, Clinton, or Edwards (e.g., Bill Richardson attacking Clinton’s support for the Iraq war or Joe Biden attacking Obama’s lack of political experience), that would still be relevant for coding purposes.

Some items may contain hyperlinks to other Web sites or embedded videos and graphics. Click on these links or view these videos and graphics only if you find it necessary in order to understand the meaning of the item and establish the context. Coding decisions, however, should be based on the text of the item itself, not any accompanying links, videos, or graphics.

You will be supplied coding sheets to mark your decisions.

## Variables

### 1. Media type

Each item will be identified as a blog post, news article, or candidate press release.

### 2. Name

Each item will be identified according to the name of the blog, name of the newspaper or wire service, or the name of the candidate.

### 3. Date

Each item will be identified according to the date in which it was published. Items will be divided into four weeks: Week 1 (Dec. 6-12, 2007); Week 2 (Dec. 13-19, 2007); Week 3 (Dec. 20-26, 2007); Week 4 (Dec. 27, 2007-Jan. 2, 2008).

### 4. Political issues

A description of the 12 political issue categories:

*Iraq.* This issue encompasses the war in Iraq, U.S. military strategy and troop levels in Iraq, and the internal political struggles within Iraq. Items that contain general references to military spending or veterans' benefits should not be included in this category unless those themes are tied specifically to the Iraq war.

*Health care.* This issue encompasses the health care system, health insurance and health benefits, prescription drugs, Medicare and Medicaid, and the fight against physical or mental health problems such as AIDS, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. Also included are references to pregnancy, abortion, or stem cell research when they are mentioned in the context of health care. For example, an item that refers to abortion as a medical procedure or as part of women's reproductive health would fall into this category, whereas an item that refers to abortion in purely moral terms (with no explicit mention of health care) would not.

*Economy and jobs.* This issue encompasses the U.S. economy, including references to the recession, economic stimulus, trade, inflation, bankruptcies, consumer confidence, the stock market, and banking. This issue also encompasses references to the job market and work-related issues, including unemployment, layoffs, outsourcing, wages, and retirement and pension plans.

*Energy and gas prices.* This issue encompasses fuel prices, energy consumption, and energy policy, including any mention of renewable fuels, alternative energy sources, gasoline prices, or the oil industry. General references to the environment or pollution do not count unless they are specifically tied to energy consumption.

*Education.* This issue encompasses any reference to education or teaching at any level (preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary), education policies such as No Child Left Behind, and the cost of education, including references to tuition, student loans, or college affordability.

*Agriculture and rural issues.* This issue encompasses any reference to agriculture or the unique challenges of rural America, including references to rural development, small-town life, family farms, and agribusiness.

*Housing.* This issue encompasses any reference to housing availability, housing affordability, or the financing of housing. This would include references to homeownership, housing sales, foreclosures, subprime mortgages, and “predatory lending” practices targeting homeowners.

*Government ethics.* This issue encompasses references to corruption in government and the question of whether the government serves the interests of the American public or special interests. Discussion of the influence of lobbyists, corporations, and cronyism in political affairs is included in this category.

*Terrorism and national security.* This issue includes mentions of national security, homeland security, or national defense; any mention of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, or other terrorist incidents; and any mention of terrorists or terror organizations, such as Al-Qaida. References to personal security or common crime are not included in this category.

*Foreign policy.* This issue includes any mentions of international affairs, international diplomacy, and U.S. relations with other countries. This issue also includes references to ongoing conflicts, crises, or other situations in such nations as North Korea, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, China, and the Middle East. Do not include items about Iraq in this category (unless other nations or broader references to foreign policy are mentioned as well). Items about Iraq should be coded in the “Iraq” category.

*Families.* This issue includes any references to “family values,” parenting, child care, foster care, child welfare, and caring for the elderly. Also included are references to teen parenting and teen pregnancy. Do not place an item in this category simply because the word “family” is mentioned (e.g., “My tax plan will save families money.”). Only place an item in this category if it makes explicit reference to family-related concerns.

*Equality and civil rights.* This issue includes any references to the struggles faced by women, minorities, gays and lesbians, the disabled, and any other disadvantaged or underrepresented group, as well as the efforts to address inequalities or discrimination. For example, discussion of “equal work, equal pay,” same-sex marriage, affirmative action, or hate crimes would fall under this category. Do not place an item in this category simply because it mentions race or gender. In order to fit under this category, the item must make explicit reference to equality, inequality, or civil rights.

## 5. Candidate attributes

A description of the 12 candidate attribute categories:

*Populism/elitism.* References to a candidate trying to appeal to ordinary citizens (as opposed to elites or special interests) or, conversely, being out of touch with ordinary citizens.

*Experience/inexperience.* References to a candidate's political experience and political preparation, or lack thereof. This may include references to a candidate's résumé, track record, or credentials; references to a candidate as being tested or vetted; or references to a candidate being a political novice or a lightweight.

*Change/status quo.* References to a candidate serving as an agent of change or as a continuation of the status quo. This would include references to a candidate wanting to "turn the page," "chart a new course," offer "fresh ideas," etc., as well as a candidate representing "more of the same," "politics as usual," or the "political establishment." While it can be argued that all candidate proposals represent a call for change, do not code an item in this category unless it specifically invokes "change" as a campaign theme.

*Electability/unelectability.* References to a candidate being "electable" or "unelectable," or assessments of that candidate's chances of winning in the general election. General mentions of candidates' poll numbers do not fall under this category, unless those poll numbers are accompanied by an explicit discussion of the candidate's electability.

*Honesty/dishonesty.* References to a candidate's honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, or candor, or lack thereof. Included under this category would be any accusations of a candidate making a false statement, playing loose with the facts, "flip-flopping," or engaging in exaggeration or deception.

*Positivity/negativity.* References to a candidate running a positive campaign or having a positive message, or, conversely, running a negative or "attack" campaign. This category would include accusations of mudslinging, running negative ads, or engaging in political "dirty tricks."

*Leadership/lack of leadership.* References to a candidate being prepared to "take charge" and assume a leadership role, or being unprepared to do so. Also, references to a candidate's leadership qualities or lack of such qualities.

*Unity/division.* References to a candidate striving to bring people together, unite the nation, unite the Democratic Party, or unite Republicans and Democrats. Conversely, this category also includes references to a candidate as "polarizing" or as someone who would split the nation or the Democratic Party.

*Likability/unlikability.* References to a candidate's warmth and personality or lack thereof. This category includes references to a candidate's likability or favorability ratings, as well as accusations that a candidate is disliked, despised or "turns people off."

*Fighter/coward.* References to a candidate as a fighter, crusader, or someone who is unwilling to give up. Conversely, this category also includes references to a candidate as someone who too easily capitulates, backs down, or compromises.

*Charisma/lack of charisma.* References to a candidate's ability or inability to inspire, charm, or stir excitement and passion in voters or crowds. This category also includes references to a candidate as boring or "falling flat."

*Personal background.* References to a candidate's family or life story, religion, race, ethnicity, or gender in the context of how it affects that candidate in the presidential race or, more broadly, in the political arena. Do not place an item in this category simply because a candidate's race or gender is mentioned (e.g., "Barack Obama would be the first African American president"). The item must discuss the political implications of the candidate's personal background in order to fall under this category.

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