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COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

A BASELINE EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL BLOGGERS: WHO
THEY ARE, THEIR VIEWS ON THE BLOGOSPHERE AND THEIR
INFLUENCE IN AGENDA-SETTING VIA THE TWO-STEP FLOW
HYPOTHESIS

By

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ABSTRACT

This is a baseline examination of political bloggers, it profiles who they are, discovers how they view the blogosphere, explores their motivations for blogging, and researches their influence on the media agenda via the two-step flow hypothesis. Key political organizations were asked which blogs they read to create a census of influential political blogs. The respondents of these blogs hailed from across the country and the political spectrum. Data was collected via a SurveyPro online questionnaire and tabulated with SPSS. The data revealed that bloggers tend to be married, educated, white males in their 40's. They are concerned about their reputation as contributors of an online rumor mill. Most do not blog professionally and are not making money from their blogs. The data also showed a digital divide between minorities and the poor and a gender gap among political bloggers.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2006, the most powerful Democrats in the country united. While this is not unusual or unprecedented in an election year, the catalyst for the union was. It consisted of bloggers: thousands of them. Each blogger came with a different sphere of influence. This diversity helped attract major Democratic lawmakers to a convention united around a common goal -- defeating the Republicans in November.

The convention was arranged by Markos Moulitsas, the founder and principal author of the political weblog *DailyKos*, the most popular site in the political blogosphere ("Top 100 blogs," 2006). Its purpose was simple: to unite like-minded bloggers to help create Democratic majorities in the 2006 elections (Phillips, 2006). Political activists, political staffs, and journalists are the most active readers and writers of the political blogosphere. The leaders of both major parties target bloggers, seeking their views and their support, while journalists study them for their commentary and unique information on stories that cover every level of the political spectrum (M. Fisher, 2006).

Bloggers were recently invited to a bill signing ceremony at the White House in recognition of their efforts to create a database of federal spending. The bipartisan bill, sponsored by Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Barack Obama (D-IL) and supported by President George W. Bush, met tough opposition from senior Senators (Dinan, 2006). Supporters of the bill said it would make it easier for the general public to track budget items, but it would also help steer some lawmakers from pork barrel projects. Senators from both parties blocked the bill using a parliamentary rule that allows one Senator to prevent legislation from passing. The blogosphere put public pressure on the Senators and the bill passed. John Hart, spokesman for Senator Coburn, "[Blogging] really does represent a revival of basic democratic values: that active citizens using tools of technology really can steer the political process" (Dinan, 2006, p. A04).

Many people wonder, "Who is a blogger?" The answer defies simple explanation. The most popular bloggers cut across race, gender, and class. There has not been any data on the demographics of political bloggers. A look at

the most popular political blogs show college professors interested in politics, commentators spreading their views across political issues, former political staffers angry at the system and annoyed activists shouting about their causes. Their audiences usually consist of like-minded, equally annoyed activists. Moreover, political bloggers offer a unique sphere of influence different from that of the traditional media, defined here as television, radio and daily newspapers, and among elected officials.

Are these political bloggers activists fighting for a cause or journalists looking to expose the truth? What are the codes of ethics and standards of the political blogosphere? Are their codes of ethics and standards as diverse as their make up?

This study examines the definitions, views and perspectives of political bloggers by answering four research questions:

- R1:** Who are the political bloggers?
- R2:** How do the political bloggers view their own blogosphere?
- R3:** What is a blogger's motivation for undertaking and maintaining a political blog?
- R4:** What influence do bloggers have on setting the media agenda and how is that influence executed via the two-step flow hypothesis?

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is blogging, the blogosphere, and the rise of the weblog?

The rise of the weblogs (commonly called blogs) is described in many ways -- from people standing on their digital soapboxes to crusading citizen journalists and modern-day pamphleteers (Tong, 2006). Starting a political blog is more popular than ever, but it took a boom in blogging technology to make the political blogosphere what it is today.

According to Adweek.com, the number of blogs reached more than 24 million in 2005, up from 5.4 million in the previous year. A new blog is born every second, and considering the size of the Internet, that estimate is conservative (Nudd, 2006). According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 9% of U.S. adults who use the Internet write blogs and more than a quarter of all Internet users read blogs regularly. *The Daily Kos*, the most visited political blog, receives a half million hits a day, according to the Truth Laid Bear, an Internet traffic site ("Traffic Ranking," 2006).

Political blogs have grown and evolved quickly with the rapid expansion of commercial software. In the late 1990s, political blogs were practically nonexistent. They usually featured links pointing users to issues of interest on the World Wide Web ("The rise and fall of blogs," 2006). This style is best reflected in *The Drudge Report*, a site that highlights news articles from several sources, but rarely boasts original contribution. The "Big Bang" of the political blogosphere -- a creation that went from obscure web spaces into an interconnected collection of societal commentators and reporters - was born out of a technological breakthrough of blogging software.

Web based products -- like Blogger and Live Journal -- provided easy tools and templates that allowed a user to manage a blog as easy as creating a document in a word processing application (Lasica, 2001). This software allowed almost anyone with an Internet connection to set up a blog within ten to fifteen minutes (Drezner & Farrell, 2004).

These tools alone did not create the current blogosphere; social networking among political bloggers did when they created a network among themselves through a series of hyperlinks. The most prominent are called Blogrolls. They appear on most blogs and list other blogs they frequently read or admire. Another form of hyperlink is a post. A post occurs when a blogger writes a specific item directed at another blog and creates a link. Unlike the Blogroll, these posts are temporary. Many are removed from the site's main page in a matter of weeks, if not days. Posts are also the primary cause of the rapid spread of information throughout the blogosphere. Bloggers are among the biggest readers of other blogs and frequently use, comment or debate information their fellow bloggers offer (Regan, 2006).

Political campaigns have tried to tap into the political blogosphere through establishing netroots -- a blend of the words *Internet* and *grassroots* -- that occur when political candidates actively court political bloggers to support their campaign ideologically. Today, netroots coordinators are essential in almost every state campaign.

Influence of Blogs

"Never have so many people written so much to be read by so few," was the *New York Times* take on the famous Winston Churchill quote (Hafner, 2004 <http://tech2.nytimes.com/>). One of the great conundrums of the political blogging phenomenon is a political blogger's ability to influence the media despite having a relatively small audience.

As popular as political blogs are, they do not attract the number of users traditional media do or even the web spaces that traditional media attract. Gallup reveals that only 9% of Internet users say they frequently read blogs, while 11% report reading them occasionally. Two-thirds of Internet users say they never read them. This places blog reading last in Gallup's 13 common Internet activities for the second consecutive year. In other words, blog readership did not grow in 2005 despite Americans spending more time online (Saad, 2006). A Pew Internet & American Life Project study showed that only nine percent of

Gen-Xers are likely to start blogs, the same percentage recorded by 51-59 year olds (Ahrens, 2006).

In related results, Gallup's survey found that checking online for news and weather is done by 72% of web users, shopping online by 52%, paying bills by 40%, and playing games by 28%. Lydia Saad of Gallup (2006) writes, "Blog readership is on par with downloading music and participating in online auctions, such as eBay" (<http://www.galluppoll.com>).

Gallup also looked at blog readership patterns (Saad, 2006). Frequent readership is "significantly higher among adults aged 29 and younger than adults 30 and older" (<http://www.galluppoll.com>). According to Saad (2006), 19% of these younger web users say they read blogs frequently, while less than 1 in 10 of older Americans are regular readers.

Blog readership tends to break down by party identification with Democrats being more avid blog readers than Republicans (Saad, 2006). Republicans do not dispute that liberal blogs have the larger audience, but they are working to change that. At a recent meeting for Republican congressional staffers on Capitol Hill, 16 Republican bloggers pressed the need for open communication to expand the Republican blog audience (Pfeiffer, 2006).

Despite these criticisms, political bloggers have several built-in advantages over traditional publications. According to Drezner and Ferrell (2004):

The median blogger has almost no political influence as measured by traffic or hyperlinks. This is because the distribution of hyperlinks and traffic is heavily skewed, with a few bloggers commanding the most attention...The skewed distribution makes it easy for observers to extract information or analysis from blogs--but the reason they are important is that journalists and opinion leaders are readers of the blogs. (p. 4)

Political bloggers will contend that their influence is immeasurably greater because their audience has a disproportionate number of opinion leaders, political operators, and traditional media (Saad, 2006). Most blogs have a

readership in the hundreds, but that readership consists primarily of journalists and political actors who are committed to reading several blogs daily (Regan, 2006).

Such dedicated readers are essential in crafting campaign messages, advising candidates, and reporting on voter trends. Blogs receive attention from political staffers, lobbyists, and communication directors from K Street to beyond the Beltway. For example, blogs became such a force in the 2005 gubernatorial race in Virginia that campaign managers were accused of neglecting their duties to read and respond to blogs (M. Fisher, 2006).

Jerome Armstrong of *MyDD* said, "Writing a blog, reading the blogs, it's become almost a de facto thing that every candidate has to do" (Brooks, 2006, p. ARC). Political weblogs are not influential because their message reaches the public via the blogosphere. They are influential because their audience influences the traditional media and the politically powerful.

The Ethics and Standards of the Blogosphere

As influential as the bloggers are, many journalists and political staffers are frustrated with the sometimes blurry and always thin line that separates the role of a citizen journalist from a social commentator, particularly when bloggers choose roles that suit them best at the time. Journalists who use the blogosphere to chase down leads have been frustrated by bloggers' frequent inaccuracies and the bloggers' lack of standards ("Bloggers need to create," 2006).

Political campaigns seeking to establish netroots in the blogosphere are unsure how to treat bloggers who view themselves as journalists versus those who insist they are political activists. The communications director for the Ohio Democratic Party, Jim Rothenberg, ran across a conundrum at a March 2006 dinner for Senator Barack Obama (D-IL). A few Democrat-friendly bloggers wanted complimentary tickets to attend the dinner. Rothenberg felt that journalists should be treated as journalists. For such events, journalists are not entitled to a complimentary seat or meal. The local Ohio blogosphere severely criticized Rothenberg, claiming that they were activists, not journalists. Senator

Obama resolved the situation and earned positive views from Ohio bloggers by paying for their table (A. Fisher, 2006).

The gray line between journalist and social commentator also has bloggers confused. A group of Virginia bloggers led by Jim Bacon of *Road to Ruin* held a summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. Bacon proposed that some basic ethical standards be established for bloggers: requiring a byline, revealing conflicts of interest, and committing to fact checking. The summit failed to reach a consensus, however. As Bacon said, "In the end, it's a bunch of maniacal individualists. They just think they can say anything they want to without limits" (M. Fisher, 2006, p. 48).

A collection of bloggers founded the Media Bloggers Association (MBA), a non-partisan organization and resource for bloggers. The MBA accepts bloggers as "journalists, pundits or provocateurs...(and they are) accorded the same First Amendment rights and legal privileges as those who work for traditional media organizations" (<http://mediabloggers.org>, n.d.). To bring some semblance of order to the blogosphere, the MBA proposed accepting standards of fairness and decency. The standards stressed honesty, fairness, and accuracy in reporting and commentating, transparency to address and disclose all potential conflicts of interest, accountability for mistakes, and respect for the privacy of private citizens -- all standards commonly associated with traditional media (Media Bloggers Association, 2006).

There are two primary requirements to join the MBA. An official MBA hyperlink must be added to the blog to publicly associate that blog with the association. The blogger must provide a 200-word explanation of his or her role as a *media blogger*. The MBA does not permit anonymous bloggers to join without a committee review. Unfortunately, the MBA has largely failed in this pursuit of standards. All members are displayed on the MBA's page, and the list lacks most of the more popular bloggers (Media Bloggers Association, 2006). A code of ethics or basic standards remains a distant dream in the political blogosphere.

Bloggers: Journalists or Activists?

Another irritant for traditional journalists is bloggers who report news. Nick Ciarelli, the 19-year-old blogger behind *thinksecret*, revealed the top-secret product launches of both the iPod Nano and Mac Mini a week before Macintosh released the products. Apple sued, demanding that Ciarelli reveal his sources. The Harvard sophomore refused, claiming that he has the same protections that journalists enjoy. The judge agreed with Apple, stating that online publishers could be forced to reveal their sources (Tench, 2005).

Court watchers and journalists complain that bloggers do not follow the same code of ethics as traditional journalists. Many of the same organizations that called for the release of imprisoned journalist Judith Miller, who similarly refused to reveal her sources in a story about exposing the identity of CIA operative Valerie Plame, kept silent on the Nick Ciarelli case (Beam, 2005).

Affording millions of bloggers the constitutional protections journalists have, such as shield laws to protect confidential sources, would weaken the trust of all media, according to Shaw (2005). "If the courts allow every Tom, Dick and Matt who wants to call himself a journalist to invoke the privilege to protect confidential sources...That would ultimately damage society as much as it would the media" (Shaw, 2005, p. E14).

The question raised by the blogosphere is, "What makes a journalist?" Journalists are not licensed. If a blogger libels an individual, by law that blogger is treated as a journalist. Inaccuracies are far more common in the blogosphere, again due to its diversity and penchant for emotional and opinion-driven prose. Mistakes by other bloggers are frequently pointed out and the offending blog is notably shamed, just as "scoops" and well-versed columns from the traditional media are linked in the blogosphere across blogs and celebrated (Tench, 2005).

As *Slate* Editor Jack Shafer (2005) noted in a retort to Shaw:

I suggest that he -- or one of the four experienced editors who touched his copy -- research the history of the First Amendment. They'll learn that the Founders wrote it precisely to protect Tom, Dick, and Matt and the wide-eyed pamphleteers and the partisan

press of the time. The professional press...didn't even exist until the late 19th century. (<http://www.slate.com/>)

Many traditional journalists are dedicated readers of the blogosphere. The *Washington Post's* Mike Shear lobbied his employer to let him have his own blog after seeing the amount of influence Virginia bloggers were having on local politics. "There's no evidence of a wider reading public, but they have become important to a really elite crowd, consultants, lobbyists, flacks," (M. Fisher, 2006).

This issue was debated in the blogosphere on both the right and the left sides of the political spectrum. In 2005, Jerome Armstrong, creator of the *MyDD* blog, served as a consultant for former Virginia Governor Mark Warner and Democratic candidates. As an undisclosed paid political consultant, Armstrong praised several of these candidates. When attacked for having a "conflict of interest" by the blogosphere, Armstrong was defended by Markos Moulitsas of *The Daily Kos*. Interestingly, Moulitsas and Armstrong published a book together on blogging and political activism in 2006 (Lambro, 2006).

The New Republic attained an email sent by Moulitsas to a select list of bloggers, asking them to ignore the story. In the email, he said, "If any of us blog on this right now, we fuel the story. Let's starve it of oxygen" (Lambro, 2006, p. A04). This focused attention on the bloggers' ethics as journalists, yet both men preferred to say they were not journalists, just political activists.

Traditional media in the political blogosphere

The traditional media's initial interactions with the political blogosphere have been tumultuous, created by the fact that political bloggers comment and review almost all traditional media news. Traditional media sources like CNN and CBS were slow to understand criticisms or handle a blog controversy. Such incidents often led to allegations of bias and fraud toward both organizations, and eventually resulted in resignations by senior news providers.

Conservatives and like-minded bloggers have claimed bias from CBS, primarily from the former anchor of the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather, particularly when he participated in a Democratic fundraiser in 2001 (Bozell,

2001). In 2004, Dan Rather anchored a story questioning President George W. Bush's military service. The core of the story's allegations consisted of copies of documents that alleged the President had not reported for duty while serving in the National Guard. Immediately after the report aired, *Free Republic*, a conservative blog, questioned the authenticity of the documents. The blog claimed the documents were fraudulent (Anderson, 2005). The conservative blogosphere questioned the integrity and truthfulness of Rather, arguing the 30-year-old documents were reproduced using word processing software. Constant pressure forced an investigation and the story gained the moniker *Rathergate*. When CBS could not vouch for the authenticity of the controversial documents, Rather resigned as anchor of the CBS Evening News (Anderson, 2005).

A similar event occurred in 2005 when CNN chief news executive Eason Jordan remarked in a speech to the World Economic Forum that several journalists in Iraq had been targeted by the military. Mr. Jordan was questioned at the forum and tried to explain that he was trying to differentiate between war journalists who were killed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and journalists who were mistaken as the enemy. The policy of the World Economic Forum is that all comments are off-the-record, but Mr. Jordan's comments made it to the blogosphere. His attempts to explain were shot down and he resigned soon after (Anderson, 2005).

To understand the blogosphere and control their interests in it, the traditional media had mixed results in joining the political blogosphere. *The BBC*, *The New York Times*, *ABC News*, *MSNBC*, and many local newspapers and magazines have started blogs or have sponsored popular bloggers (Nudd, 2006). Andrew Sullivan, who for five years had an independent blog, is now associated with *Time* magazine. Many traditional media companies view blogs the same way music companies viewed online music swapping in the late 1990s. They deny the bloggers' significance, but feel threatened nonetheless (Naughton, 2005). *The Washington Post* created a few blogs for its reporters, but placed restrictions on them, allowing them to be less formal than traditional columns but restricting their comments on the news. The editorial board wanted them to appear as information providers, not as political activists. The journalist-bloggers

earned credit as reliable sources in the blogosphere, but were treated as outsiders by the blog community (M. Fisher, 2006).

The Washington Post experienced a disastrous incident when employing an established conservative blogger, Ben Domenech. Domenech, founder of the blog, *Red State*, lasted six postings before being exposed by the liberal blogging community as a serial plagiarist. Domenech's conservative allies in the blogosphere cited his age (24) and inexperience as reason for his plagiarism, but liberal bloggers focused their ire on Jim Brady, the Executive Editor of *Washingtonpost.com* (Shafer, 2006). The political blogosphere responded to the Domenech scandal the same way it reacted to "Rathergate" and the result was the same -- a reporter was removed and the company behind him blamed (Shafer, 2006).

The problems traditional media have in dealing with bloggers are they do not understand the speed of the blogosphere and cannot grasp its maverick, independent nature. The diversity of the blogosphere allows several individuals with unique local views of politics and some policy expertise the advantage of high speed publication (Drezner & Ferrell, 2004).

Blogs and Politics

The political blogosphere and politicians had a similarly rocky start. As the Dan Rather resignation was the keystone event for conservative bloggers, the Trent Lott incident was the shot heard round the Internet for political bloggers on the left. Political strategists recognized the power that the blogosphere could hold, and encouraged them to include that part in their campaign strategies, establishing netroots and including blogs on blast emails and talking points.

As reported by CNN (2002), Trent Lott (R-MS), the Senate majority leader, speaking at Senator Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party, said:

I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either. (<http://archives.cnn.com>)

In the 1948 campaign mentioned by Senator Lott, Strom Thurmond ran as a Dixiecrat with pro-segregationist positions. Senator Lott's comments were aired live and rebroadcast on C-SPAN but ignored by the traditional media ("Lott steps down," 2002). Even conservative bloggers picked up on Lott's remarks and questioned his racial sensitivity. Did his comments mean that Lott supported a pro-segregation position, the foremost issue in Thurmond's presidential run? The political blogosphere put pressure on the traditional media to pay attention to the remarks. After two weeks, the media revisited the story and the attention forced the southern Republican to resign from his leadership position ("Lott steps down," 2002).

In February 2006, Ken Mehlman, the chairman of the Republican National Committee, reported that "32 million Americans read the blogs. Our job is to reach out to those people, to reach out to talk radio, to reach out to the blogs" ("Ken Mehlman delivers remarks," 2006). As part of his effort, the RNC enlisted a former blogger Patrick Ruffini. Ruffini acted to ensure that every RNC member receive a twice-daily "blog report" that summarized the key points occurring in the political blogosphere ("Rise of the Blogs," 2006).

Blogs and Political Campaigns

Reaching the voter through the blogosphere has produced mixed results for politicians. Howard Dean's campaign made him the first presidential candidate to blog. He even broke records for fundraising via the Internet (Lambro, 2006).

Establishing netroots, as Dean did in 2004, is an essential goal in every state-level campaign. As Froma Harrop (2006) of the *Providence Journal* said, "Proceed with caution, as the blogosphere is not known for its loyalty to candidates" (p. D-07). Early in the campaign, bloggers embrace a candidate, and that candidate in turn embraces the supportive bloggers. This relationship will quickly sour if the candidate loses any possibility of winning the election. The speed of the blogosphere makes the loss of support seem much more dramatic.

This was the case with Howard Dean. Liberal blogs supported his nomination as the first candidate to embrace them. The liberal bloggers ignored his conservative views on gun control and welfare reform, touting his more liberal credentials, like legalizing civil unions for gay partners. After Dean's infamous scream at the 2004 Iowa Caucus, the blogosphere painted the Vermont Democrat with a far different brush stroke, highlighting his conservative views and quick temper. Blogger rebound helped cut off his Internet funding machine (Harrop, 2006). It quickly ended his opportunity to receive the Democratic presidential nomination.

This risk is ignored by several candidates who feel bloggers are a "point of entry" or possible exit. Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT), who served as Al Gore's running mate in 2000, lost his Senate primary thanks to the blogosphere. Lieberman's challenger, Ned Lamont, was a virtual unknown until bloggers became angry with the Senator's unchanging support for the war in Iraq. They wanted a more liberal candidate. The Connecticut bloggers railed on Lieberman's pro-war sentiments and circulated an Internet clip of President George W. Bush kissing the Senator on the cheek after the 2005 State of the Union address (Brooks, 2006). Lamont used this blogosphere assistance to fuel his campaign.

"They can give a boost to the candidates they trust, and they can impose retribution," Maine political consultant Jed Rathband informed Molly Ball of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (2006). "Look at Joe Lieberman. This new muscle that they (bloggers) have is being flexed" (p. 1A).

Despite the unpredictable state of blogs, campaigns are desperate for them as cornerstones of online media strategy. Knowing that nearly half of media consumption is from voters spending time online, political strategists are focusing on well-produced candidate sites, targeted emails, and ads on web sites and blogs. The candidate blog has become a key area of an organized online campaign (Gilbert, 2006).

Political Blogging at the State Level

As the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections shared the importance of a single state's electoral votes, the adage, "all politics is local," has never been more accurate. Bloggers have started to spring up at the state level, reporting and commentating, not only on statewide office holders, but also on local issues and races. Most of these bloggers are former political insiders who have worked as staffers in one form or another. Ben Tribbett, a former Virginia Statehouse candidate, provided detailed accounts of Virginia legislative races that were mostly ignored by the traditional media (M. Fisher, 2006).

Campaigns are looking for support from popular bloggers. According to Moulitsas of *DailyKos*, several candidates frequently ask him for endorsements:

My rule with campaigns and the like is that they have to build support locally. If (talk about a candidate) doesn't come from the local bloggers, I'm not going to pay attention. It would be too easy for people to come to the top blogger and try to build support that way. I want (endorsements) to come from the issue bloggers, I want to see them build support at the bottom. (Brooks, 2006, p. ARC)

This has occurred in the 2006 Virginia Senate Race, where both the campaigns of incumbent Senator George Allen (R-VA) and his Democratic opponent James Webb hired bloggers to generate positive stories about their campaigns. Webb's campaign employed bloggers early. They helped fan the flames of a derogatory remark toward a Webb volunteer by Senator Allen. The incident helped close Allen's double-digit lead in the polls, prompting Allen to generate his own netroots. "Our goal is to engage the blogosphere to get our message out," said Allen's blog guru, Jon Henke (Shear & Craig, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>).

A lack of understanding of the political blogosphere can be catastrophic, especially for a politician as the traditional media have discovered. In a primary

race in Ohio House District 14, blogger Eric Vessels called leading Democratic House candidate Bill Ritter to discuss a “gay-baiting” piece of campaign literature that could tarnish his chief opponent. Vessels recorded the conversation during which Ritter got defensive. The audio clip was posted on Vessels’ blog *Plunderbund*. The surrounding storm worsened when the traditional news media picked up the audio clip. Ritter lost to his opponent by fewer than 200 votes (Naymick, 2006).

In Missouri, actions of political bloggers’ led to the resignation of a Democratic staffer and angry responses from the Republican governor’s office. Roy Temple, founder of the Democrat-leaning blog *Fired up! Missouri* and former chief of staff to Senator Jean Carnahan (D-MO), had been constantly jabbing Republican Governor Matt Blunt. His criticism caused him to be barred from a bill signing and listed as a security threat by the Governor’s office (Lieb, 2006).

Jeff Roe, a former chief of staff to Republican Congressman Sam Raines, was responsible for exposing foul comments made by a Democratic staffer on a social networking site. Roe’s blog also criticized Democratic Congressman Emanuel Cleaver for missing a House vote to preside over a funeral (Lieb, 2006). Cleaver later noted to David A. Lieb (2006) of the *Springfield News-Leader* that his voting attendance was 98%, saying, “Blogs can be a great way for people to express their opinions and engage in civil dialog. Unfortunately, they can also be used to attack and score political points” (<http://www.news-leader.com>).

As the political blogosphere grows, it increasingly reaches into more local levels of government. As seen in the examples above, political bloggers can be advantageous as part of a comprehensive campaign. They can also be lethal in turning a poor comment into a full-blown scandal or exposing misconduct.

Bloggers vs. Journalists

There is a certain inevitability of bloggers and traditional journalists conflicting with each other. The traditional media call bloggers lazy, pajama-clad, shut-ins who throw rumors at each other from their parents’ basement.

Los Angeles Times columnist David Shaw (2005), a Pulitzer Prize winner, offered this view:

Many bloggers – not all, perhaps not even most – don't seem to worry much about being accurate. Or fair. They just want to get their opinions – and their 'scoops' – out there as fast as they pop into their brains. One of the great advantages of the Internet, many Web lovers have told me, is that it's easy to correct an error there. You can do it instantly, instead of having to wait until the next day's paper. (p. E14)

Many bloggers retort that they represent the new journalism, and the traditional media are slowly dying. The argument is specious, however, because *most* blogs do not report. Instead, they comment on news the traditional media reports (Kedrosky, 2005). They also point out that bloggers have hidden conflicts of interest. It is not uncommon for a blogger to work under a pseudonym or be an undisclosed, paid member of a campaign (Lambro, 2006).

Additional resentment from traditional journalists claims that bloggers hold them to a higher standard, initiating media errors and inaccuracies that spread rapidly throughout the blogosphere. The sentiment among traditional journalists is that the blogger is quick to criticize, but refuses to be held to the same standards journalists hold dear (M. Fisher, 2006). This new fourth estate, previously accountable to no one, except perhaps its readers, has found a possible fifth column.

There is also a concern that some bloggers blend the anonymity of the Internet with their own passionate political activism in a mix of hateful and vile speech. In January 2006, a blog featuring *Washington Post* ombudsman Deborah Howell became ground zero for blog rage. Howell was commenting on the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal, saying that Abramoff gave campaign donations to both Republicans and Democrats. The blogosphere immediately directed a thousand comments at Howell. They were peppered with obscenities and threats. A clarification offered a few days later brought more crude comments. *Washingtonpost.com* Executive Editor Jim Brady jumped in the fray and shut the blog down to comments (Brady, 2006).

Brady was then listed as a puppet of President George W. Bush and skewered on several blogs. Brady (2006) stood by his decision, saying in a *Washington Post* op-ed:

Blogs play a crucial role in the national conversation, whether it's giving readers insight into a specific topic, providing a forum for healthy debate or holding the media's feet to the fire...

What's distressing about my recent experience is that a small number of highly partisan, energetic bloggers poisoned the debate instead of contributing to it. Some of those angry about Howell's error didn't bother to present all the facts on their own sites.

Instead, they picked the facts that conveniently fit their world views and ignored anything that didn't. (p. B01)

Brady (2006) then defended his reasons for shutting down the comment area. "We won't allow our comments area to become a place where people can use whatever vulgar language they want, personally attack Post staffers or bully other contributors to our pages or discussions" (p. B01).

The Los Angeles Times had to discontinue one of its blogs for a different reason. Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Michael Hiltzik had, according to *The Los Angeles Times* (2006), "acknowledged using pseudonyms to post a single comment on his blog on *latimes.com* and multiple comments elsewhere on the Web that deal with his column and other issues involving the newspaper" ("Political free e-speech," p. 12).

The traditional media would like to see the political blogosphere hold bloggers to the same ethical standards and practices of journalists. The political bloggers do not believe journalists hold themselves to any standard and are disinclined to adopt a universal standard of ethics. As discussed in the next chapter, the influence of the dual roles of bloggers is examined with the study of agenda setting-via the two-step flow hypothesis.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY: AGENDA SETTING AND TWO-STEP FLOW

An Overview of Agenda-Setting

The study of agenda-setting can be traced to newspaper columnist and presidential advisor Walter Lippmann. In his book, *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann suggested that the mass media serve as intermediaries between world events and how the public views those events. Although he never performed scholarly research on the subject, Lippmann was, at that time, considered a primary source in the role of media and how they affected public opinion (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Bernhard Cohen (1963), a political scientist, said 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). His work advanced the conceptualization of agenda-setting.

The term agenda-setting was first introduced by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw (1972), who studied the effects of the media on 100 voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina during the 1968 presidential election. These voters were asked, “What are you *most* concerned about these days? That is, regardless of what politicians say, what are the two or three *main* things that you think the government *should* concentrate on doing something about?” The five main campaign issues voters mentioned were foreign policy, law and order, fiscal policy, public welfare and civil rights. McCombs and Shaw (1972) counted the number of news articles, editorials and broadcast stories in the nine mass media outlets that served Chapel Hill. They found an almost perfect correlation between the rank order of the five issues by the voters (the public agenda) and the five issues from the media (the media agenda) (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The initial research revealed that neither politicians nor the media control what voters think, but do control the issues that they think about.

This seminal publication by McCombs and Shaw (1972) is the most cited article by agenda-setting researchers, a subject that has become one of the most popular in communication research. Over 350 publications on agenda-setting appeared between 1972 and 1994 (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Scholars began to expand the field through single points in time content analyses of the media

agenda along with audience surveys of the public agenda (Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981). Other scholars pursued a longitudinal approach, tracing a single issue, like AIDS or drug use, over a period of time (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Still others (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) examined agenda-setting at the micro level, having respondents view customized news broadcasts in which additional material was included on a particular issue. The viewers ranked the item with additional material higher on their own agenda.

Recent studies have examined agenda-setting and political socialization among adolescents participating in the *Kids Voting USA* campaign. The study concludes that exposure to the voting process increased the adolescents' attention to the news media, that the news media's agenda would predict the issues most important to adolescents, and that those issues with the most news media coverage would be the focus of the adolescents' discussion (Kiousis, McDevitt, & Wu, 2005). A longitudinal study of South Korean media determined that the two largest newspaper websites influenced the agenda of South Korea's largest online news wire service, but the online news wire service did not influence the agenda of the newspapers (Lim, 2006).

The Media Agenda

How do items wind up on the media agenda and/or the public agenda? The President of the United States has the power to set the media agenda regarding national issues because when the President focuses on, or merely comments upon an issue, the mass media cover it. Major events can become the focus of attention as well. The Exxon Valdez oil spill regenerated several stories on the environment (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The AIDS epidemic was mostly ignored until the death of Rock Hudson, and then was treated as a disease related to gay males until Magic Johnson announced he had contracted the HIV virus from heterosexual sex (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). These stories have underlying issues that become salient for the viewer. An interested viewer will likely be motivated to learn more about the issue.

As was the case with Magic Johnson, individuals can also influence the media agenda. Illegal drug use became a more visible issue when activist and

political candidate Jesse Jackson discussed the issue with the editor of the *New York Times*, resulting in an increase in *New York Times*' coverage of drug use. That coverage exploded when basketball star Len Bias died soon after of a drug overdose. This increase in exposure occurred even though illegal drug use in the U.S. was on the decline (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

This suggests that the media can overemphasize or overexpose an issue. For example, media attention may make drug overdoses seem to occur more frequently than they actually occur. Similarly, the media can ignore issues that concern the public, as they did with the AIDS epidemic during the mid-1980s.

The Public Agenda

The public agenda is the hierarchy of issues at a particular point in time (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). McCombs and Shaw (1972) demonstrated that the media agenda influences the public agenda. For example, if the media agenda is focusing on (in rank order) war, poverty and public health, the public agenda will most likely be war, poverty and public health. After the Chapel Hill study, most studies have also found evidence supporting this relationship (Funkhouser, 1973; MacKuen, 1981; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Brosius & Keppinger, 1990).

However, in terms of source credibility, intervening variables may occur (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). For example, political weblogs are considered less credible than the *Washington Post* by most journalists, in part because the political blogosphere has produced an inconsistent track record of accurate news reporting. Those who find the *Washington Post* credible will more likely rely on the *Post* for information and be more susceptible to its influence than someone who does not find the newspaper credible.

Experience with issues also can create variance in the media agenda-public agenda relationship. A veteran from the war in Iraq will tend to let his/her own experience influence him/her more than any media source. The less direct experience a person has with an issue, the more the media can influence that issue (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

Other research investigated not only how the public agenda was influenced by the media agenda, but how the media directs the way the public

evaluates issues. Authors Iyengar & Kinder (1987) demonstrated that broadcasts featuring additional news coverage of issues raised the importance of that issue to the viewer, and suggested that through focusing coverage on one news item, the mass media draws attention to certain issues, at the expense of others. For example, the Democratic Party typically “owns” issues associated with race relations, while the Republican Party “owns” issues associated with business. According to Iyengar & Kinder (1987), the media are inadvertently helping the Democrats when they report on race issues and helping the Republicans when they report about business.

Agenda-setting demonstrates the connection between the media agenda and the public agenda. The two-step flow hypothesis will show how additional actors, known as opinion leaders, facilitate the interaction between the mass media and the public.

The Two-Step Flow Hypothesis

Blogger Jeff Coryell told Mark Naymick of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*:

Our readership isn't large enough to influence voters in a direct way, but the part of the public that reads blogs is the politically aware, politically active part. So we influence voters indirectly by influencing them. (2006, p. A10)

This comment describes how political bloggers serve as the second step in the two-step flow hypothesis. Bloggers track, research, and opine on events identified by the mass media, passing their views on to their audience.

In 1940, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944/1968) suggested that the flow of mass communications is mediated by opinion leaders, alluding to a two-step flow hypothesis. The study focused on voters from Erie County, Ohio in 1940. It showed how the media affected their attitudes toward the presidential candidates throughout the entire election cycle. Through tracking the mass media (radio and newspapers), they noticed:

Ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less-active sections of the population...The person-to-person influence reaches the ones who are more susceptible to change, and serves as a bridge over which formal media of communications extend their influence. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944-1968, p. 152)

The two-step flow hypothesis was tested and substantiated by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) in Decatur, Illinois. They reported that certain individuals:

Exerted a disproportionately greater influence on the vote intentions of their fellows... [These] opinion leaders seemed to be distributed in all occupational groups, and on every social and economic level. (p. 32)

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) found this to be true not only in politics but in marketing, fashion, and even movie-going.

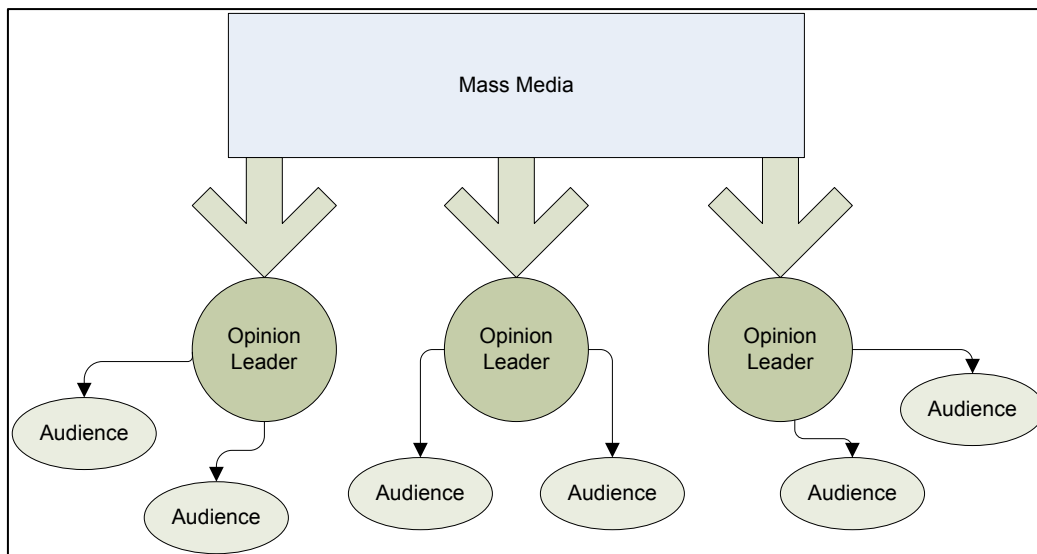


Figure 1: Model of the two-step flow hypothesis.

Since the research of the 1940s and 1950s, Blumer (1971) introduced the stepwise process that provided for the emergence of social issues. His research

demonstrated that the mass media, along with certain individuals and groups, played a critical role in the initial stage of getting society to recognize a social problem. Ball-Rokeach (1985) introduced the aspect of interpersonal networks, noting that individuals are “situated in interpersonal networks...the agenda of interpersonal discourse is, to some degree, shaped by the message foci of the media system” (p. 502).

The central credentials of opinion leaders were studied by Weimann (1994), who determined that opinion leaders have a higher number of contacts, hold a central position in a social network, and actively make their opinions and views known. Opinion leaders are more exposed to media content because they have a higher motivation to be informed, updated, and involved due to their level of expertise. For example, one researcher found that political leaders in Turkish villages were more likely to own a radio than religious leaders. This greater access attuned the political leaders to more liberal concepts like family planning (Weimann, 1994).

Agenda-Setting and Two-Step Flow

Reviewing the trends of agenda-setting research, Brosius and Weimann (1996) noted that while research supported the notion that the media cannot tell people what to think, but what to think about, studies had “often overlooked the individual-and-personal-network level of analysis” (p. 563). They note that when the mainstream media cover an issue, interpersonal communication often reinforces the media messages; however, interpersonal communication actually sets the agenda “when the discussions deal with issues that have received little coverage in the media” (p. 563). Brosius and Weimann (1996) also looked at the role of the opinion leader, who “through social discourse, personal contacts, and social networks...can collect, diffuse, filter, and promote the flow of information” (p. 564). As such, “The media thus became part of the environment in which these active individuals function” (p. 564).

These researchers looked at agenda-setting research through the Two-Step Flow hypothesis. Through their studies of opinion leaders as agenda setters, Brosius and Weimann (1996) list four possible models of the two-step

flow that note the early recognizers (or opinion leaders) and their effect on the media agenda and the public agenda. These four models are:

- **Model 1:** The Classical Two-Step Flow
 - Media Agenda ⇒ Early Recognizers ⇒ Public Agenda
- **Model 2:** The Reverse Two-Step Flow
 - Public Agenda ⇒ Early Recognizers ⇒ Media Agenda
- **Model 3:** Initiating the Classical Agenda-Setting Process
 - Early Recognizers ⇒ Media Agenda ⇒ Public Agenda
- **Model 4:** Initiating the Reverse Agenda-setting Process
 - Early Recognizers ⇒ Public Agenda ⇒ Media Agenda

The first two models use opinion leaders as mediators between the media agenda and the public agenda. The second two suggest that opinion leaders are the initiators of the agenda-setting process. The results of the study did not prove any particular model superior, suggesting that all four models can be true depending on the context and climate of an issue (Brosius & Weimann, 1996).

Agenda-Setting Two-Step Flow in the Political Blogosphere

The diversity and flexibility of the four models listed above provides insight into the rapidly evolving and ever changing political blogosphere. There are some blogs that are dedicated to responding to the mass media, providing their own interpretation on a reported news item. These political blogs fall in models one and two. There are other blogs that investigate stories that the mainstream media have not discussed. These political blogs would fall in models three and four.

If the blogosphere can be defined as a hybrid between interpersonal and mass communication (Brosius & Weimann, 1996), then it would seem that bloggers could define the parameters of discussion on those issues that the mainstream media avoids. Several bloggers follow Model 1: The Classical Two-Step Flow by commenting on the media agenda and hoping to influence the public agenda. Many single issue blogs are interested in promoting a special cause, like the Ned Lamont candidacy, thus advancing a public agenda item to

get it on the media agenda and following Model 2: The Reverse Two-Step Flow. The Trent Lott resignation followed Model 3: Initiating the Classical Agenda-Setting Process when the blogger-journalist influenced the media agenda, which in turn influenced the public agenda. The Dan Rather example was exposed by smaller blogs that were pushing to change the public agenda, which influenced the media agenda, as noted in Model 4: Initiating the Reverse Agenda-Setting Process.

Due to the flexible nature of the blogosphere, a single blog can operate across these models – commenting on the news and breaking a story in different entries. This study was not designed to see which of the four Brosius-Weimann models works best or most often. Instead, it was created to see how the blogosphere works within these models. These theoretical constructs provided a basis to identify the population for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To best reach political bloggers, an Internet-based survey was selected as the primary tool used for data collection. Before the survey could be distributed, the population had to be identified, as detailed in the following section. The questionnaire was then created and distributed via Survey-Pro software. Survey-Pro is a web-based survey tool that allows respondents to complete questionnaires anonymously online.

Identifying the Population

The political blogosphere is separated into a hierarchy, based on the number of unique hits a blog gets per day. Surveying a political blogger who is not read by an influential audience would defeat the purpose of measuring the effects of blogging on the political system.

The problem was identifying a population that was connected with opinion leaders on a national, political level. This is not to suggest only leading political blogs would be surveyed. Even though there is data measuring the amount of site traffic of most blogs, using only the most popular sites would ignore influential blogs in swing states and blogs that cater to third parties or independent causes (Ahrens, 2006). The goal of this research was to select a population that is a combination of popular and influential blogs.

Selecting the participants for this study was a two-stage process. In adherence to the two-step flow hypothesis, political leaders needed to be identified to help select bloggers who are opinion leaders. This list included both individuals and groups who supplied talking points, press releases, and other forms of communication to opinion leaders and the mass media to communicate their message. The political leaders consisted of:

- Persons predominantly affiliated with political issues based in the United States. International organizations were not included.

- Bell weather issues or candidates. This included congressional leadership, possible 2008 political candidates, and special interest groups.
- Political national committees. This included the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and several third parties.

Through studying references by the traditional media, 89 organizations (See appendix C) were identified that matched the above criteria. The goal was to contact the political director or communications director for each organization. If the organization agreed to participate, then they were asked two questions:

1. What political blogs do you send talking points to?
2. What political blogs do you read?

From this list, the political blogs were located. To be included in the population, the political blogs had to meet the following requirements:

- Political in nature – personal blogs were not included.
- Primarily focused on US political issues at the state or federal level.
- Have a valid email address.

Surveying the Population

The final population was 250 blogs. To attempt a census of the 250 identified bloggers, the instrument of an online survey was selected, using Survey-Pro software. A questionnaire of 57 items (see appendix A) was created, considering the following research questions:

- R1:** Who are the political bloggers?
- R2:** How do the political bloggers view their own blogosphere?
- R3:** What is a blogger's motivation for undertaking and maintaining a political blog?
- R4:** What influence do bloggers have on setting the media agenda and how is that influence executed via the two-step flow hypothesis?

The data collection period began on August 29, 2006, with an individual email to potential respondents explaining this study and requesting their participation (see appendix B). Respondents were informed their responses would be kept confidential and none of the results of this survey would be used for profit. The respondents were sent two follow up blast emails on September 7, 2006 and September 18, 2006. Data collection ended on September 27, 2006. In the next chapter, the results from the data collected are analyzed and reported.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Analysis of Data

Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Means, medians and standard deviations were used to compare seven-point Likert scale questions. Means, medians, standard deviations, and range were used to compare ratio level data. Cross-tab procedures were used on selected variables to examine relationships between cases. The results of the cross-tab procedures will be discussed in the following chapter.

R1: Who are the political bloggers?

The data indicates political bloggers are highly educated, white males in their 40s who live in all parts of the country and have high annual incomes (See figure 2). Most of the respondents are male 85.9% (n=79) and 14.1% (n=13) are female. In terms of race, 85.9% (n=79) of respondents are Caucasian (White), 1.1% (n=1) African-American, 1.1% (n=1) Multi-racial, and 12% (n=11) selected “Rather not say.” In reporting their marital status, 56.5% (n=52) of respondents are married and 28.3% (n=26) single. The highest age range reported was between 40 and 49, followed by 30 and 39 (22.8%, n=21), and 50 and 59 (15.2%, n=14).

Note: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, and Wisconsin each

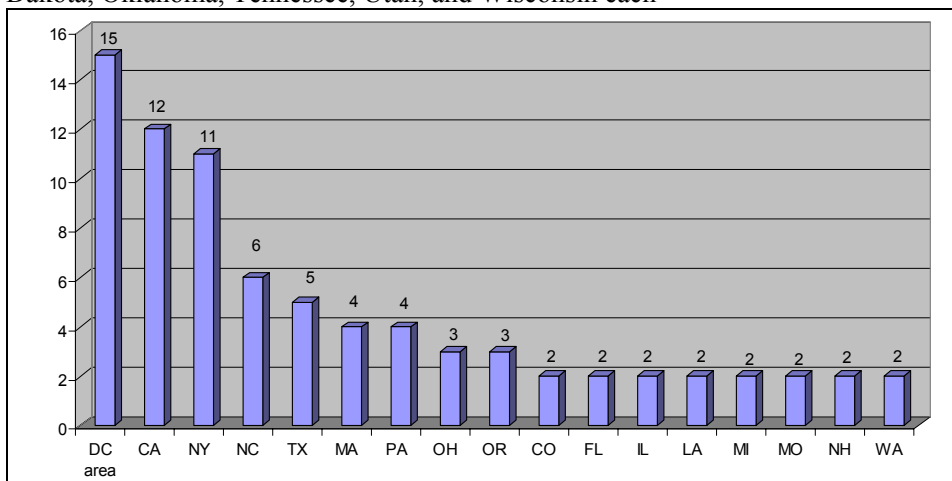


Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by state.

Respondents were asked to list their political leanings which ranged from 1 – Far Left to 7 – Far Right. The data indicates respondents lean mildly left with a mean of 3.83 (See table 1). When asked to describe their political leanings, 45.7% (n=42) respondents identified themselves as leaning to the political left compared to the 35.9% (n=33) of respondents who identified themselves as leaning to the political right.

Table 1: Mean, median, and standard deviation responses on political leanings, income, education, marital status, age and race.

| | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|--------|----------------|
| How would you describe your political leanings? | 3.83 | 4.00 | 1.587 |
| Please indicate your current household income in U.S. dollars | 4.26 | 4.00 | 1.772 |
| Please indicate the highest level of education completed. | 5.40 | 5.00 | 1.293 |
| What is your current marital status? | 3.55 | 3.00 | 1.270 |
| What is your age? | 3.62 | 4.00 | 1.078 |
| What is your race? | 3.61 | 3.00 | 1.670 |

As shown in Table 2, the respondents also reported high incomes with 32 respondents reported earning over \$100,000 per year.

Table 2: Respondent's level of annual income.

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Valid Under \$19,999 | 5 | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| \$20,000 - \$39,999 | 9 | 9.8 | 15.2 |
| \$40,000 - \$74,999 | 26 | 28.3 | 43.5 |
| \$75,000 - \$99,999 | 9 | 9.8 | 53.3 |
| \$100,000 - \$150,000 | 14 | 15.2 | 68.5 |
| Over \$150,000 | 18 | 19.6 | 88.0 |
| Rather not say | 11 | 12.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 92 | 100.0 | |

Most respondents (80.4%, n=74) had graduated college, and 35.9% (n=33) held advanced degrees (See table 3).

Table 3: Respondent's level of education.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|
| Valid | High School or equivalent | 2 | 2.2 | 2.2 |
| | Some College | 16 | 17.4 | 19.6 |
| | College Graduate (4 year) | 41 | 44.6 | 64.1 |
| | Master's Degree (MS) | 18 | 19.6 | 83.7 |
| | Doctoral Degree (PhD) | 4 | 4.3 | 88.0 |
| | Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.) | 11 | 12.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 92 | 100.0 | |

When asked if they voted in the last two presidential elections, 87% (n=80) said they had. As shown in Table 4, respondents participated as paid staff or as volunteers on an average of 2.1 political campaigns, although 46.7% (n=43) had never participated in a political campaign.

Table 4: Number of political campaigns bloggers participated in as a volunteer or paid staff.

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|
| N | Valid | 92 |
| Mean | | 2.11 |
| Median | | 1.00 |
| Std. Deviation | | 3.596 |
| Range | | 20 |
| Minimum | | 0 |
| Maximum | | 20 |

R2: How do the political bloggers view their own blogosphere?

Respondents reported that blogs are an effective source of obtaining news and information, but are concerned about accuracy and rumors. As shown in Table 5, respondents were asked a series of seven point Likert-type scales with answer options ranging from 1- Strongly Disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree. Asked if blogs are an effective source of information, 83.7% (n=77) of respondents agreed to some degree that blogs are an effective source of information. Half of

all respondents (n=46) were in agreement that blogs foster inaccurate rumors. A majority of respondents (58.7%, n=54) responded above the mean that blogs are an accurate source for news. When asked if certain blogs should be the sole source for news, 62% (n=57) of respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Respondent' views on the political blogosphere.

| | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation |
|--|-------|--------|----------------|
| Blogs are an effective source of information. | 5.54 | 6.00 | 1.253 |
| Blogs are an accurate source for news. | 4.63 | 5.00 | 1.255 |
| Bloggers should use the same publishing standards as journalists in the mainstream press. | 4.46 | 5.00 | 1.824 |
| Certain blogs should be the sole source for news. | 1.90 | 1.00 | 1.611 |
| Blogs foster inaccurate rumors. | 4.38 | 4.50 | 1.609 |
| Blogs are best used for opinion and commentary. | 5.21 | 5.00 | 1.501 |
| Blogs have a large impact on voter behavior. | 3.71 | 3.50 | 1.418 |
| Candidates and their advisers should pay attention to messages from the blogosphere. | 5.53 | 6.00 | 1.463 |
| Blogs will have a large impact on 2006 midterm elections for Democratic candidates. | 4.71 | 5.00 | 1.288 |
| Blogs will have a large impact on 2006 midterm elections for Republican candidates. | 3.91 | 4.00 | 1.435 |
| Blogs will have a large impact on 2008 presidential election for the Democratic candidate. | 5.14 | 5.00 | 1.323 |
| Blogs will have a large impact on 2008 presidential election for the Republican candidate. | 4.48 | 5.00 | 1.449 |
| The mainstream media should become further involved in the blogosphere. | 4.272 | 4.000 | 1.8582 |
| Blogs should be used to promote one's own ideologies. | 5.32 | 6.00 | 1.358 |
| The mainstream media should stay out of blogging. | 3.12 | 3.00 | 1.715 |
| Bloggers are as responsible as traditional media. | 3.92 | 4.00 | 1.787 |
| Bloggers are more independent than the traditional media. | 5.88 | 6.00 | 1.451 |
| The traditional media should pay me to publish my blog. | 3.38 | 3.00 | 2.233 |
| A blogger can work for the traditional media and maintain his/her independence. | 4.45 | 5.00 | 1.775 |
| A blogger should have some journalism training. | 2.85 | 2.00 | 1.779 |
| A blogger's opinions and commentary should be accurate. | 5.71 | 6.00 | 1.661 |
| A blogger is responsible to the readers of the blog. | 5.76 | 6.00 | 1.660 |
| A blogger who writes false information should be shunned from the blogosphere. | 5.54 | 6.00 | 1.667 |

Most respondents reported that the political blogosphere does not have a large impact on voter behavior now, but will increase its influence in the coming

elections, particularly for Democratic candidates. Half of all respondents (n=46) responded below the mean that blogs will have a large impact on voter behavior, versus 30.5% (n=28) of respondents who responded above the mean. When asked if candidates and their advisors should pay attention to messages from the blogosphere, 84.8% (n=78) of respondents listed were in agreement.

When asked if blogs will have an impact on the 2006 midterm elections for Democratic candidates, 69.5% (n=63) of respondents listed responded above the mean. When asked if blogs will have an impact on the 2008 presidential election for the Democratic candidate, 79.3% (n=73) of respondents listed also were in agreement. Asked if blogs will have an impact for Republican candidates in 2006, 40.2% (n=36) of respondents responded below the mean. Responding to the impact of blogs for the Republican presidential candidate in 2008, 55.4% (n=51) were in agreement that blogs will strongly impact that campaign.

When asked if bloggers are more independent than the traditional media, 75% (n=69) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Over half of respondents (55.4%, n=51) were in agreement that a blogger can work for the mainstream media and maintain his/her independence. As shown in Figure 3, respondents reported inaccurate reporting (27.21%) and government censorship (25.85%) as the two greatest threats to political blogging.

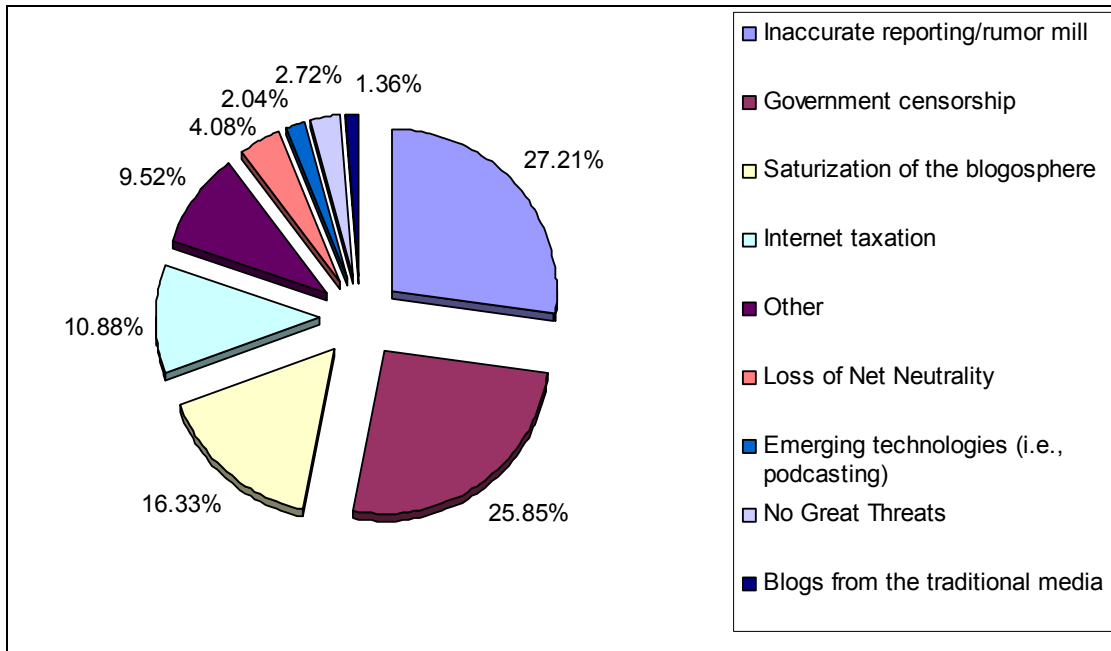


Figure 3: Respondents views on greatest threat to political blogging.

Nearly half (46.7%, n=43) of respondents strongly agreed that a blogger’s opinion and commentary should be accurate. When asked if a blogger who writes false information should be shunned from the blogosphere, 80.4% (n=74) responded above the mean. When asked if a blogger should have some journalism training, 54.3% (n=50) of respondents responded below the mean. As seen in Figure 4, nearly two-thirds (60%) of respondents believe that the blogosphere will become part of the traditional media in the next five years.

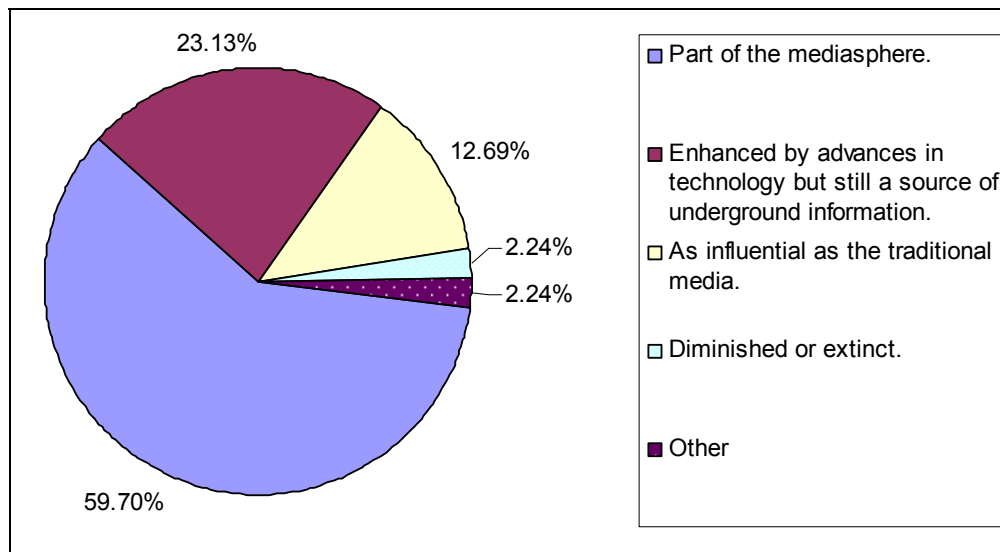


Figure 4: Respondent’s 5 year outlook of the political blogosphere.

Qualitative Analysis: In Their Own Words

To better describe the bloggers, several of the survey questions featured a choice of “Other,” allowing the respondent to enter his/her own text instead of selecting a predetermined answer. Then the responses were analyzed in thematic fashion to gather deeper information about the respondents. The best example of this was for the question, “What is the greatest threat to the political blogosphere?” Six respondents reported the loss of Internet Neutrality as the biggest threat.

The final question of the survey was “Is there anything else you would like to add?” Respondents who responded (n=92) to this question sometimes offered a critique about the questionnaire. Others offered additional insight about being a political blogger:

“A blog is just a fast, easy way to publish a journal online. It can take many forms, break new ground in writing and publishing styles and help inform people in ways that the corporate, mainstream, legacy press never will. I've worked for the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, the Dallas Morning News, UPI, and some of the best alternative weeklies in the country. But there is nothing like the freedom of self-publishing online without having to conform to stock story styles and the preconceived notions of editors and publishers who never leave their offices in New York and other media centers.”

“Most strong pro/con opinions about the blogosphere refer to either end of the spectrum, but are generally inaccurate when they attempt to speak for the blogosphere as a whole.”

“I think you assume that all bloggers think of themselves as being journalists. I think that's wrong. I believe that most of the ones on the left think of themselves as being columnists or political activists.”

“I think the impact of blogs is still overrated, and the community is in danger of crowding-out, too much navel-gazing, and follow-the-pack mentality.”

“Blogging is important because it allows bright, well read amateurs to serve as checks on the mainstream media, and to research, write, and publicize stories on their own. There are many more smart people in America than there are either professional journalists, or potential jobs in journalism. Journalism, after all, is a craft, not an art.”

“Blogging is a great exercise in focusing one's thoughts. Successful blogging, i.e. learning that I have changed someone's mind on something, is quite a rewarding thing. But in the long run, I'm not entirely sure that blogging is worth all the time I spend on it unless I will want to become a full-time writer or commentator.”

“Journalistic trade publications are encouraging journalists to take up blogging. That shows the increasing prominence of blogs as a legitimate information source.”

“Blogs are likely to evolve as new technologies evolve. In many ways, they were a product of new web publishing technology that emerged in 2001-2002, so they will take on different forms as new technology makes web publishing easier. The rise of YouTube is an example of technology creating a whole new way for the public to interact with the media.”

R3: What is a blogger’s motivation for undertaking and maintaining a political blog?

This question examines the reasons respondents blog. When asked why they started a blog, 27.43% of respondents said it was to share their points of view, 17.71% to participate in an online debate, and 15.63% to influence other people (See figure 5).

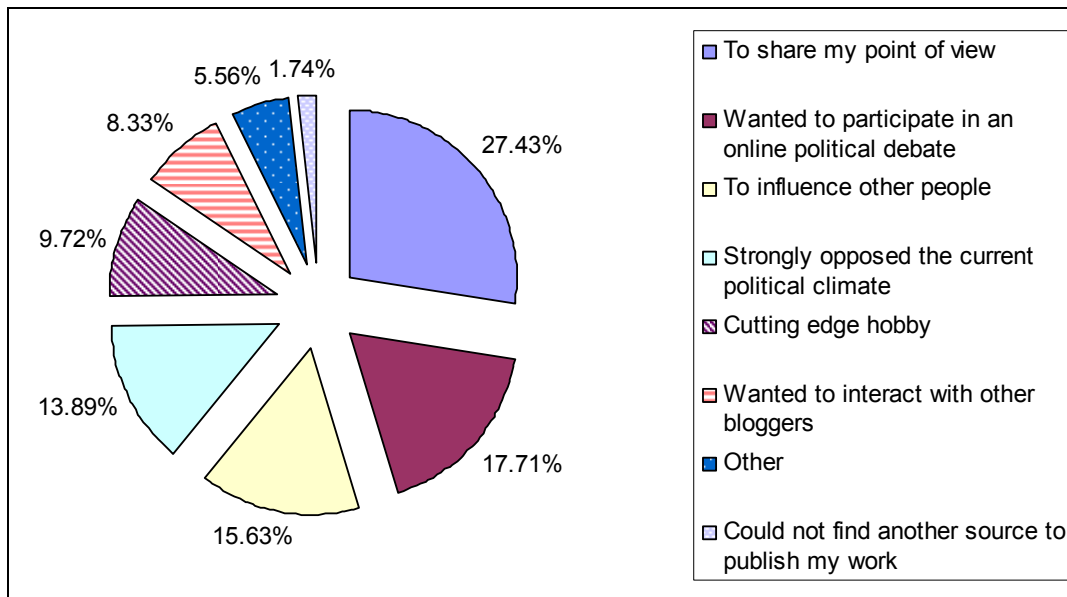


Figure 5: Reasons respondents started a political blog.

When asked the percentage of their work day spent on their blog, 26.1% of respondents reported spending 10% of their work day and 7.6% of respondents reported blogging full time. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.9%) had never worked as a professional journalist. More than a third of respondents (40.2%) reported spending 20 hours a week or more on their blog.

When asked how many independent advertisers their blogs had, 56.5% (n=52) reported not having any independent advertisers. Of respondents who do have independent advertisers, 62.5% said their ads were paid for by subsidiaries of political groups and 20% said their ads were paid for by subsidiaries of the traditional media.

Table 6: Respondents motivations for starting and maintaining a political blog.

| | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation | Range | Minimum | Maximum |
|--|-------|--------|----------------|-------|---------|---------|
| What percentage of your work day is spent on your blog? | 21.64 | 10.00 | 28.111 | 100 | 0 | 100 |
| How many hours per week do you spend working on your blog? | 19.31 | 13.00 | 19.990 | 104 | 1 | 105 |
| How many years have you worked as a professional journalist? | 2.11 | .00 | 5.229 | 25 | 0 | 25 |
| What percentage of your feedback (posts or email) is positive? | 70.76 | 75.00 | 21.325 | 100 | 0 | 100 |
| How many independent advertisers does your blog have? | 2.52 | .00 | 5.132 | 30 | 0 | 30 |
| How many of these independent advertisers are subsidiaries of the traditional media? | .20 | .00 | .745 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| How many of these independent advertisers are subsidiaries of political groups or campaigns? | 1.80 | .00 | 10.523 | 100 | 0 | 100 |

R4: What role do bloggers have on setting the media agenda and how is that role executed via the two-step flow hypothesis?

This question examines the affect that bloggers have on the traditional media, the political blogosphere, and their own audience. As shown in Figure 6, respondents were asked to choose the three most important issues to them: the war in Iraq received 55 responses, terrorism received 47 responses, and other issues received 31 responses.

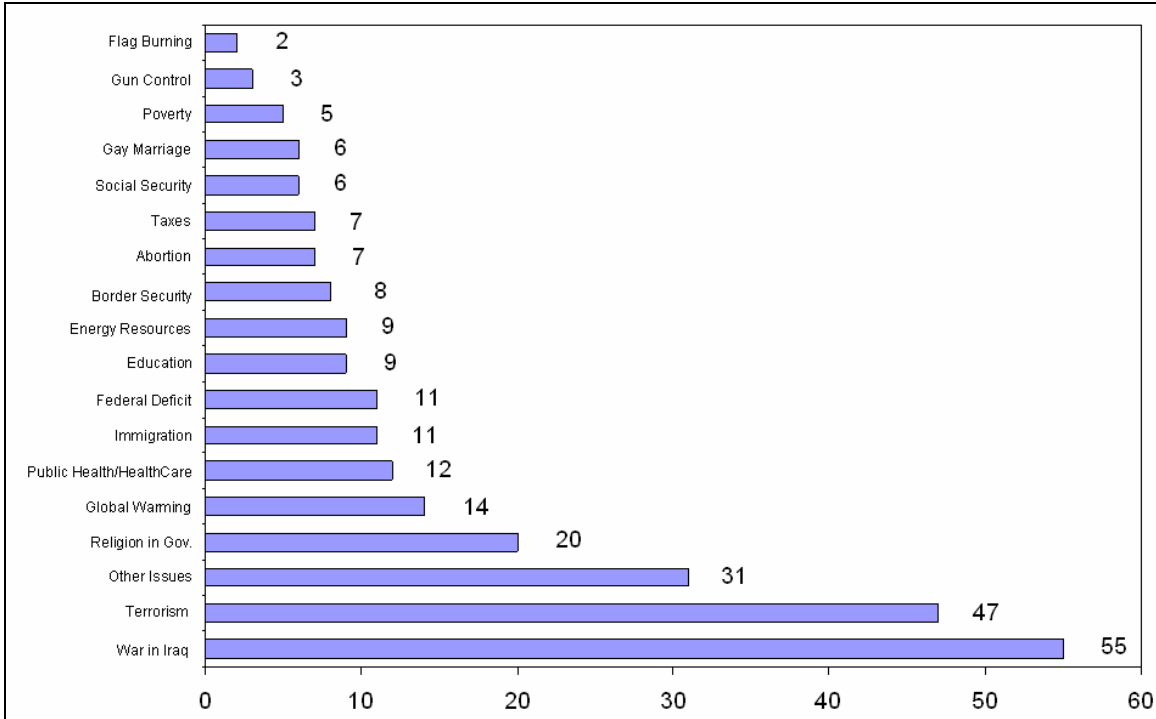


Figure 6: Importance of issues to respondents.

According to the respondents, the most important event to occur in the political blogosphere was Dan Rather's removal from *CBS News*, followed by Ned Lamont's upset of Joe Lieberman and press credentials being issued to bloggers at the Republican and Democratic national conventions (See figure 7).

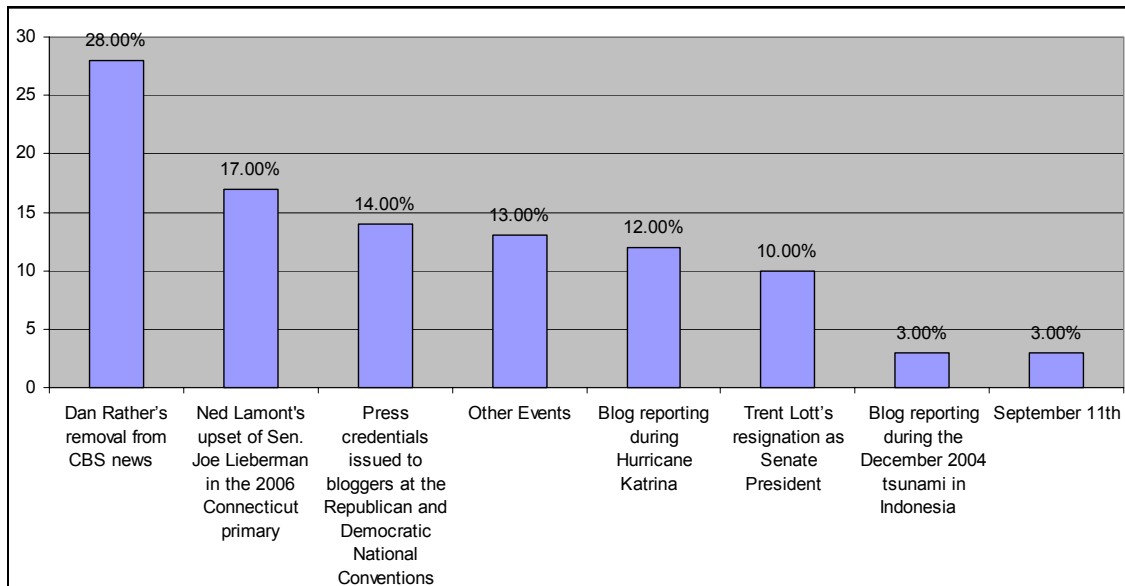


Figure 7: Most important event to occur in the political blogosphere.

Respondents were quoted by the traditional media 42.48 (n=92) times on average. As shown in Table 7, 22.8% (n=21) of respondents had been quoted by fellow bloggers between zero and 49 times. The same number of respondents had been quoted by fellow bloggers between 1,000 and 6,000 times.

Table 7: Number of times respondent has been quoted by a fellow blogger.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Valid | 0 - 49 | 21 | 22.8 | 22.8 |
| | 50 - 99 | 9 | 9.8 | 32.6 |
| | 100 - 499 | 29 | 31.5 | 64.1 |
| | 500 - 999 | 12 | 13.0 | 77.2 |
| | 1,000 - 6,000 | 21 | 22.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 92 | 100.0 | |

As shown in Table 8, respondents reported linking to an average of 97.53 (n=92) blogs and having an average of 350.61 (n=92) blogs link back to them.

Table 8: Respondents role in agenda setting via the two-step flow hypothesis.

| | Mean | Median | Std. Deviation | Range | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|---------|--------|----------------|-------|---------|---------|
| How many times have you been quoted by the traditional media? | 42.48 | 4.00 | 149.435 | 1000 | 0 | 1000 |
| How many times have you been quoted by a fellow blogger? | 533.55 | 100.00 | 982.274 | 6000 | 0 | 6000 |
| How many users visit your blog per day? | 6205.20 | 862.50 | 14281.165 | 80000 | 0 | 80000 |
| How many blogs does your blog link to? | 97.53 | 63.00 | 93.377 | 500 | 0 | 500 |
| How many blogs link to your blog? | 350.61 | 159.50 | 467.274 | 2000 | 0 | 2000 |

Respondents reported a range of zero to 6,000 unique site visits per day. As show in Table 9, 25 respondents reported a range of zero to 199 unique visitors per day versus 20 respondents who reported 5,000 to 80,000 unique site visitors per day.

Table 9: Number of daily users per blog.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Valid | 0 - 199 | 25 | 27.2 | 27.2 |
| | 200 - 699 | 18 | 19.6 | 46.7 |
| | 700 - 1,399 | 12 | 13.0 | 59.8 |
| | 1,400 - 4,999 | 17 | 18.5 | 78.3 |
| | 5,000 - 80,000 | 20 | 21.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | | 92 | 100.0 | |

When asked how they viewed their blog’s audience, 71.7% (n=66) of respondents said their audience consisted of readers with diverse opinions and 26.1% (n=24) of respondents reported their audience consisted of readers with similar views as their own. As seen in Figure 8, 49.19% (n=61) reported linking to additional bloggers to increase the exposure of their blog.

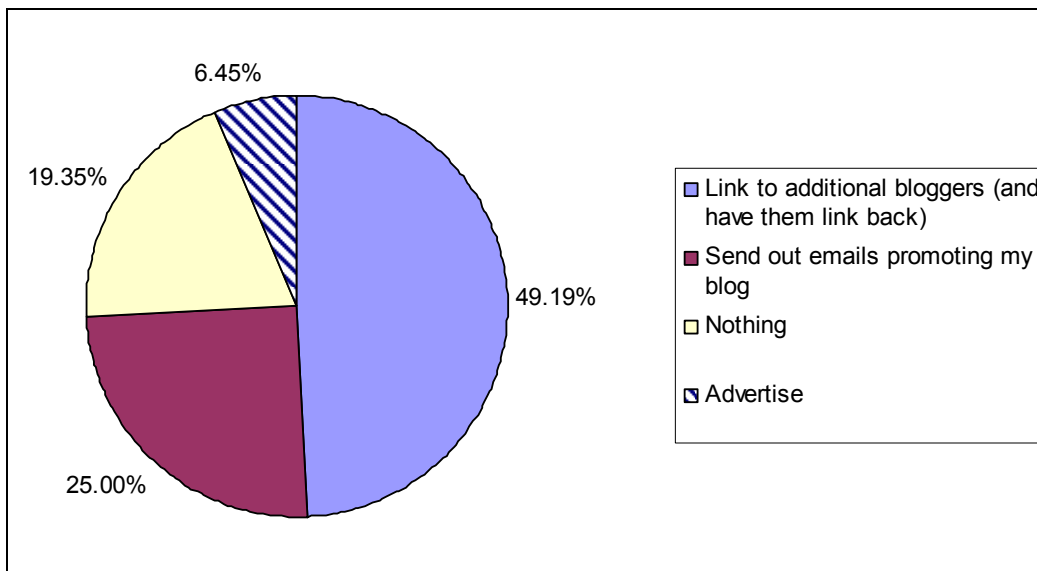


Figure 8: What respondents do to increase the exposure of their blog.

When asked how their blogs influenced their audiences, 34.96% of respondents said their blog influenced the debate of popular issues and topics, 26.99% said it reinforced the beliefs of people who feel the same as the respondent, and 24.78% said it was a source of annoyance for people who disagree with the blog’s content (See figure 9).

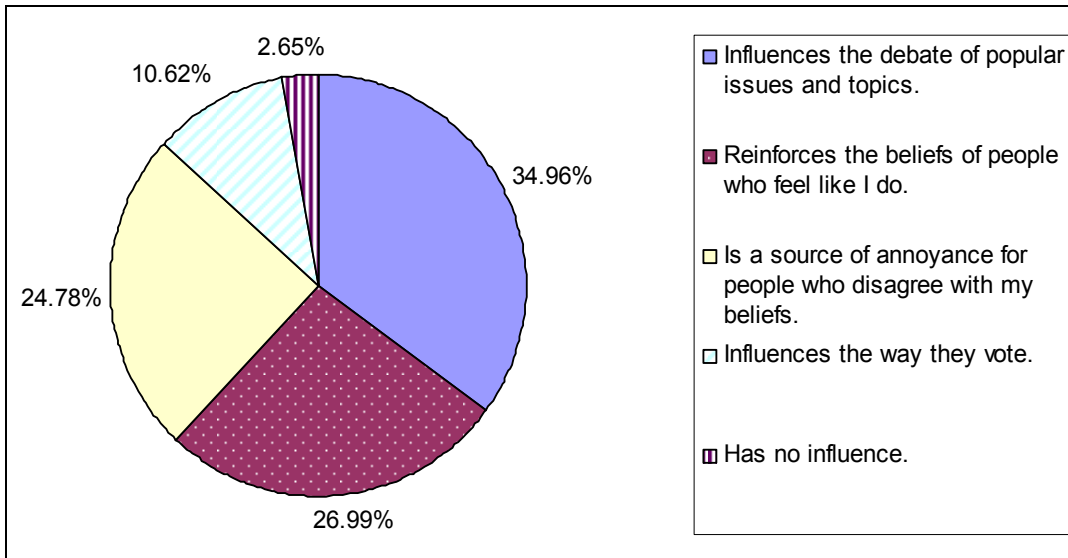


Figure 9: Respondents view on how they influence their audience.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to examine the political bloggers, how they view their world, their motivations, and their role in how information is distributed. Implications of this research can be used for a multitude of purposes, including examining the views of the traditional media or the general public on the political blogosphere. As this is a baseline study, there are several areas where increased research can further define some questions, like the role of the blogger as an activist versus a journalist, the accuracy of the political blogs, and the affect of political blogs on elections.

The Political Bloggers

Who are the political bloggers? The results of this study suggest the popular stereotype of a pajama-clad 20-something living hunched over a computer screen in his parents' basement is an incorrect one. The data indicates this individual is a married, highly-educated, upper middle class, white male in his 40's. Nearly four out of five (80.4%, n=74) had graduated from college. Over half were married and over a third were making more than \$100,000 per year. The data not only reveals the characteristics of a typical blogger, but also who is left out of political blogging.

Minorities and women are noticeably absent from the political blogosphere. The digital divide is a concept where minorities and the poor do not have access to the Internet or experience with computers to take advantages of online opportunities (Attwell, 2001). Only one respondent was African-American, one was multi-racial and no respondents described themselves as Hispanic. Five respondents reported income levels of under \$19,999. The data suggests the digital divide may exist here as well.

The digital divide is not the sole reason for lower numbers among minorities and the poor. These populations vote in lower numbers for multiple reasons, including disenfranchisement, lack of involvement in the political process and no ability to get to the polls. For example, 13% of all black men are

disenfranchised, a rate that is seven times the national average (Cross, 2006). Less than half of all Hispanic voters went to the polls in 2004. As this population is now the country's largest minority, political organizations are working to increase voter education and turnout among Hispanics. Both major political parties are courting Hispanic candidates and voters (Abernathy & Lawton, 2006).

In addition to a digital divide with minorities and the poor, there is also a gender gap in the political blogosphere. Only 14.1% (n=13) of respondents are female. More women are blogging, but are not blogging about politics (Taylor, 2006). There are suggestions that the belligerent tone of politics and machismo rules of the blogosphere have influenced potential female bloggers to focus their talents elsewhere (Taylor, 2006). Regardless of the reasons, the political bloggers cannot effectively serve as online activists with such gross gaps in gender and racial demographics.

In terms of elections, the online activists do not seem to be actively involved in traditional political campaigning, as nearly half (46.7%, n=43) of respondents had never worked on a political campaign. With many political bloggers describe themselves as activists, volunteering on a political campaign is considered "a red badge of courage" in political activism. Campaigns are now courting bloggers to join them in more formal efforts. It is becoming a requirement to recruit and hire bloggers to establish their netroots in almost all state and federal political campaigns. The 2006 election cycle is the first broad test of the effects of netroots on voters (Gilbert, 2006). Further study in this area would be helpful to see if this trend increases the number of bloggers active in politics beyond their blog and the number of people voting.

As reported earlier, bloggers responded to this study from across the country. There was a higher than expected number (six) of respondents from North Carolina. This placed the number of respondents from the Tar Heel state higher than Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. There are several possible reasons. First, this number is skewed high due to the political opinion leaders from North Carolina. Elizabeth Dole is the senior Senator from North Carolina, head of the National Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, and in 2000 became the first woman Republican to run for president. John Edwards

is a former Senator from North Carolina, was the 2004 Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee, and is considered a potential candidate for president in 2008. There are also several key political industries in North Carolina, like tobacco, banking, and the airline industry that may have also been a partial cause for large the number of respondents from that state.

The Blogger's View of the Political Blogosphere

Political bloggers devote most of their content to political issues and news events. In this study, they had an opportunity to comment on how they viewed the political blogosphere they had helped create. Bloggers felt that the greatest threat to political blogging was its poor reputation as an inaccurate rumor mill, with government censorship following as a close second. Despite the increased involvement of the traditional media, most bloggers did not consider them a threat. Instead, they saw the lines of the traditional media and the political blogosphere blurring over the next five years. This is necessary if they are to have an increased impact on the 2006 and 2008 election cycles.

Bloggers have a lot of faith in the information on the blogosphere and are concerned about its poor reputation for posting inaccurate information. Most respondents agreed that blogs are excellent sources for news and information and would like to shun the blogs that perpetuate false information. The data indicate that enforcement of standards may be informally enforced by the blogosphere. Respondents were split over whether bloggers should have the same publishing standards as the traditional media.

This self-enforcement drives out most rumors at lower levels of the blogosphere before breaking stories reach the most popular blogs (Drezner & Ferrell, 2004). The concern is when these popular blogs fail to act at a high standard. The most popular political blogger, Makos Moulitsas of *The Daily Kos*, did not receive the same scrutiny Dan Rather got when he was caught trying to quell a story about a possible conflict of interest of a fellow blogger (Lambro, 2006). The top blogs must hold themselves to higher ethical standards or adopt a set of publishing standards.

Bloggers are split on adopting standards and tend to be suspicious of any type of control. Six bloggers wrote in a loss of Internet neutrality as the largest threat to the political blogosphere. This was the largest write-in response in the survey. Internet neutrality means that all traffic online remains free to use and access ("U.S. Congress Joins," 2006). The concern is that without Congressional action, Internet providers like Verizon and Comcast could block or hinder access to some sites, while promoting other sites at a premium price ("U.S. Congress Joins," 2006). This means a provider could offer a basic package of sites, like *CNN.com* and *Yahoo.com* as part of basic Internet service, but charge a premium for use of *Google.com*. Congress and the Bush administration have no plans in 2006 to take any action on the Internet neutrality issue feeling that current anti-trust laws will resolve any potential issues ("U.S. Congress Joins," 2006). Congressional Democrats have strongly supported specific Internet neutrality language and will offer new legislation if they take control of either legislative house in 2006 (Dunbar, 2006). Regardless of legislation, any decrease in the independent spirit of the Internet would have a similar effect on the independent spirit of the political blogosphere.

The traditional media are not viewed as a threat. Most respondents predict that blogging will become a part of the traditional media in the near future. Respondents report they are more independent than the traditional media, but do not believe that independence would be harmed if they chose to work for the traditional media.

Bloggers do not feel that blogs have much effect on voters right now. Conversely, most believe that blogs will have a positive effect for the Democrats in the 2006 midterm elections, but not for the Republicans. Most bloggers lean to the political left, so the expectation from respondents is that advantage should help left-leaning candidates this year. The data suggest that 2008 will see increased influence from blogs on the presidential candidates for both the Democrats and Republicans in 2008. This reflects the work by the Republicans and others on the political right to further involve them in the political blogosphere, helping to eliminate some of the ideological imbalance.

As stated before, the 2006 elections is the first political cycle to implement netroots and involve bloggers on a widespread basis (Gilbert, 2006). If political candidates find success with this relatively inexpensive form of mass communication, the effort will certainly be expanded to the larger 2008 presidential election cycle. Also, the numbers of bloggers grows exponentially each day. With the rise of sites like *MySpace* and *Facebook* encouraging their combined 33 million users to blog, younger users are being introduced to the political blogosphere (Atkins, 2006).

The literature suggests that the blogosphere tends to lean to the political left. The data supports that inference, as 45.7% (n=42) of respondents reported leaning left versus 35.9% (n=33) who leaned right. Attempts to run a cross-tab procedure examining political leanings to views about how bloggers would affect Democrat and Republican candidates in the 2006 and 2008 elections failed due to too many empty cells. Implied results did not seem to indicate any significance if these tests had been successful.

Motivations for Starting and Maintaining a Political Blog

Respondents presented a wide range of reasons for starting their blogs. The top four reasons can be loosely characterized as wanting to have their (the bloggers) opinions heard. Respondents reported an average of 21.64% of the work day spent on their blogs, or roughly less than an hour per day (based on an eight-hour work day). Respondents reported spending about 20 hours per week on their blogs, a number more indicative of a hobby than a profession.

The motivation for maintaining a political blog was not financially based. According to the data, most political bloggers do not make any money on their blogs. In addition, over half of respondents (56.5%, n=52) did not have any independent advertisers. Only 8.7% (n=8) reported having seven or more independent advertisers.

Of the bloggers who do have independent advertisers, political groups are far more likely than the traditional media to be paying for the ad space. This may indicate that the traditional media is sponsoring traditional journalists in the blogosphere, as 73.9% (n=68) of respondents have never worked as

professional journalists. As the political blogosphere grows, will there be a rise of professional bloggers? This question invites additional study in the future.

The Political Bloggers' Influence in Setting the Media Agenda via the Two-Step Flow Hypothesis

This study was based on the theoretical construct that political bloggers serve as opinion leaders. Holding true to Lazarsfeld and Katz's (1955) original definition of an opinion leader, the bloggers are more involved and actively filter information to the general public and use that information to influence. The data validates that assumption based on the high number of unique daily site visits and the number of times respondents were quoted in the traditional media. In Brosius and Weimann's (1996) four models of agenda-setting as two step flow, bloggers fulfill the role of "early recognizers" in each of the four models.

Bloggers' input to the traditional media places them in the role of mediators between the public agenda and the media agenda or serving Model 2 and Model 3 of Brosius and Weimann's (1996) models. The data indicates that bloggers are being sourced by the traditional media, who are taking original content and commentary from the blogosphere and incorporating that into their own messages to the general public.

Their higher visibility to the general public places in them in the role of early recognizers whose information flows to the public in Model 1 and Model 4 of the Brosius and Weimann (1996) models. This is evident with bloggers' anticipating an impact on election outcomes in 2006 and 2008. Their messages are being received and influencing their audience to at least discuss the issues bloggers choose to focus on.

Respondents were quoted by other bloggers 535.55 times on average. There is some caution with that high figure. The political blogosphere is so vast and frequently features bloggers commenting and quoting other bloggers as information moves through the various layers of the blogosphere (Drezner & Ferrell, 2004). A few respondents commented that it would be impossible to accurately report the number of times that any blogger had been quoted, because it occurs often and without the blogger's knowledge.

The respondents demonstrated their diversity in answering the question, “What issues are most important to you?” Sixteen issues that were broadly pulled from news reports were listed. Respondents were given an opportunity to select up to three political issues including an “Other” field, where they could enter their own answers. Thirty-one respondents selected this field and proceeded to fill it with 31 unique issues that were important to them, ranging from individual interests like budget items to countering the views of specific individuals in the traditional media. This response demonstrates the range of issues covered in the political blogosphere.

The war in Iraq and terrorism were the two most important issues for both the respondents and the media agenda during the survey time period of late August and September 2006. The third most important single issue was religion in government. This study did not include a content analysis on the traditional media. Religion in government did not seem to be a key media issue. However, there are several stories resulting from the top two issues about religion and its interactions with government. Also, a key Republican constituency is evangelical Christians which may have contributed to the high ranking of this issue.

The diversity within the political blogosphere seems not to apply only to the bloggers, but also to how they view their audience. Almost three-quarters (717%, n=66) of respondents reported that their audience consisted of readers with diverse opinions. This is a shift from the way many political audiences are viewed. For example, in a study focusing on Rush Limbaugh’s radio program, data indicated his audience was comprised of listeners who felt the same way he did (Barker & Knight, 2000). This phenomenon is even celebrated on his show, as the listeners are referred to as “ditto-heads,” implying the perception that their views are the same as the host.

There are several possibilities that could lead to the view of a diverse audience. The feedback loop of posts and emails is not only short and accessible to readers, but a key component of many political blogs. Bloggers are immediately aware of their reader’s views when they agree or disagree. The blogosphere is also filled with such a diverse array of viewpoints, even among ideologically similar blogs, that respondents may simply assume diverse views.

Not enough information is available from the current data to draw any conclusion, but this area invites additional research.

APPENDIX A: COPY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, we are researchers at Florida State University. Please take a few minutes and complete our survey. Participation is voluntary, and all results are confidential to the extent allowed by the law. The survey should take about five minutes to complete. The purpose of this survey is to learn about the users and uses of political blogs.

Completion of the questionnaire is implied consent to use the data you have provided. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate. The data will be stored under lock and key on file on campus until one year after the study has been completed, and destroyed on or about September 7, 2007. No foreseeable risks or discomforts are associated with this study. All e-mail correspondence will be kept confidential and will be destroyed one year after the study has been completed. If you have any questions, please contact Michael S. Tomaszewski at political.blogs@comm.fsu.edu or The Florida State University IRB at 850.644.8633 located at the Office of Research, Innovation Park, 210 Levy Ave, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL, 32306-2742. Thank you for your participation.

Did you vote in the last **TWO** presidential elections? *

- Yes
- No
- Rather not say.

Please type in the number that best applies.

What percentage of your work day is spent on your blog? *

How many hours per week do you spend working on your blog? *

How many years have you worked as a professional journalist? **(If you have never worked as a professional journalist, please type in zero.)** *

How many political campaigns have you worked on as a volunteer or paid staff? **(If you have never served on a campaign, please type in zero.)** *

On a scale of 1 to 7, how would you describe your political leanings? **(1 being Far Left, 7 being Far Right)** *

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

What is the **MOST** important event to occur in the blogosphere? *

- Dan Rather's removal from CBS news
- Trent Lott's resignation as Senate President
- Press credentials issued to bloggers at the Republican and Democratic National conventions
- Blog reporting during Hurricane Katrina
- Blog reporting during the tsunami in Indonesia

Please select all that apply.

Where do you get your information? *

- Traditional media
- Political groups (via talking points)
- Independent sources
- Users of the site
- Other bloggers

How many times have you been quoted by the traditional media? *

How many times have you been quoted by a fellow blogger? *

Please select all that apply.

Which of the following issues is the greatest threat to political blogging? *

- Government censorship
- Blogs from the traditional media
- Inaccurate reporting/rumor mill
- Saturization of the blogosphere
- Emerging technologies (i.e., podcasting)

Internet taxation

Please answer the following statements on a scale of 1 through 7. 1 means Strongly Disagree. 7 means Strongly Agree.

Blogs are an effective source of information. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs are an accurate source for news. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bloggers should use the same publishing standards as journalists in the mainstream press. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Certain blogs should be the sole source for news. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please answer the following statements on a scale of 1 through 7. 1 means Strongly Disagree. 7 means Strongly Agree.

Blogs foster inaccurate rumors. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs are best used for opinion and commentary. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs have a large impact on voter behavior. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Candidates and their advisers should pay attention to messages from the blogosphere. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please answer the following statements on a scale of 1 through 7. 1 means Strongly Disagree. 7 means Strongly Agree.

Blogs will have a large impact on 2006 midterm elections for Democratic candidates. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs will have a large impact on 2006 midterm elections for Republican candidates. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs will have a large impact on 2008 presidential election for the Democratic candidate. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Blogs will have a large impact on 2008 presidential election for the Republican candidate. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The mainstream media should become further involved in the blogosphere. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please select all that apply.

Where do you see the role of blogs in 5 years? *

- Influential as the traditional media.
- Part of the mediasphere.
- Enhanced by advances in technology but still a source of underground information.
- Diminished or extinct.

Please select all that apply.

For which of the following reasons did you start your blog? *

- Share my point of view
- Influence other people
- Strongly opposed the current political climate
- Wanted to interact with other bloggers
- Wanted to participate in an online political debate
- Could not find another source to publish my work
- Cutting edge hobby

In terms of months, how old is your blog? *

How many users visit your blog per day? **(Please answer this in terms of original visits and not repeat visits, if you have the appropriate data.)** *

How many blogs does your blog link to? *

How many blogs link to your blog? *

Select **ONLY THREE** of the following:

What current issues are MOST important to you: *

- Abortion
- Border security
- Environment
- Federal deficit
- Flag burning
- Gay marriage
- Global warming
- Gun control
- Immigration
- War in Iraq
- Poverty
- Public health (i.e., HIV/AIDS, Avian Flu)
- Religion in government
- Social Security
- Taxes

Terrorism

Please answer the following statements on a scale of 1 through 7. 1 means Strongly Disagree. 7 means Strongly Agree.

Blogs should be used to promote your own ideologies. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The mainstream media should stay out of blogging. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bloggers are as responsible as traditional media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bloggers are more independent than the traditional media. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The traditional media should pay me to publish my blog. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please answer the following statements on a scale of 1 through 7. 1 means Strongly Disagree. 7 means Strongly Agree.

A blogger can work for the traditional media and maintain his independence. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A blogger should have some journalism training. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A blogger's opinions and commentary should be accurate. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A blogger is responsible to the readers of the blog. *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A blogger who writes false information should be shunned from the blogosphere. *

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please select all that apply.

Your blog influences your audience in the following ways: *

- Influences the way they vote
- Influences the debate of popular issues and topics.
- Reinforces the beliefs of people who feel like I do.
- Is a source of annoyance for people who disagree with my beliefs.
- Has no influence.

How do you view your audience? *

- Readers with diverse opinions
- Readers with similar views that I have
- Readers with the opposite views that I have

What percentage of your feedback (posts or email) is positive? *

How many independent advertisers does your blog have? *

How many of these independent advertisers are subsidiaries of the traditional media? *

How many of these independent advertisers are subsidiaries of political groups or campaigns? *

What do you do to increase the exposure of your blog? *

- Advertise
- Link to additional bloggers (and have them link back to mine)
- Send out emails promoting my blog
- Nothing

Which blog do you read the most? *

What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female

Please indicate your current household income in U.S. dollars *

- Rather not say
- Under \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$150,000
- Over \$150,000

Please indicate the **HIGHEST level of education completed.** *

- Grammar School
- High School or equivalent

- Vocational/Technical School (2 year)
- Some College
- College Graduate (4 year)
- Master's Degree (MS)
- Doctoral Degree (PhD)
- Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)
- Other

What is your age? *

- 18 - 24
- 25 - 29
- 30 - 34
- 35 - 39
- 40 - 44
- 45 - 49
- 50 - 54
- 55 - 59
- 60 - 64
- 65 - 69
- 70 - 74
- 75 - 79
- 80 - 84
- 85 - 89
- Over 90
- Rather not say

What is your current marital status? *

- Divorced
- Living with another
- Married
- Separated
- Single
- Widowed
- Rather not say

What is your race? *

- African-American (Black)
- Asian
- Caucasian (White)
- Hawaiian Native
- Hispanic
- Multi-Race
- Native American
- Rather not say

Which state do you live in? *

Is there anything else you would like to add? *

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF EMAIL SENT TO POLITICAL BLOGGERS

Dear (Subject Name),

My name is Michael Tomaszeski and I am a graduate student at Florida State University. I am currently working on my graduate thesis about the political blogosphere. The purposes of the thesis are to obtain a blogger's perspective on the users and uses of political blogs, to develop an understanding on how information flows through the blogosphere, and to see how this information affects the readers of blogs.

To collect data for my thesis I request that you take my online survey. If you are willing to participate, please respond to this e-mail for further instructions.

If you would like to take the survey right now, here is the link:

<http://www.surveympro.com/TakeSurvey?id=19312>

I am willing to share any information that I receive with you, nor will I profit from this work in any way. Thank you for your help and if you have any questions I would be more than happy to answer them.

Thank you,

Michael Tomaszeski
Florida State University
703.842.7674
political.blogs@comm.fsu.edu

**APPENDIX C: LIST OF POLITICAL OFFICES AND ORGANIZATIONS
CONTACTED FOR BLOGGER LISTS**

This is a list of organizations contacted for this study. Although each organization was contacted, some declined to participate.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| All America PAC | Democratic Senatorial Campaign |
| Alliance for Economic Justice | Committee |
| America First Party | Dick Durbin, United States Senate |
| America Votes | Emily's List |
| American Family Voices | Feinstein for Senate |
| American Civil Liberties Union | Florida Democratic Party |
| Americans for Tax Reform | Freedom Works |
| Amnesty International | Friends of Brownback Committee |
| Bill Frist, United States Senate | Friends of George Allen |
| Bill Nelson, United States Senate | Giuliani Partners LLC |
| Bill Richardson for Governor 2006 | GOPAC |
| Bring Ohio Back | Granholt for Governor |
| California Democratic Party | Green Party |
| California Republican Party | Greenpeace USA |
| Californians for Schwarzenegger '06 | Haley Barbour, Governor of |
| Center for American Progress | Mississippi |
| Citizens for Biden | Hillary Rodham Clinton, United |
| Citizen's United | States Senate |
| Democracy for America | Human Rights Campaign |
| Democratic Congressional | Kay Bailey Hutchison for Senate |
| Campaign Committee | Committee |
| Democratic Governors Association | Keeping America's Promise |
| Democratic Legislative Campaign | Libertarian National Committee |
| Committee | Libertarian Party of New York |
| Democratic Party | Michigan Democratic State Central |
| Democratic Party of Virginia | Committee |

Michigan Republican Party
Mike DeWine for U.S. Senate
MoveOn.org
NAACP
NARAL
National Association of State PIRGs
National Republican Congressional
Committee
National Republican Senatorial
Committee
National Right to Life Committee
National Taxpayers Union
New York Republican State
Committee
New York State Democratic
Committee
Newt.org
Ohio Democratic Party
Ohio Republican Party Headquarters
Pennsylvania Democratic Party
Progress for America
Progressive Patriots Fund
Republican Federal Committee of
Pennsylvania
Republican Governors Association
Republican Main Street Partnership
Republican National Committee
Republican Party of Florida
Republican Party of Texas
Russ Feingold, United States Senate
Santorum 2006
Service Employees International
Union
Spitzer 2006
Tennessee Democratic Party
Tennessee Republican Party
Texas Democratic Party
The American Enterprise Institute
The Club for Growth
The Commonwealth PAC
The Heritage Foundation
The League of Conservation Voters
The League of Women Voters
The National Rifle Association
The Reform Party of the United
States of America
The Republican Party of Virginia
The Sierra Club
Voices for Working Families
Volunteer Political Action Committee
(VOLPAC)

APPENDIX D: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Agenda-setting: The study of the how the traditional media serves as an intermediary with the general public on which issues are addressed and how issues are viewed.

Blast emails/faxes: Media talking points that are sent to pundits, columnists, bloggers and other political supporters to present a united message on an issue or event.

Bloggers: Any individual who writes and maintains a web based daily log, otherwise known as a weblog or blog.

Blogger and LiveJournal: Web based software that allows a user to manage a blog through interfaces that resemble word processing software, like Microsoft Word.

Blogrolls: A list of hyperlinked weblogs that are endorsed by a host blog.

Election cycle: The complete electoral campaigning process from announcing a primary candidacy, to the primary elections, ending with the general election.

Federal political issues: Legislative or legal items that can only be addressed by the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of the United States government.

Hyperlink: An element in an electronic document that when activated sends the user to another electronic document or another place in the same electronic document.

Internet neutrality: A concept where all online traffic remains free to use and access, preventing Internet providers the ability to limit bandwidth to certain websites or charge premiums to access certain areas of the Internet.

Journalist-bloggers: Bloggers who report news on their weblog.

Longitudinal: Studying a phenomenon across multiple points in time.

Media agenda: The hierarchy (rank order) of issues covered by the traditional media.

Netroots: A blend of the words Internet and grassroots that occurs when political candidates actively court political bloggers to their campaign ideologically.

Netroots coordinator: Campaign staff member whose responsibility is to interact with like minded bloggers to involve them in the campaign.

Opinion leader: Individuals who are more active and aware of a certain subject (i.e., politics) and information from the traditional media to lesser active sections of the population, with their own biases added to that information.

Political blogosphere: All weblogs whose content is concentrated on commentary, news, events, and occurrences involving politics.

Point-in-time content analyses: Research of the media agenda at one specific point (as opposed to longitudinal which looks at multiple points).

Post: An electronic method of publishing a message on a weblog or newsgroup.

Pseudonym: A pen name or alias.

Public agenda: The hierarchy of issues at a particular point in time.

Two-step flow: A hypothesis that states ideas often flow from the traditional media *to* the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less-involved sections of the population.

Third party: In terms of U.S. politics, any political party that is not one of the two dominant political parties.

Traditional media: Mainstream content delivery systems. For the purpose of this thesis, it includes television, radio, and daily newspapers.

Talking points: A list of bullet marked statements designed to help candidates, commentators, and activists quickly address an issue with the traditional media.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michael Tomaszeski was born on October 4, 1976 in Jacksonville, FL to RADM Steven and Elizabeth Tomaszeski. Following Navy family tradition, Michael and his younger siblings James and Mary grew up across the country. Michael graduated from Coronado High School in 1994. He then studied at Florida State University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in English.

After graduation, Michael moved to Washington, D.C., becoming Financial Director of GOPAC from 1998 to 2000. He has spent the last six years employed by Northrop Grumman, where he ran the System Development Organization Web Team, developing web-based applications for the U.S. Navy, U.S. Army Reserve, the Department of State, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain.

The author intends to conclude a banner year in 2006, which included his marriage to the former Emery Baskin of Washington, D.C. and his 30th birthday, by completing the requirements for his Master of Arts degree in Integrated Marketing and Communication Management at Florida State University.