

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

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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.