2009-12-12

The Blog Election: An Analysis of the Source Interaction Between Traditional News Media And Blogs in Their Coverage of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections

Marcus Messner
*University of Miami, mmessner@vcu.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations](https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations)

Recommended Citation

[https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/324](https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/324)

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
THE BLOG ELECTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCE INTERACTION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA AND BLOGS IN THEIR COVERAGE OF THE 2006 CONGRESSIONAL MIDTERM ELECTIONS

By

Marcus Messner

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2009
THE BLOG ELECTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCE INTERACTION BETWEEN TRADITIONAL NEWS MEDIA AND BLOGS IN THEIR COVERAGE OF THE 2006 CONGRESSIONAL MIDTERM ELECTIONS

Marcus Messner

Approved:

Bruce Garrison, Ph.D.
Professor of Communication

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Michel Dupagne, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Communication

Sam Terilli, J.D.
Associate Professor of Communication

Richard Weisskoff, Ph.D.
Professor of International Studies
Political blogs have emerged as a new journalistic format that has gained influence on the political discourse in the United States. Previous research has shown that this influence stems mainly from attention given to blogs by traditional news media.

Based on the concepts of intermedia agenda setting and agenda building, this study explored the source interaction between 10 elite traditional news media and 10 political filter blogs during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. An analysis of 2587 sources used in the election context found that traditional news media frequently cited blogs in their election coverage, but that the source attributions to the blogs were vague. Blogs, on the other hand, heavily cited traditional news media, but the analysis revealed that conservative blogs cited elite traditional news media less than did liberal blogs. Conservative blogs relied more on conservative media outlets in their election coverage.

A case study of the dominant election topic, the Mark Foley scandal, showed that the daily interaction between the two media formats was driven by the use of breaking news elements as well as controversial opinions. The findings of this study show that the blog agenda is strongly influenced by traditional news media sources and that blogs at the
same time have become part of the routine newsgathering process of traditional news
media journalists. However, the findings also raise questions about changes in the
standard journalistic research and attribution procedures as both media formats often rely
on each other as sources rather than on original reporting.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people, who helped and encouraged me to write this dissertation. I would like to thank my dissertation committee at the University of Miami: My chair and adviser, Bruce Garrison, who since my days as a master’s student has been a mentor to me, as well as my committee members Michel Dupagne, Sam Terilli, and Richard Weisskoff. They all helped me with their insights and expertise. I also owe gratitude to my committee member, Michael Salwen, who guided me during my master’s and doctoral studies, but who passed away before this dissertation was completed. I also like to thank Marcia Watson DiStaso for her help in coding parts of the media and blog content for this study.

I would like to thank my parents, Manfred and Annette Messner, for their never-ending support during my education, even though most of it took place so far away from home. Most of all, I owe thanks to my wife Vivian and our daughters, Valentina and Rebecca, for putting up with the many late-night hours in front of the computer. Thank you for your enduring patience and support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................................ vi

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ 1

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................................................. 7
   Blog Research ........................................................................................................................................... 7
       Definition of Blogs ............................................................................................................................... 7
       Types, Content and Credibility of Blogs ............................................................................................. 9
       Relationship of Blogs and Traditional News Media ........................................................................ 12
       Impact of Blogs.................................................................................................................................. 14
       Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal................................................................................................................ 15
       Trent Lott’s Resignation ..................................................................................................................... 16
       2004 Presidential Election .................................................................................................................. 17
       Easongate and Gannongate ................................................................................................................. 20
       War and Terror................................................................................................................................... 22
       Natural Disasters ................................................................................................................................. 23
       2006 Congressional Midterm Elections .......................................................................................... 24
   Theoretical Foundations............................................................................................................................ 26
       Intermedia Agenda Setting .................................................................................................................. 26
       Influences on Gatekeepers ............................................................................................................... 26
       Elite Media as Agenda-Setters ........................................................................................................... 28
       Influences in Political Elections ......................................................................................................... 30
       Impact of Internet Media .................................................................................................................... 31
       Filter Blogs as Intermedia Agenda-Setters ....................................................................................... 32
       Agenda-Building Power of Sources .................................................................................................... 36
       Conventional News Sources ............................................................................................................. 38
       Nonconventional News Sources ......................................................................................................... 40
   Research Questions................................................................................................................................... 41
       Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media ................................................................................... 42
       Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs .................................................................................... 44
       Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs .................................................... 45

3 METHOD .................................................................................................................................................. 46
   Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media ........................................................................ 46
       Sampling ............................................................................................................................................. 47
       Traditional News Media Sample ....................................................................................................... 47
       Blog Sample ....................................................................................................................................... 49
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Networks</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 RESULTS</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 4</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 5</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 6</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 7</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking the Foley Scandal</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Buzz</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declining Source Uses</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 DISCUSSION</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a Process Model for the Source Interaction</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Interaction Between Traditional News Media and Blogs</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Daily Traditional Media and Blog Source Use in Context of Foley Scandal</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Daily Blog Source Use in Newspaper and Television Networks in Context of Foley Scandal</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3</td>
<td>Daily Traditional Media Source Use in Liberal and Conservative Blogs in Context of Foley Scandal</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>Source Cycle Model</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2</td>
<td>Source Interaction Model</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.3</td>
<td>Source Sub-Cycle Model</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Topics of Blog Source Use by Traditional News Media</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Overall Articles and News Transcripts</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Overall Blog References</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Blog References in Election Context</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Filter Blogs Cited in Election Context</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Other Blogs Cited in Election Context</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Specific Blog Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Traditional Media: Type of Blog Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Newspapers: Blog Source Use by Sections in Election Context</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Newspapers: A-Section Blog Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>TV: Blog Source Use by Time Period in Election Context</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>TV: Blog Source Use by Segments in Election Context</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Blogs: Overall Use of Traditional Media Sources</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Blogs: Traditional Media Sources in Election Context</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Blogs: Elite Traditional Media Cited in Election Context</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Blogs: Other Traditional Media Cited in Election Context</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Blogs: Specific Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Blogs: Type of Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>Liberal Blogs: Specific Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Conservative Blogs: Specific Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.20 - Traditional Media: Blog Sources in Context of Foley Scandal............... 89
Table 4.21 - Blogs: Traditional Media Sources in Context of Foley Scandal .......... 90
Table 4.22 - Traditional Media: Blogs Cited in Context of Foley Scandal .......... 90
Table 4.23 - Blogs: Traditional Media Cited in Context of Foley Scandal .......... 91
Table 4.24 - Blogs: Other Traditional Media Cited in Context of Foley Scandal .... 92
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The new media phenomenon of blogs has developed into an influential journalistic format over the last decade. Not only has the number of these personal online journals grown into the millions, but blogs also have continuously impacted the news coverage of the traditional news media. While a single blog is rather insignificant in its impact on the public discourse, the collective influence of thousands of blogs on certain issues cannot be ignored. Drezner and Farrell (2004) stated that “blogs are becoming more influential because they affect the content of international media coverage … increasingly, journalists and pundits take their cues about ‘what matters’ in the world from weblogs” (p. 34).

Blogs are also known as weblogs, a term derived from the words “web” and “log” to describe the characteristics of these online journals. They began to appear in 1999, when Blogger.com was launched -- which is today owned by Google -- allowing anyone with only few Internet and computer skills to maintain and regularly update a website (Dorrorh, 2005; Jensen, 2003). According to Blood (2002b), these first blogs were mainly compilations of links to other websites. Blogger.com made blogging more user-friendly and helped to develop a mainstream format. “Blogging technology has, for the first time in history, given the average Jane the ability to write, edit, design, and publish her own editorial product – to be read and responded to by millions of people, potentially” (Welch, 2003, p. 22). By 2000, several thousand blogs had developed into what came to be known as the blogosphere, the virtual community of blogs. The increasing availability of high-speed Internet connections enhanced the blog growth in the following year
The number of Americans who use broadband connections in their homes increased from 60 million to 84 million between March 2005 and 2006, which then constituted a 42% adoption rate. By 2009, the rate had increased to 63% of all adult Americans (Horrigan, 2006, 2009). Overall, Internet penetration was at 73% of all American adults in 2006 and has remained steady at that level (Holmes, 2008; Madden, 2006).

The blogosphere has experienced rapid growth since the September 11, 2001, terror attacks when an increasing number of people felt a need to express themselves (Seipp, 2002). The focus of blogs shifted towards comments on the news that was presented by the traditional news media. Many bloggers grew impatient with the restrained tone in the traditional news media, giving expression to a widespread attitude in the American public. Traditional news media journalists subsequently paid increasing attention to the opinions of the blogosphere as a way to assess the mood of the country (Smolkin, 2004a). However, as Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) pointed out, the focus of the traditional news media is generally only on “A-list bloggers, those whose thoughts are heard and quoted far beyond the blogosphere and in mainstream media” (p. 978).

While the impact of blogs has been mostly in politics with such scandalous events as the resignation of U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in 2002 (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005), the premature retirement of CBS anchor legend Dan Rather in 2004/2005 (Pein, 2005a), or the resignation of Florida Congressman Mark Foley in 2006 (Kornblut & Seelye, 2006), blogs have also influenced the reporting by newspapers and television networks during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Iraq War from 2003 until today, and the South Asian Tsunami in 2004 (Albritton, 2003; Farhi & Wiltz, 2005;
Outing, 2005b). Today, not a week goes by in which traditional news media do not refer to the reporting or editorializing of blogs (Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005).

While blog readership is constantly increasing, blogs do not reach a majority of the American public. The majority of the American public is not reading blogs on a regular basis; the Gallup Organization found in a 2004 survey that 26% of Americans are very or somewhat familiar with blogs and that 56% are not familiar with them at all (Saad, 2005). The Pew Research Center also found in 2005 that 20% of newspaper readers and 40% of talk radio listeners read blogs (Cornfield, Carson, Kalis, & Simon, 2005). Hargrove and Stempel (2007) found in a survey that only 12.1% of Americans get their news from blogs and, therefore, concluded that blogs at this point are no competition for traditional news media. The number of blog users, however, is increasing. In February 2006, 39% of Internet users in the United States read blogs, compared to only 27% at the end of 2004 (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Rainie, 2005).

Because the majority of the public does not recognize blogs as news sources and, therefore, there is clearly no direct agenda-setting effect of blogs for the majority of the public, the question arises, regarding the degree to which blogs influence the traditional media’s news agenda as sources. Professional journalists, who through their news media outlets have agenda-setting effects on the public, are paying increasing attention to blogs. This in turn has caused scholars to turn their attention to the new media phenomenon.

McCombs (2005) described the importance of studying the blog phenomenon as follows:

While numerous polls of the general public reveal that the majority do not even know what a blog is, much less seek them out on the Internet, there is
probably no one in journalism who does not know what a blog is and many journalists, if not a majority, regularly seek them out. And if blogs have an agenda-setting role, it is likely to be an influence on the media agenda…. Blogs are part of the journalism landscape, but who sets whose agenda under what circumstances remains an open question. (p. 549)

Agenda-setting is one of the most widely applied theories in mass communication research (Rogers & Dearing, 1993). Originally developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in their classic Chapel Hill study, agenda-setting research explores the transfer of salience from one agenda to another. While the Chapel Hill study analyzed the transfer of salience from the media’s agenda to the public’s agenda in the 1968 presidential election and found a strong correlation between the two, agenda-setting research has developed into many different areas of mass communication. More than 400 agenda-setting studies have been conducted worldwide (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Rogers & Dearing, 1993).

McCombs (2005) defined five stages of the agenda-setting concept: (1) basic agenda-setting, (2) attribute agenda-setting, (3) psychology of agenda-setting effects, (4) sources of the media agenda, and (5) consequences of agenda-setting. He pointed out that besides studying correlations between news agendas, examining the sources of media agendas is becoming increasingly important in a news environment that is dramatically changing and diversifying through the Internet. It is important to know the sources that set the media agenda, which in turn can set the public agenda.

Researchers have turned their attention to the media as news sources for themselves. Under the concept of intermedia agenda-setting, researchers have attempted to study how journalists “rely heavily on each other for ideas and confirmation of their news judgments” (McCombs & Bell, 1996). Intermedia agenda-setting research also
analyzes the influence of one news medium on another. Many times the influence is caused by the use of one medium as the source in another medium (Danielian & Reese, 1989; McCombs, 2004). With the diversification of the news media through the emergence of the Internet, the study of intermedia influences gains increasing importance.

The goal of this study, therefore, was to explore the agenda-setting relationship between traditional news media and blogs by analyzing the influences of sources on the respective media agendas. The concepts of intermedia agenda-setting and agenda building were applied to explore the process between the traditional news media and the blogosphere. The study analyzed how and under which conditions one becomes a legitimate source for the other. The study determined under which circumstances the traditional news media use blogs as sources, which traditional news media sources blogs use, and in what way they use them. The findings allowed the researcher to form conclusions about whether traditional news media and blogs are engaging in a source cycle, in which news content is continuously passed back and forth from medium to medium. As part of this discussion, the legitimization process of new informational sources was also addressed.

Internet-related research has grown significantly over the last decade and has employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Cho & Khang, 2006; Kim & Weaver, 2002). The research in this field has become increasingly theory-driven, but is still in an exploratory stage. Cho and Khang (2006) stressed “that Internet-related research is becoming more theoretically sound,” but that “more explanatory research studies are needed” (p. 158). This study, therefore, employed a combination of
quantitative and qualitative methods in order to explore the agenda-setting influences between traditional news media and blogs, an area that has not received much scholarly attention to date.

This study first discusses the theoretical foundations of intermedia agenda-setting and agenda-building as well as the development and influence of blogs. In two quantitative content analyses, the sources used by both media were analyzed throughout the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States. In the third step, a qualitative case study of the predominant election topic in the coverage examined the continuous use of sources in both media to determine whether the source interaction between traditional news media and blogs led into the creation of a source cycle.

The combination of these approaches helped to better explore the intermedia agenda-setting influences between the traditional news media and blogs. The regular use of blogs as sources in the traditional media could signal a change in the standards of reporting, as reporters usually prefer original reporting over the reliance on other media. It is important to understand these influences as their combination has the potential to also influence public opinion.

The implications of the findings of this study are two-fold. The results establish the degree of the intermedia agenda-setting influences between the traditional news media and blogs and help to develop models to explain the source relationship between them. The study explains how content is passed back and forth between traditional and new media formats. In addition, the results of this study also contribute to the basis for future research, which should address the effects of blogs through traditional media channels on the public’s agenda.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Blog Research

Definition of Blogs

Between 2002 and 2008, the blog search engine Technorati (2009) indexed 133 million blogs. These online journals, which used to be referred to as weblogs, account for 900,000 daily posts, which are the entries bloggers write. Due to this large number of blogs and posts, a simple definition of a blog is rather difficult. There are no blog standards (Vogel & Goans, 2005).

As Blood (2002a) pointed out, blogs can be funny, serious, or even off-the-wall. They can be dealing with politics or sports as much as they can exchange cooking recipes or intellectual arguments. While politics and technology are the most popular topics, blogs also deal with humor and family issues (Outing, 2006). Blogs can do original reporting as well as commentary or just link to other websites. They can be written by anybody with Internet access.

While most blogs are noncommercial and unaffiliated, there is an increasing number of blogs that are run by the traditional news media, which for the purpose of this study are defined as newspapers, magazines, television stations, networks and cable news channels as well as radio stations (Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Reuters, 2007). A distinction is made to the term mainstream media, as websites and Internet services such as Yahoo!, Google, Salon, or Slate have such large audiences that they also have to be considered mainstream. Online journalism has been defined as exclusively produced news content for the World Wide Web (Deuze, 2003). To distinguish these online news
outlets from the traditional news media, they will be referred to as Internet media in this study. Websites of newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations and networks, however, will still be considered traditional news media.

A blog has been defined as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer” (Tynan, 2004, n.p.). The common denominator that blogs have is their format. What distinguishes blogs from other websites is that new posts are always placed at the top of the page, listing them in reverse chronological order. Herring, Scheidt, Wright, and Bonus (2005) described blogs as “individualistic, even intimate, forms of self-expression” (p. 163). Blogs are also updated on a regular basis and are never finished (Outing, 2002; Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005). A common characteristic of a blog is the use of hyperlinks, which also allows measuring the popularity of blogs (Harp & Tremayne, 2006; Robins, 2002).

A single blog generally focuses on a single subject or theme (Barrett, 2002) and is generally written in an informal style (Gupta & Pitt, 2004). Usually blogs have a three-column layout with the posts in the middle. On the sides, bloggers list their favorite other blogs in a blogroll, provide an archive and display advertising. Most blogs are written by one person, the blogger. But some are also group projects of several bloggers.

According to studies conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, the number of bloggers in the United States has increased from 8 to 12 million between 2004 and 2006 (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Fifty-four percent of bloggers in the United States had never published before starting their blogs. The most prominent topics in blogs are
personal experiences (37%), politics (11%), entertainment (7%), sports (6%), general news (5%), business (5%), technology (4%), and religion (2%).

The public attention to the blogosphere is constantly growing. While only 27% of Internet users in the United States (32 million) were reading blogs at the end of 2004, this number increased to 39% (57 million) by February 2006 (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Rainie, 2005). While blogs at this point still do not reach the majority of the American public, their reach is increasing significantly.

*Types, Content and Credibility of Blogs*

When blogs first gained the attention of the traditional news media, there was widespread debate whether bloggers can be considered journalists and what impact they would have on traditional journalism standards (Andrews, 2003; Blood, 2003; Lascia, 2002). Most bloggers engage in editorializing and would not consider themselves journalists, but rather commentators (Oxfeld, 2004; Smolkin 2004a). Many blogs present polarized points of view. Especially the political blogosphere can be divided in liberal and conservative (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Tremayne, Zheng, Lee, & Jeong, 2006). Consequently, bloggers do not necessarily adhere to common journalistic standards such as fairness and accuracy (Andrews, 2003; Anonymous, 2003). Bucy, Gantz, and Wang (2007) stressed that bloggers “often amplify, illuminate, or interconnect the news rather than create it” (p. 150). Alterman (2003) even questions that if blogs were objective, they would be considered blogs.

However, some blogs also provide “real time alternative coverage” (Kahn & Kellner, 2004, p. 93) and challenge the traditional news media through the speed of their
reporting (Matheson, 2004). According to Lascia (2002), a blogger can be someone at a breaking-news event or someone who is commenting from his home. While advertising revenues of blogs have increased to an estimated $10 million to $100 million in 2005 and blog groups are formed to increase revenues even further, only a few bloggers have managed to gain an income from their blogs (Baker, 2006; Berger, 2005; Reynolds, 2003; Sloan & Kahiha, 2006).

Blood (2003) defined four types of blogs: “Those written by journalists; those written by professionals about their industry; those written by individuals at the scene of a major event; those that link primarily to news about current events” (p. 61). According to Fisher (2006), most bloggers fall in the latter categories as they still rely heavily on the traditional news media for their information gathering, but journalists at the same time read blogs to capture the “zeitgeist” (p. 44). Some experts argue that blogs take on the role of media watchdogs that could also improve the quality of journalism in general (Mitchell, 2003; Palser, 2005a, 2005b; Singer, 2005b). The increase in numbers of blogs around the world is also seen as strengthening democracy and the right for free expression (Kristof, 2005).

Lascia (2003) argued that “weblogs should not be considered in isolation but as part of an emerging new media ecosystem – a network of ideas … In such a community, bloggers discuss, dissect and extend the stories created by mainstream media” (n.p.). This is supported by Haas (2005), who sees the significance of blogs in the challenge to the narrow topical range of the traditional news media by facilitating a “multiperspectival, multivocal, or intertextual form of news coverage” (p. 389). However, Haas stressed that the traditional news media have a strong influence on the topics the blogosphere is
covering. Only very few blogs link to alternative news websites. Most blogs link to traditional media websites.

While some journalists question the ethical standards of bloggers, they do not lack credibility with the public. Online information in general has maintained high credibility ratings in comparison to traditional media content. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that Internet users view online information to be as credible as content from television, magazines and radio, but not as credible as newspaper content. However, Johnson and Kaye (2000) found that politically interested Internet users judge the Internet as a whole as the most reliable source to gather political information. This was supported by the findings of Abdulla, Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll, and Casey (2005), who found that online news was rated higher in credibility by the public than newspapers and television. Johnson and Kaye (2002) also found that the credibility of online media increased between the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections.

Similar findings were made in the evaluation of the credibility of blogs. Blog users view blogs as more credible than the traditional news media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). While blogs were rated as highly credible, traditional news media information was rated as moderately credible. Blogs were rated especially high on their depth of information, while they were rated lower on fairness. The credibility advantage of blogs was confirmed by a survey of politically-interested Internet users (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007). Differences in credibility ratings so far have only been detected between male and female bloggers (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). These overall high credibility ratings have for instance caused public relations practitioners to turn their attention to blogs (Messner & Watson, 2006; Sanderson, 2008; Sweetser & Metzgar,
2007; Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). However, blogs did not rank high in credibility with professional journalists and public relations practitioners (Sweetser, Porter, Chung, & Kim, 2008). The more these professionals used blogs, the higher they ranked their credibility.

**Relationship of Blogs and Traditional News Media**

Traditional news media journalists were very skeptical about the new online media environment that developed in the 1990s (Ruggerio & Winch, 2004). Journalists viewed the new format as a challenge to their gatekeeping role (Singer, 1997) and their professional standards (Singer, 2003). The blog phenomenon was greeted with a similar skepticism in its early stages:

> Weblogs now present a similar threat to traditional media. This threat … represents a more immediate challenge than the large-scale introduction of the Internet…. What skillful bloggers are demonstrating to traditional media is how they no longer get to decide on their own what is news anymore. (Regan, 2003, p. 68)

While some of that resentment in the traditional news media is still present (Cooper, 2005), many traditional news media outlets have not only begun to closely monitor blogs, but have also started to adopt the blog format to direct Web traffic to their own websites and for their own reporting and editorial purposes (Chung, Kim, Trammell, & Porter, 2007; Oser, 2004; Reilly, 2004; Singer, 2005a). According to Outing (2005a), blogs allow traditional media journalists to establish closer relationships with readers, to maintain conversations, to foster feedback, and to develop a news hole for items that would usually not be published. Overall, blogging adds a modern element to the news coverage.
While The Charlotte Observer is credited with being the first newspaper to adopt the blog format in the late 1990s, many other newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, The Boston Globe, The Miami Herald, The Dallas Morning News, the Chicago Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, The Sacramento Bee, The Providence Journal, the Albuquerque Journal, the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, and the San Jose Mercury News have followed suit in recent years (Anonymous, 2006; Gillmor, 2003; Heyboer & Rosen, 2003; Lennon, 2003; Oxfeld, 2005a, 2005b; Strupp, 2005a, 2006; Sullivan, 2003; Yahn & Whitney, 2006). Cable news networks such as the Fox News Channel, MSNBC, and CNN are also adding their own blogs as well as blog reporters, who monitor developments in the blogosphere (Palser, 2002). In addition, traditional news media columnists such as Michael Barone, Austin Bay and most notably Arianna Huffington have started successful blogs (Astor, 2005, 2006).

Nevertheless, traditional news media blogs differ from unaffiliated blogs in that they mainly link and refer to other traditional media websites and thereby reinforce traditional journalistic norms and practices (Messner & DiStaso, 2006; Singer, 2005a). According to Singer (2006), “these j-blogs by mainstream publications remain very much framed in tradition” (p. 81). In addition, traditional news media organizations have occasionally restricted the blogging of their employees, because they saw the blogs as conflicting with traditional reporting (Outing, 2005a; Palser, 2003b). While traditional media blogs have blurred the lines of traditional journalistic standards, the traditional news media are still reluctant to completely give up control over what is published under the outlet’s name (Mitchell, 2006). Furthermore, traditional news media blogs lack
influence and readership within the blogosphere in comparison to unaffiliated blogs (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2008; Messner & DiStaso, 2006; Reuters, 2007).

Impact of Blogs

Numerous research studies and professional articles have focused on the blogs’ impact on the traditional news media. News coverage that was initiated by blogs has found its way into the traditional news media on many occasions (Garrison & Messner, 2007; Messner, 2005). Starting with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in 1998 (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000, 2004) and the resignation of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in 2002 (Alterman, 2003), the number of investigative successes of blogs has steadily increased. Additionally, the reporting of CBS on military files concerning former President George W. Bush’s conduct in the National Guard was questioned by blogs during the 2004 presidential election, which subsequently led to the retirement of anchor legend Dan Rather (Pein, 2005a). During the 2004 election, blogs also circumvented the traditional news media gatekeepers by reporting unofficial exit poll results (Messner & Terilli, 2007). In 2005, CNN executive Eason Jordan resigned after blogs reported on controversial comments he made on the war in Iraq. Also that year, blogs uncovered the true identity of White House correspondent “Jeff Gannon” and forced him to return his accreditation (Kurtz, 2005a).

All these incidents and additional events involving natural disasters, politics, the media, and war and terror are analyzed in the following to evaluate how blogs have increased the salience of topics in news events.
Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal

The uncovering of the affair between President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky and its legal implications is generally considered to be the first incident in which a blog impacted politics and traditional news media (Bucy et al., 2007). Williams and Delli Carpini (2000, 2004) view the publication of the scandal on the blog Drudge Report as a milestone in the challenge to gatekeeping theory as developed by White (1950). While the traditional news media acted as a gatekeeper in refusing to break the story it had researched on the president’s affair with the intern, it was the blog that reported the rumors. Afterwards the story was immediately picked up by the traditional media, which repeatedly cited the Drudge Report as a source and continued to cover the scandal on a daily basis until the spring of 1999 (Abel, 1999; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003).

Newsweek had decided to postpone the publication of the scandal, which had been researched in-depth by investigative reporter Michael Isikoff (1999). However, when the Drudge Report reported on the postponing, the incident and Newsweek’s decision became public:

At the last minute, at 6 p.m. on Saturday evening, Newsweek killed a story that was destined to shake official Washington to its foundation: A White House intern carried on a sexual affair with the President of the United States! The Drudge Report has learned that reporter Michael Isikoff developed the story of his career, only to have it spiked by top Newsweek suits hours before publication. (Isikoff, 1999, p. 339)

The following day the topic spread from the blog into the Sunday talk shows. Consequently, Newsweek and the other traditional news media had to cover the president’s affair with the intern. Williams and Delli Carpini (2000) suggest that this incident undermined the gatekeeping function of the traditional news media, which attempted to stay in a central position without noticing the challenge to its own role:
The new media environment presents a challenge to mainstream journalists in their gatekeeping role as agenda-setter and issue-framer…. One result was the collapse of anything like a daily news cycle. While reporters still struggled to ‘move the story forward’ they did so in an environment where that story was being updated every 20 minutes. (p. 78)

The ethical concerns about the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal within the traditional news media were swept away after the blog made the topic public. Consequently, Agence France Presse ranked the breakthrough of the Drudge Report as one of the top 10 media events in the 20th century (Grossman, 1999). According to Salwen (2005), “the story showed that an online news outlet could be a potent social force by putting a major issue on the public agenda” (p. 63).

Trent Lott’s Resignation

While the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal was the first news incident involving a blog, the influence of this new media phenomenon became apparent with the resignation of designated Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in December 2002 (Smolkin, 2004a). Perlmutter and McDaniel (2005) state that “blog obscurity changed decisively in 2002, when Lott, while attending a reception for South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, made a racially insensitive comment” (p. 62).

At the event, Lott seemed to support ideas Thurmond had expressed during his 1948 segregationist presidential campaign. While C-Span covered the event, Thurmond’s 100th birthday party, and the traditional news media briefly reported on Lott’s remark, the issue seemed to fade away in the news cycle (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004). Nevertheless, the outrage in the blogosphere increased the salience of the topic and led to
widespread coverage in the traditional news media. Eventually public pressure forced
Lott to resign his position as Senate Majority Leader.

Overall, it was the criticism in the blogosphere about the traditional news media
that brought the issue back to the top of the news agenda. It was especially blogger Josh
Marshall (2002) of *Talking Points Memo*, who initiated the criticism in the blogosphere:

> Hard-hitting coverage?… As we noted yesterday, on Thursday incoming-
Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott seemed to explicitly endorse the pro-
segregation, anti-civil rights platform which Strom Thurmond ran for
president on in 1948. He even bemoaned all the ‘problems’ the country
might have avoided if it had taken the segregation route. Now, maybe Lott
… didn't quite mean what he said? … perhaps at a minimum he'd like to
apologize. (n.p.)

The Lott incident is considered the first after the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal that
shows exposure of blogs in the traditional news media. It also led to more attention for
the blogosphere, as journalists more often monitored blogs during political events (Glenn,
2007; Kurtz, 2005e).

2004 Presidential Election

According to Perlmutter and McDaniel (2005), “2004 was the year of the blog”
(p. 62). While the 2003 California governor recall was the first election in which blogs
gained attention as a campaigning tool (Weintraub, 2003), the impact of the new
journalistic format became apparent nationally throughout the 2004 presidential election
as “novel forms of citizen engagement in online political communication” (Singer, 2006,
p. 267). Since the 2004 campaign, blogs have become a campaign tool on every level of
the political spectrum (Fisher, 2006).
Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean helped to bring blogs into the mainstream of the political discourse in the early stages of the campaign in 2003. Dean not only paid bloggers to promote his run for the White House, but also used them as a campaign platform for his supporters to plan events and exchange ideas (Bulkeley & Bandler, 2005; Davis, 2005; Morris & McGann, 2005; Strupp, 2003; Trippi, 2005; Whitney, 2004). His opponents for the Democratic nomination also adopted blogs to create an effective online presence (Trammell et al., 2006). Democrats as well as Republicans invited a total of 57 bloggers to cover their national conventions in July and August 2004 (Meraz, 2005; Sweetser, 2007). In addition, George W. Bush and John Kerry adopted the format by maintaining their own official campaign blogs (Bichard, 2006; Williams et al., 2005). According to Mears (2005), blogs were also used by the campaigns to “feed virulent, groundless rumors into the information chain” (p. 231). However, Sweetser, Golan, and Wanta (2008) pointed out that the media coverage mainly set the agenda for the candidates’ campaign blogs.

Bloggers were also instrumental in criticizing opinion poll results (Daves & Newport, 2005; Frankovic, 2005) as well as disseminating and discrediting information about John Kerry’s Vietnam War service record and George W. Bush’s National Guard service record (Dorroh, 2004; Kurtz, 2005d; Palser, 2005b). In the latter case, which became know as “Filegate” and “Rathergate,” bloggers discredited information reported on 60 Minutes II by CBS anchor Dan Rather on George W. Bush’s National Guard service. Rather questioned the military record of the former president on September 8, 2004, but bloggers immediately started questioning the authenticity of military reports and thereby increased the salience of the topic (Pein, 2005a).
The conservative blog *Little Green Footballs* (2004) caused the widespread criticism of the CBS report on September 9, 2004, by showing that the military record was processed in a Microsoft Word file, which had not existed when the president was in the military in the early 1970s:

Bush Guard Documents: Forged…. my Microsoft Word version, typed in 2004, is an *exact match* for the documents trumpeted by CBS News as “authentic.” The spacing is not just similar—it is identical in every respect…. And I did not change a single thing from Word’s defaults; margins, type size, tab stops, etc. are all using the default settings…. There is absolutely no way that this document was typed on any machine that was available in 1973. (n.p.)

On September 11, 2004, *The New York Times* began its own coverage of the topic. A week later CBS admitted that it was not able to verify the authenticity of the presented documents. Consequently, Rather announced his retirement and the producer of the news report, Mary Mapes, was fired by CBS (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005).

The presidential election not only revealed a challenge to traditional news media reporting, but also another challenge to the central gatekeeping position of the traditional media. While the news networks decided to not report on exit poll data on election night -- a consequence from the disastrous 2000 election -- the blogs quickly reported on the predicted outcomes for George W. Bush and John Kerry and consequently sharply increased their audiences (Bauder, 2004; Blumenthal, 2005; Carlson, 2007; Walker, 2004). Therefore, in the early stages of election night, many politicians believed that Kerry would win by a narrow margin. Throughout election night, though, it became apparent that the exit polls were inaccurate again (Messner & Terilli, 2007). Outing (2004) stated that traditional news media such as Reuters followed the bloggers’ lead and also posted exit poll data showing a Kerry lead. Most traditional news media, however,
refused to call a winner of the election until Kerry conceded to Bush the next morning (Smolkin, 2004b).

_Easongate and Gannongate_

In other blog incidents following the 2004 presidential election, known as “Easongate” and “Gannongate,” CNN Chief News Executive Eason Jordan and White House correspondent Jeff Gannon had to resign their posts, after they came under strong criticism in the blogosphere (Kurtz, 2005a; Reisner, 2005). Both incidents indicated that many bloggers have taken on the role as media watchdogs (Kurtz, 2005c).

Jordan made off-the-record comments at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 27, 2005, stating that the U.S. military “targeted” (Lyons, 2005, n.p.) and killed a dozen journalists in the Iraq War (Potter, 2005). Although he immediately retracted his comments, business executive Rony Abovitz posted the comment on the forum’s blog the same day (Reisner, 2005). The news about the comments swept into U.S. blogs, such as the conservative blogger _Instapundit_ (2005), and caused outrage and calls for Jordan’s resignation before the CNN executive had even returned home:

JUST GOT AN EMAIL FROM CNN ON THE EASON JORDAN SCANDAL…. I'll be frank -- I don't believe it. Here's what it says: 'Many blogs have taken Mr. Jordan's remarks out of context.' Pardon me if I don't fully trust Jordan in light of his past behavior. And it sounds like there's more than just context involved. I'll believe it when I see the video, or a transcript. (n.p.)

Again, the bloggers increased the salience of the topic by starting a “cyber-war on Eason Jordan” (Kurtz, 2005b, n.p.) until the story was picked up by the traditional news media, in this case _The Washington Post_ on February 8. Three days later, Jordan resigned.
from his position at CNN (Potter, 2005). The resignation was partly blamed on Jordan’s reluctance to react to the criticism of the bloggers (Kurtz, 2005a).

Shortly after Jordan’s resignation, the blogosphere ignited over another controversy, which became known as “Gannongate.” Jeff Gannon (who also goes by the name James Guckert), a White House correspondent for Talon News, asked President Bush the following question on January 26, 2005, about Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid and Senator Hillary Clinton: “How are you going to work with people who seem to have divorced themselves from reality?” (Rich, 2005, p. 1).

Liberal bloggers, such as Atrios (2005), immediately began investigating Gannon’s background and found nude photos of him and exposed that Talon News was financed by Republican activists:

Special Treatment for Gannon? According to sources, Jeff Gannon's real name is not, in fact, Jeff Gannon. According to the same sources, his White House press credentials list him as "Jeff Gannon" … the point is that he's allowed to be credentialed under his professional pseudonym even though women whose "professional pseudonyms" are their maiden names aren't. (n.p.)

Bloggers revealed that Gannon had no journalism background and had been involved in a gay escort service (Loyalka, 2005). This time the liberal blogosphere waged war on a conservative reporter. Bloggers again increased the salience of the topic and The Washington Post started its coverage on February 7. The increasing coverage of the traditional media eventually led Gannon to resign his position on February 10. Talon News later shut down its site (Strupp, 2005c). According to Mitchell (2005), the incident proved the investigative power of the blogosphere.
While blogs clearly have had an impact on politics, they have also evolved as an alternative medium in times of war and terror. As Palser (2003a) pointed out, war coverage often introduces new media: “Radio came of age with World War II. Vietnam was America’s first televised war. The 1991 Persian Gulf War marked the rise of 24-hour cable news. The War in Iraq was set up for the Internet” (p. 40).

The war in Iraq opened the opportunity for bloggers to function as real-time war correspondents (Albritton, 2003; Kurtz, 2003; McLeary, 2007). Some of the bloggers in Operation Iraqi Freedom were military officials equipped with laptops, who wrote about their experiences in combat, which often contradicted official Pentagon versions (Buzzell, 2005; Schulman, 2005). Other bloggers were Iraqis writing about their day-to-day experiences in the war (Riverbend, 2005). This was again considered another step in the breakdown of the central gatekeeping position of the traditional media, as bloggers were able to report from the war without an editor and influence public opinion. Bloggers were widely quoted in the traditional media, while at the same time acting as media watchdogs by fact-checking information (Berenger, 2006). According to Palser (2003a), 13% of Americans received war news from the Internet.

According to Wall (2005), the war blogs were especially popular due to their narrative style and their personalization of the war: “The use of personal opinion gives a certain intimacy to the blogs and suggests that the blogger is someone the readers can believe they know, someone who is not manipulated by a corporate boss or a filter of professionalism” (p. 165). However, traditional news media, such as the The New
Republic, quickly learned about the popularity of the blogs and ran their own online diaries by their reporters and contributors (Kurtz, 2003).

War blogs were especially popular with audiences that opposed the war as war critics were only rarely quoted in the traditional news media (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006; Wall, 2006). War opponents overall viewed the Internet as a more credible news source on the war as traditional media (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006).

Two years after the Iraq War started, the London bombings in 2005 became another incident in which bloggers provided real-time coverage ahead of the traditional news media and thereby became news sources for them. Photo-sharing websites and blogs were the first to report on the terror attacks in the British capital before reporters were able to reach the scenes. According to Story (2005), the BBC and The Guardian decided to publish readers’ experiences, photos and videos on their websites to keep their coverage up to date: “Online experts like operators of photography sites and photography agencies said the pictures of the explosions were posted in greater numbers and with greater speed than they had seen in other major events” (p. 12).

Natural Disasters

Blogs have also contributed real-time coverage during natural disasters such as the South Asian Tsunami in December 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in September 2005, when the traditional news media did not have the means to start or continue with their coverage (Farhi & Wiltz, 2005; Outing, 2005b). Most Western news outlets had no reporters on the ground when the Tsunami hit South Asia. They relied heavily on bloggers to provide first assessments of the situation. Photos of the disaster areas first
appeared on Asian blogs and then reached the American public through American blogs that linked to the pictures (Waldman, 2005). “Bloggers at the scene are more deeply affected by events than the journalists who roam from one disaster to another” (Schwartz, 2004, p. A17).

Hurricane Katrina caused a similar media outage when the storm hit the American Gulf Coast. Journalists were hit as hard as the residents and “printing a newspaper in New Orleans was a cosmic absurdity” (Farhi & Wiltz, 2005, p. C01). News was delivered on the websites of the newspapers in the affected areas and blogs of residents became one of the main news sources for journalists to assess the situation along the Gulf coast.

The Web turned into a town hall. Overnight, Web sites and blogs sprang up to provide a forum for the worries to speak their mind, for Samaritans to offer evacuees a place to stay, and for survivors to bear witness…. Others used their blogs to provide news updates, request rescues for the stranded, and post pictures of the missing…. More than anything, however, the Net provided a vast electronic bulletin board for those looking for lost loved ones, posting phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and making urgent pleas. (Farhi & Wiltz, 2005, p. C01)

It was again the very personal narrative style that made blogs newsworthy sources for the traditional media, which did not have the capacity to cover every corner of the disaster area (Strupp, 2005b).

2006 Congressional Midterm Elections

The impact that a single blog can have in politics was again demonstrated in the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States, when a blogger published sexually explicit instant messages from Florida Congressman Mark Foley to male Congressional pages. Traditional news media immediately picked up the story as it
gained popularity within the blogosphere, which then led to the resignation of Foley and contributed to the Republican defeat in the election (Levey, 2006a, 2006b; Schatz, 2006).

The story broke when the blog *Stop Sex Predators*, which was run by an employee of the gay rights group Human Rights Campaign (Kirkpatrick, 2006), published the following posting:

This is absolutely amazing. I just received these emails. They were sent by Congressman Mark Foley to a 16-year-old male page. I have removed his name to protect his identity. But how shocking is this? I can’t believe this was e-mailed to me? There must be even more out there. Email me at stopsexpredators@gmail.com and let me know what we should do!!!! Something must be done!!!! (Stop Sex Predators, 2006, n.p.)

The incident has important implications for the relationship between the traditional news media and blogs as several newspapers had refused to run the story before it broke in the blogosphere. The newspapers had received the same information as the blogs, but decided against a publication. Only after the blogs reported on the instant messages, the story was picked up by the traditional news media (Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kornblut & Seelye, 2006).

Harris (2006) pointed out that the 2006 Congressional Midterm Election stressed that blogs were used as a “weapon” in political campaigns. Not only was Congressman Foley forced to resign, but blog reports on a racial slur of Republican Senator George Allen of Virginia contributed to his defeat. Allen had also attempted to fight back with an attack of bloggers on the sexual content of novels written by his opponent Jim Webb (Shear & Craig, 2006). Baum and Groeling (2008) also stressed that partisan blogs select their news topics based on criteria that benefit the political parties of their preference. Overall, Palser (2007) and Pedersen (2008) predicted that the role of the Internet and blogs will gain further importance in future political campaigns.
These incidents, which have only been analyzed through anecdotal evidence, have only received minimal scholarly attention at this point. Therefore, the time frame surrounding this election is a suitable setting to study the agenda-setting influences between traditional news media and blogs.

**Theoretical Foundations**

*Intermedia Agenda Setting*

Research on intermedia agenda-setting has its foundation in the concept of agenda-setting, which was introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to the field of mass communication. Through its growth over the last four decades, agenda-setting research has developed in many different research areas, but most recently has continuously raised the question of how certain media set the agenda for other media. Under the name of intermedia agenda-setting, which Breen (1997) defined as the concept of “how the media set their own agenda for news” (p. 354), several scholars have turned their attention to this subset of agenda-setting research since the late 1980s (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Bell, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Rogers & Dearing, 1993).

*Influences on Gatekeepers*

Early analysis of how one medium sets the agenda for another medium can be found in early gatekeeping research (Shoemaker, 1996). In his famous “Gate Keeper” study, White (1950) did not only show the subjective process of news selection at a newspaper, but also suggested that competing media have an impact on the selections by an editor. He questioned whether an editor can ignore stories that are prominently
published in other media and suggested that other media are important factors that impact the agenda of an editor.

The influence of newspapers on other newspapers was established by Breed (1955), who interviewed 120 editors and staffers. He identified an influence of larger newspapers on smaller ones. Editors at smaller newspapers are reading larger publications and let their news selection influence their own. Larger newspapers, therefore, take on the role of “opinion leaders” (p. 279) for the smaller newspapers. In addition, Breed (1955) pointed to the possible influence of wire services in the news selection. In the interviews, some editors revealed that smaller newspaper editors rely on the wire budgets more than the editors at larger newspapers.

Gieber (1956) analyzed the influence of the Associated Press on daily newspapers by studying the news selection of 16 telegraph editors in Wisconsin. The study established that editors strongly depend on the recommendations of the wire service to develop their own news budget. The researcher described the dependency of the editors on the wire copy as “being caught in a straight jacket of mechanical details” (p. 432) since they heavily relied on the previous news selection of the Associated Press.

The impact of the Associated Press was also shown by Gold and Simmons (1965) and Snider (1967), who found that the news agenda of the wire service was almost identical to the agenda of the newspaper wire editor. Crouse (1974) also found in an anecdotal report on the 1972 presidential campaign that reporters rely on each other and especially on colleagues from the Associated Press and elite newspapers in determining the focus of their news stories. This notion was supported by Tuchman (1978) and Fishman (1980), who both stressed that competing reporters do not only read each other’s
work, but also work together and socialize at news events. Gans (1979) and Breed (1980) also found that editors at smaller newspapers read larger newspapers for guidance.

Whitney and Becker (1982) established in a study of the news selection of 46 editors in Ohio that the correlation between wire and newspaper-television agendas is not based on a shared set of news values among wire and newspaper-television editors, but on the uncritical acceptance of routinely transmitted news categories. The researchers concluded that the news agenda of local newspapers and television stations is strongly influenced by few editors of the wire services. Bleske (1991) confirmed the consistency of the wire news selection and stressed that “it may be useful to think of gatekeepers as an audience influenced by an agenda-setting effect” (p. 78).

Shoemaker (1991), however, extended this model with the notion that there is mutual influence in the wire news selection process. She suggested “that wire services transmit stories in patterns of selection congruent with their perception of what the newspapers wish to receive” (p. 57).

*Elite Media as Agenda-Setters*

While early gatekeeping research established the influence of wire services and large news organization on smaller ones, the concept of intermedia agenda-setting was not formulated until the 1980s. Rogers and Dearing (1988) identified the gatekeepers and influential media as one of four factors -- besides the structure of society, real-world indicators, and spectacular news events -- that shape the agenda of the news media. They identified the study of how media influence themselves as one of future research areas.
The first intermedia agenda setting study that measured effects among different types of media over time was conducted by Atwater, Fico, and Pizante (1987). A content analysis of news stories by radio and television stations, wire services and newspapers over a two-week period revealed that there is a very high correspondence among the topics covered by the different media. Wire services and newspapers had a strong correlation as well as newspapers and broadcast and wire services and broadcast. In an analysis of how many stories were unique, the researchers found that the wire services accounted for 41% of all unique stories. This result led them to conclude that wire services contribute to news diversity.

In their landmark study on intermedia influences in the cocaine issue in 1986, Danielian and Reese (1989) conducted a content analysis of newspapers, television newscasts, and magazines over 40 weeks to test whether agenda-setting effects change over time. The researchers found that the newspapers, especially The New York Times, provided significant leadership for the television newscasts in the news coverage. However, they also found that different types of media initiated new coverage on the issue:

This reciprocal, back-and-forth attention cycle suggests that the issue was kept in the news by first one medium and then another dealing with it in turn, each perhaps reinforced by the preceding week’s coverage and indicating a sort of ‘epidemic’ of media interest in the cocaine issue.” (p. 55)

Danielian and Reese (1989) concluded that media discover topics for their coverage and then engage in a “cycle of peaking coverage” (p. 58). The development of the cycle was caused by intermedia influence, rather than the prominence of a news event. They also stressed the importance of studying sources as factors in media agenda
setting. Protess and McCombs (1991) also stressed that “elite media” (p. 208) have a strong influence on the news media of local newspapers and television stations. McCombs (2004) credited especially The New York Times with being the major intermedia agenda-setter, an analysis supported by Golan (2006), who found correlations between the newspaper’s agenda and television news programs. Furthermore, Breen (1997) pointed out that journalists “take shortcuts by relying on the most accessible information. Frequent repetition of a given story focuses journalistic attention on that issue” (p. 349).

Influences in Political Elections

Roberts and McCombs (1994) were the first scholars to study intermedia agenda-setting effects in a political election, the 1990 gubernatorial race in Texas. They not only established a link between the newspaper agenda and the television news agenda, but also established the influence of television campaign commercials on the newspaper agenda and the television news agenda. The researchers concluded that “the news agenda of the Austin newspaper and the three local television newscasts … reflected the issue priorities of the candidates” (p. 260).

Boyle (2001) reinforced these findings with his analysis of the 1996 presidential election. He studied the intermedia agenda-setting effects between political advertising and newspaper and television network stories and found that the major candidates set the news agenda and that news organizations mainly focus on the topics of the “horse race” (p. 40).
Analyses of intermedia influences during the 1995 regional election in Navarra, Spain, also supported that the newspaper agenda influences the television news agenda and that candidate advertising influences the newspaper and television news agenda, with a stronger influence on the latter (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998). However, the researchers also found that television news influences the agenda of political advertising on television. These findings suggest the existence of an agenda-setting cycle between news and advertising on television.

**Impact of Internet Media**

Current research on intermedia agenda-setting still focuses mainly on political elections, but has changed the focus on the impact of Internet media on the traditional news media news agenda. Ku, Kaid, and Pfau (2003) found a strong influence of website campaigns on the traditional news media agenda and public opinion. They studied the intermedia agenda-setting effects between the websites and *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, ABC, CBS, and NBC in the 2000 presidential election and concluded that “Internet-based communication has established powerful new links between politicians and voters and created great impact on the information flow of the traditional news media” (p. 544).

Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002), on the other hand, studied the effects of traditional news media agenda on the discussions on electronic bulletin boards during the 1996 presidential election. They found that *The New York Times*, Associated Press, Reuters, *Time*, and CNN all had agenda-setting effects on the discussions, but found that the impact of *The New York Times* was most significant. This approach was extended by
Lee, Lancendorfer, and Lee (2005), who looked at intermedia agenda-setting effects in both directions. During the 2000 general election in South Korea, they documented agenda-setting effects of newspaper agenda on the opinions posted on bulletin boards. They also established that discussions on bulletin boards influenced the newspaper agenda. They concluded that traditional journalists use the Internet to gather a variety of opinions on issues and that the Internet has the power to shape public opinion by affecting the agendas of other media.

Filter Blogs as Intermedia Agenda-Setters

The power of blogs as agenda setters for the traditional news media has been clearly established in major news events. Tremayne (2007) pointed out that this influence is greatest when blogs influence news events as a collective by creating a buzz and identified the following factors under which they exert their influence:

First, they have outsider status. Like television news in the 1950s, they are seen by users as conduits to raw information, somehow less corrupted by power than their predecessors. Second they have attained a large audience. Regardless of whether they ‘should’ have an audience, they do, and with it comes power. Third they have the ‘power of the collective.’ … Even if many individual blogs have just a few hundred regular readers, collectively the blogosphere can generate a louder ‘buzz.’ … Though individual link choices, this collective bestows upon a select few the ‘power of authority’. (p. xvi)

Lowrey (2006) also found that blogs derive their influence on the traditional news media from a focus on partisan expression and stories that are based on alternative, non-elite sources. However, as Drezner and Farrell (2004) stressed, while the blogosphere is growing rapidly, only few blogs have agenda-setting power on the traditional media. Filter blogs serve as “focal points” (p. 35) that bring attention to interesting posts of less
renowned blogs. Bucy et al. (2007) also pointed out that filter blogs “often amplify, illuminate, or interconnect the news rather than create it” (p. 150). Drezner and Farrell (2004) also found that traditional news media journalists tend to concentrate on the same filter blogs. Through these filter blogs, it becomes easier and less time consuming for journalists to survey the blogosphere on a daily basis. Haas (2005) argued that these filter blogs take on an opinion leader and agenda-setting role within the blogosphere similar to the one that *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and the television networks play within the traditional news media. Thereby, current research applied Breed’s (1955) concept of opinion leaders to the new media environment, in which filter blogs shape the discourse within the blogosphere, and elite traditional news media dominate the discourse within the mainstream media.

Research on the agenda-setting power of blogs has mainly focused on the creation of buzz within the blogosphere, the increased blogging during certain news events. Cornfield et al. (2005) traced the buzz on filter blogs during the 2004 presidential campaign and compared it with the buzz in the traditional news media, campaign statements, and Internet forums. They found that blogs had difficulties influencing other media when there was no advancement of the stories, such as the results of an investigation. Zeller (2005) also stressed that blogs are most likely to influence the traditional media, if they can present a “smoking gun” (p. C5) or advance the content of a news story. Schiffer (2006) also found in his analysis of blog buzz about the Downing Street Memo controversy during the 2004 presidential election that the issue was transferred into the traditional news media, but was only covered there for a short time. However, hyperlinking within the blogosphere is the factor that makes blog buzz
accessible to the traditional news media. This has also led political campaigns to adopt
the blog format for their information distribution purposes (Bichard, 2006; Trammell et
al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005).

Overall, the coverage of blogs in the traditional news media has changed from a
focus “on the sexy or ‘hot’ aspects of new media technology” (Perlmutter & McDaniel,
2005, p. 60) to the use of blogs as sources in the reporting. While Perlmutter and
McDaniel (2005) found a sharp increase in mentioning of blogs in the traditional news
media between 1998 and 2005, Messner and DiStaso (2008) also analyzed the use of
a steady increase of the overall number of articles mentioning blogs between 2000 and
2005, they also found that the reporting on the blog phenomenon did not increase as
much as the use of blogs as sources and the simple mentioning of blogs in the articles.
The researchers also confirmed politics as the main topic of articles involving blogs.

In contrast to previous research, Messner and DiStaso (2008) combined their first
analysis with an evaluation of the sources in 120 political and business blogs and found
that bloggers heavily rely on traditional news media, Internet media and other blogs as
their sources, a finding also supported by Reese, Lou, Hyun, and Jeong (2007), who
found a heavy reliance by blogs on traditional news media reports, and Lee (2008), who
found that the traditional news media and blog agendas are similar. Messner and DiStaso
(2008) concluded by advancing Danielian and Reese’s (1989) concept of a cycle of
peaking coverage that traditional news media and blogs engage in what they called a
“continuous or repeating source cycle … especially in the political realm. This concept
needs to be further explored by future research. It seems as if the traditional media report
on an issue, which directly reaches the public. The issue is then picked up by weblogs, who use the traditional media as their sources” (pp. 23-24). However, the existence of a source cycle has yet to be verified. Messner and DiStaso (2008) used samples from different time periods and did not connect the use of sources in traditional news media and blogs.

Leskovec, Backstrom, and Kleinberg (2009) did not investigate this source cycle, but tracked the occurrence of certain key phrases in 1.6 million media websites and blogs as part of the overall news cycle during a three-month period before the 2008 presidential election. The study found a time lag of 2.5 hours from the time news media gave attention to a certain phrase (e.g., lipstick on a pig) until it appeared in blog posts. The researchers also found that certain filter blogs were quickest to pick up media coverage, but pointed out that only 3.5% of story topics originated on the blogs. They stressed that it is important to understand the media-blog interaction as it impacts how the public consumes news.

Other researchers also argue that it is well worth to further explore the sourcing relationship between traditional news media and blogs. Gordon (2006) pointed out that traditional news media websites increasingly link to political blogs and summarize the posts of prominent bloggers. While Meraz (2009) found in an analysis of hyperlinks that the agenda-setting influence of traditional news media on blogs is shrinking and that citizen media’s influence is increasing, the study confirmed also that traditional news media, especially The New York Times and The Washington Post, are still by far the largest source category in blogs. Kenix (2009) also found that “blogs … serve as an insular echo chamber that extend the reach of mainstream news” (p. 812).
Pein (2005b) argued that journalists increasingly take their cues from blogs:

“Blogs had become a real force in the American media – at least according to the bloggers themselves and the desk-bound journalists who relied on them” (p. 17).

Agenda-Building Power of Sources

While agenda-setting researchers generally focus on the impact of the traditional news media as a whole on public opinion, more scholars have turned their focus on agenda-building, the study of sources that shape the media’s agenda. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) stressed that news sources can have a strong effect on the content of the news media:

Sources have a tremendous effect on mass media content, because journalists can’t include in their news reports what they don’t know. The most obvious influence occurs when sources withhold information or lie, but they may also influence the news in more subtle ways, by providing the context within which all other information is evaluated, by providing usable information that is easier and cheaper to use than that from other sources … and by monopolizing the journalists’ time so they don’t have an opportunity to seek out sources with alternative views. (p. 150)

Several other studies have established that sources shape news reports more than the journalists do (Berkowitz, 1987; Berkowitz & Beach, 1993; Reese, Grant, & Danielian, 1994; Soloski, 1989). Gans (1979) defined the journalist-source relationship as “a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading” (p. 116). Gandy (1991) also stressed that journalists make a conscious decision on whether they spent time with a source. This decision is mainly
based on the expected outcome of the interview. Sources that have proven their value before are often preferred by journalists.

Generally, news sources are used by journalists for fact gathering purposes. Sources are interviewed to report and verify information for a certain story. However, as Mencher (2008) pointed out, not all facts can be verified because journalists work on tight deadlines and with limited resources. “We cannot determine the truth of opinions and judgments. All we can do is to quote the source accurately, seek countering opinions and let the reader or viewer decide” (p. 42). Therefore, sources can be factual as well as opinionated. Shaw, McCombs, and Keir (1997) wrote that “journalists often balance the opposing sides of an issue” (p. 303). Fedler, Bender, Davenport, and Drager (2005) also stated that “some interviews provide facts about events reporters were unable to witness. Other interviews provide opinions or colorful quotations about people, problems or happenings” (p. 269).

In addition to factual and opinionated sources, Strentz (1989) makes a distinction between conventional and nonconventional news sources. He defines conventional sources as routine news sources, such as government officials, public relations practitioners, planned events, and public records. Nonconventional sources, on the other hand, are defined as poorer members of society that do not receive regular news coverage, minorities, alternative politicians, or even terrorists.

The choice of conventional and nonconventional sources directly influences the news agenda, but Zoch and VanSlyke Turk (1998) also stressed that the choice of sources will influence a media’s construction of reality. “News is not necessarily what happens, but what a news source says has happened” (p. 763).
Conventional News Sources

The selection of news sources is a routine process in journalism. According to Berkowitz and Beach (1993), most news is influenced by official sources that are chosen by journalists. According to Powers and Fico (1994), journalists tend to select sources that they identify as credible, knowledgeable, and powerful in regard to a certain topic. As originally defined by Hovland and Weiss (1951), the credibility of a source refers to its trustworthiness. Wilson and Sherrell (1993) extended this definition to include truthfulness and validity of the source. Expertise of the source was also identified as one of the main elements of credibility by Ibelema and Powell (2001). Overall, source credibility with journalists, therefore, refers to the characteristics of a message sender (Bucy, 2003).

Traditional news media will only choose and include sources that they view trustworthy, truthful, and knowledgeable. Gans (2003) pointed out in this context that sources gain legitimacy with their level of newsworthiness, which is greatly determined by the audience. Therefore, the choice of news sources is more likely to include mainstream points of view than extreme opinions, making it more difficult for alternative sources to be recognized by the traditional news media. Journalists gain more freedom to choose their sources outside the routine pool when they develop their own story ideas (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993). Overall, however, as Soley (1992) pointed out, journalists strive for objectivity in their reporting by balancing different news sources. Thereby, they not only use sources for fact-gathering purposes, but also for opinion balancing. The balancing of sources is seen as a shield against criticism. Journalists also use official
sources, as they are viewed as experts to explain complicated issues. Therefore, political
discussions are influenced more by experts than by the average citizen.

Research has shown a strong influence of official sources and public relations
practitioners on the news agenda. Weaver and Elliott (1985) found that while newspaper
journalists maintain a “filtering role” (p. 93), the agenda of newspapers is strongly shaped
by official events. “This is, of course, no surprise to those who regard the proper role of
the reporter as a neutral information transmitter or a chronicler rather than an analyzer or
interpreter” (p. 93). Powers and Fico (1994) stress that there is also pressure from news
organizations on their journalists to use official news sources and conclude that “news is
controlled by people who hold power in society” (p. 94).

Research shows that certain interest groups continuously manage to influence the
news agenda to campaign efforts. VanSlyke Turk (1986) found that half of the material
public relations practitioners sent to newspapers was used in news stories. Huckins
(1999) showed that the Christian Coalition was able to shape the media agenda through a
public relations effort. Chang (1999) also stressed how the automobile industry was able
to shape news coverage in elite media on the trade conflict between the United States and
Japan. Similar influences were exerted by the Carter Administration to draw the focus of
the elite media on human rights in Latin America (Cassara, 1998)

The reliance on official sources and the balancing of experts, however, leads to
what Brown, Bybee, Wearden, and Straughan (1987) call “limits of diversity” (p. 45). In
their study on the use of sources in newspapers, they found that only one-fifth of the
sources were informal, meaning not within the routine channels of information gathering.
Nonconventional News Sources

Salwen (1995) argued that nonconventional news sources have the power to shape the news agenda as well. His study of source selection in national and regional newspapers in the coverage of Hurricane Andrew in 1992 found that journalists interviewed unaffiliated individuals rather than government officials as the most frequent source in their hurricane coverage. On that basis, Salwen (1995) concluded that the hurricane victims were able to set the news agenda, which overall was very critical of the government’s response to the hurricane.

Johnson and Wanta (1996) also found that the real world can influence the government and media agendas. When drug abuse dramatically increased in the United States in the 1970s, the real world could not be ignored by the media. The coverage of the media then influenced the public’s agenda, which eventually forced President Nixon to declare a state of national emergency on drug abuse. The increase in media coverage had a strong impact on public policy. The more media reported on the problem, the greater the pressure became for the administration to act.

The rise of civic journalism, which tries to better link journalism and public life, and the emergence of online news sources have also increased the use of nonconventional sources and contributed to source diversity in news reports. Kurpius (2002) found that civic journalism has especially improved source diversity by including more minorities and women. The emergence of the Internet has also increased the diversity of sources in news stories.

Shaw et al. (1997) stressed that nonconventional online sources may be chosen by journalists because they “may bring to the story a passion not found in everyday
interviews” (p. 233). This is a characteristic that is especially true for blogs, which cannot only be partisan and opinionated, but can create a buzz on certain issues they view important and neglected by the traditional news media. Lowrey and Mackay (2008) found that newspaper reporters were more willing to use local blogs as non-official sources, if there was an increasing blogging activity combined with a recognition of that activity during news planning meetings.

In general, bloggers can become valuable to traditional news media reporters because they are a combination of investigative reporter and commentator:

Bloggers not only define and amplify the emerging role of the media pundit, but also alter the notion of punditry by occasionally performing traditional journalistic reporting, again blurring the line…. Combined with their blatant ideological stances, this suggests a new conceptualization that might be more accurately referred to … as active pundits…. Many consider journalists wholly integrated actors in the political system, rather than members of the Fourth Estate. Therefore, bloggers’ media punditry is political punditry. (Scott, 2007, p. 51)

Because bloggers not only report, but also take strong positions on political issues and have impacts on public affairs, they become interesting as nonconventional sources for traditional news media journalists, who constantly search for sources to balance their news stories.

**Research Questions**

This study attempts to explore the intermedia agenda-setting influences between the traditional news media and blogs, an area of research that has growing significance for the advancement of the agenda-setting model in mass communication (McCombs, 2005). Intermedia agenda-setting research has identified elite traditional news media which have a strong influence on the news agendas of other media. This subset within the
agenda-setting concept has recently been extended to emerging new online media formats, such as blogs. Filter blogs, very similar to the elite media, have emerged as very influential within the blogosphere. Traditional news media, consequently, pay increasing attention to these filter blogs to assess the discourse within the blogosphere.

Research in this area has recently developed and is only exploratory at this stage. No study has focused on a single news event, such as the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections, and has attempted to study the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between traditional news media and blogs through their use of each other as sources. Therefore, this study does not test hypotheses, but poses research questions to further explore and define this new area of research.

*Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media*

While the quantity of research on the blog phenomenon is continuously growing, only few scholars have begun to address the existence of a source relationship that blogs have with traditional news media (Gordon, 2006; Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005; Reese et al., 2007). While elite traditional news media greatly rely on official sources, the use and influence of non-conventional sources has been established by previous research as well (Johnson & Wanta, 1996; Kurpius, 2002). Unaffiliated blogs fall under this category of non-conventional sources.

Research has shown that blogs serve as occasional sources for the elite traditional news media. Journalists especially rely on filter blogs, the elite blogs within the blogosphere, to monitor discussions and buzz on certain topics (Bucy et al., 2007; Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Haas, 2005; Wei, 2009). However, questions arise over how
frequently the traditional news media agenda-setters use blogs as sources in their stories. Previous studies have been conducted over several years and have not focused on a single news event, such as the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. Therefore, the first research question for this study is the following:

\[ RQ_1: \text{How frequently do traditional news media use blogs as sources?} \]

The importance of a source in traditional news media can be determined by its prominence within the story (Messner & DiStaso, 2008). Hence, it is also important to analyze under which conditions blogs are used as sources.

\[ RQ_2: \text{How prominently do traditional news media use blogs as sources?} \]

Traditional news media generally use their sources to gather facts and to balance opinions (Fedler, Bender, Davenport, & Drager, 2005; Mencher, 2008; Shaw et al., 2007). Anecdotal evidence in news events has shown that blogs have served as both, breaking news sources and partisan pundits. It is unclear at this point, which role dominates the sources relationship with the traditional news media.

\[ RQ_3: \text{Do traditional news media use blogs predominantly as factual sources or as opinion sources?} \]

When analyzing this source relationship, previous research has not distinguished among traditional news media. This study, therefore, also attempts to analyze different types of traditional news media and their source relationship with blogs:

\[ RQ_4: \text{Are there differences among traditional news media in their use of blogs as sources?} \]
Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs

Similar question arise in regard to the use of traditional news media as sources in blogs. While it has been established that elite traditional news media serve as sources for blogs (Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Reese et al., 2007; Schiffer, 2006), the question arises as well how frequently bloggers use them as sources in a news event, such as the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections:

*RQ₅: How frequently do blogs use traditional news media as sources?*

While the measurement of the prominence of a source use in a blog post is rather difficult since most blog posts only have one source, it is also important to examine how traditional news media are used as sources. The primary function of traditional news media is the presentation of news to their audiences; nevertheless, they also present opinions in editorials and commentary segments (Mencher, 2008). Many blogs, on the other hand, are highly opinionated. It is unclear whether they rely on the factual reporting of traditional news media or their editorials.

*RQ₆: Do blogs use traditional news media predominantly as factual sources or as opinion sources?*

The political blogosphere, which is in the focus of this study in the context of the elections, can be separated into a liberal and a conservative spectrum, which each support a political party or ideology and choose their news sources accordingly (Tremayne et al., 2006). Therefore, it is important to examine potential differences within the blogosphere.

*RQ₇: Is there a difference among blogs in their use of traditional news media as sources?*
Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs

Messner and DiStaso (2008) suggested that the use of blogs as sources in
traditional news media and the use of traditional news media as sources in blogs can lead
to a source cycle in which news content is continuously passed back and forth among
them. In one of the early intermedia agenda-setting analyses, Danielian and Reese (1989)
had already pointed out that media engage in a “cycle of peaking coverage” (p. 58) and
that this cycle is not driven by the news event itself, but rather by the intermedia
influence. Therefore, it is important to advance the current state of research in this area
and combine the analysis of the use of sources in traditional news media and blogs
conducted in this study to determine whether such a cycle exists.

RQ8: Do traditional news media and blogs develop a source cycle by
continuously using each other as sources?
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study addresses three different stages of how traditional news media and blogs use each other as sources: (a) blogs used as sources in traditional news media; (b) traditional news media used as sources in blogs; (c) the source interaction between traditional news media and blogs. Subsequently, the research questions were addressed in three separate studies. A quantitative content analysis of traditional news media content addressed research questions 1-4. Another quantitative content analysis of blog content addressed research questions 5-7. Research question 8 was addressed in a qualitative case study of traditional news media and blog content relating to the predominant topic of source use in the election coverage. The methods of these three studies are described in this chapter.

Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media

Intermedia agenda-setting has been predominantly studied through content analysis (Atwater et al., 1987; Danielian & Reese, 1989; Ku et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2002). This first study adopted the same methodological approach to answer research questions 1-4. A quantitative content analysis was used to analyze the use of blogs as sources in traditional news media over a defined time frame. The research methodology was developed based on the guidelines provided by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) and by Neuendorf (2002).
Sampling

Intermedia agenda-setting studies have compared an equal number of one media type to another media type in a defined time frame (Boyle, 2001; Lee et al., 2005). This overall study, therefore, compared an equal number of traditional news media to an equal number of blogs. The following traditional news media sample was not representative for all traditional news media, because it did not take into account magazines and radio. However, the sample included the leading national newspapers as well as television networks and cable news channels in the United States and conclusions, therefore, were later drawn for the national media of these two formats. Scholars have pointed out that the elite national media have an intermedia agenda-setting influence on regional and local media, which allowed this study to focus on national media only (McCombs, 2004; Protess & McCombs, 1991; Rogers & Dearing, 1988).

Traditional News Media Sample

The traditional news media sample included an equal number of national newspapers and television networks in order to study similarities and differences between the two media types. The national newspapers under study were The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, The Christian Science Monitor, and USA Today. All five newspapers have been used in previous research and have been determined elite newspapers with a national audience (Boyle, 2001; Danielian & Reese, 1989; Ku et al., 2003; Schiffer, 2006).

The content of the five national newspapers in the sample was available through the LexisNexis Academic database, which was accessed through the University of Miami
Richter library website (http://www.library.miami.edu/). While some weaknesses of LexisNexis have been pointed out especially in regard to differences in how media organizations make their content available in the database (Wiley, 2002), this study verified that all traditional news media in the sample supplied all content to the database on a regular basis. Therefore, The Wall Street Journal, another national newspaper, was not included in the sample because it was not available in LexisNexis.

The New York Times was available in LexisNexis since 1980 and was updated daily, The Washington Post since 1977 and updated daily, the Los Angeles Times was available for the previous six months at a given moment and updated daily, USA Today since 1989 and updated daily, and The Christian Science Monitor since 1980 and updated one day after publication. While The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times were published daily during the defined time frame of this study, USA Today and The Christian Science Monitor were only published Mondays through Fridays. These differences were accounted for in the analysis of the results.

The broadcast networks and cable news networks included in the study were the Cable News Channel (CNN), the Fox News Channel, ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News. The five outlets, which will be address together in the following parts of this study as television networks for the purpose of simplification, have also been identified as elite news media agenda-setters and have been used in previous intermedia agenda-setting studies (Boyle, 2001; Ku et al., 2003; Schiffer, 2006).

The transcripts for all newscasts of the five television networks in the sample were also available through LexisNexis. The cable news channel MSNBC, to which NBC News contributes, was not included in the sample as it was not available through
LexisNexis. CNN was available since 1992 and updated as a continuous feed, Fox News since 1997 and updated with a one-day delay, ABC News since 2006 and updated with a one-day delay, CBS News since 1990 and updated with a one-day delay, and NBC News since 1997 and updated with a one-day delay. There are differences between CNN and Fox News as 24-hour cable news networks and ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News, which only broadcast several newscasts throughout the day. These differences were also accounted for in the analysis of the results.

Blog Sample

A matching sample was drawn from the blogosphere that had to be incorporated into the coding protocol for the elite traditional news media content. The focus of this study was on the use of political blogs as sources, which have shown the greatest impact on the traditional news media (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005). The sample excluded traditional news media blogs as they had not shown an impact on traditional news media and their readers in previous research (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2008). Therefore, a matching sample of 10 filter blogs was drawn from blogs that were not affiliated with traditional news media.

Previous researchers have identified filter blogs, which have a strong influence within the blogosphere, but are also monitored by the traditional news media (Bucy et al., 2007; Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Haas, 2005; Lowrey, 2006). The sample for this study included an equal number of conservative and liberal blogs to be able to analyze possible differences, which were also pointed out in previous research (Tremayne et al., 2006). The classification as conservative and liberal was based on the self-description of the
bloggers on their blogs. Based on a combination of rankings and samples used in previous studies by Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Schiffer (2006), Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005), and Tremayne et al., (2006) as well as from the blog search engines Technorati (2007) and The Truth Laid Bear (2007), which measure the influence of blogs within the blogosphere, the following sample was drawn:


*DailyKos* is the political blog with the highest daily traffic and considerable influence among liberals and progressive Democrats (Schiffer, 2006). *DailyKos* blogger Markos Moulitsas Zúñiga, a former member of the U.S. Army and a political consultant, was paid to support the presidential campaign of Howard Dean, but has not engaged in paid blogging in recent years (Bulkeley & Bandler, 2005; DailyKos, 2007). The *DailyKos* was included in samples by Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), and Schiffer (2006). Technorati (2007) ranked it as the eighth-most popular blog overall, The Truth Laid Bear (2007) as the third-most influential.

*Talking Points Memo* is published by columnist Joshua Micah Marshall, who played a major role in forcing Trent Lott to resign as Senate Majority Leader in 2002 (Glenn, 2007). According to Palser (2005b), the blog was one of the most influential ones in the liberal blogosphere. Technorati (2007) listed it as 51st-most popular blog overall, The Truth Laid Bear (2007) as the 10th-most influential. It was included in previous samples by Schiffer (2006) and Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005).
*Eschaton* helped expose the questionable identity of White House Correspondent Jeff Gannon (Loyalka, 2005) and was considered one of the most influential liberal blogs. It is run by Duncan Black from the liberal think tank Media Matters for America (Palser, 2005b). Technorati (2007) did not rank it among the 100 most popular blogs, but The Truth Laid Bear (2007) ranked it in 16th place. It was included in samples by Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005), and Tremayne et al. (2006).

*Crooks and Liars* is a liberal blog with a focus on the conservative media. It is run by John Amato, a former musician turned media critic, and was one of the most popular weblogs in 2006 (Madigan, 2007; Rubin, 2007). The blog was included a sample by Schiffer (2006). It was ranked 16th by Technorati (2007), and 22nd by The Truth Laid Bear (2007).

*Think Progress* is connected to the liberal think tank Center for American Progress and was at the forefront of pointing out flaws in an ABC documentary on the Clinton Administration and its efforts on fighting terrorism (Guardian Newspapers, 2006). The blog was not included in any scholarly samples, but was ranked as the 15th-most popular weblog by Technorati (2007) and 27th by The Truth Laid Bear (2007).

Instapundit, published by law professor Glenn Reynolds from the University of Tennessee, is considered the most influential conservative blog (Palser, 2005b). Reynold’s blogging led to the resignation of CNN executive Eason Jordan (Permutter & McDaniel, 2005). Smolkin (2004a) called Reynolds one of the “rock stars of political blogging” (p. 38). The blog was included in samples by Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Schiffer (2006), Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005), and Tremayne et al. (2006). It was ranked as the 22nd-most popular blog by Technorati (2007) and the most influential by The Truth Laid Bear (2007).

Michelle Malkin is also an influential conservative blog named after its author. Malkin is also a conservative commentator and columnist, who is known for harsh criticism of the liberal establishment (Kurtz, 2007). The blog was ranked 13th by Technorati (2007) and second by The Truth Laid Bear (2007). It was included in the samples of Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Schiffer (2006), and Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005).

Little Green Footballs was instrumental in discrediting the report of CBS News on the president’s military record during the 2004 presidential election and uncovering the manipulation of a Reuters photo from Lebanon (Pein, 2005a; Rutten, 2006). The conservative blog is run by Web designer Charles Johnson. Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Schiffer (2006), and Tremayne, et al. (2006) used the blog in their samples. It was ranked 30th by Technorati (2007) and fourth by The Truth Laid Bear (2007).

Powerline is a conservative blog run by lawyers John Hinderaker, Scott Johnson, and Paul Mirengoff. It was also instrumental in discrediting the CBS News report on the
former President George W. Bush’s military record and forcing anchor Dan Rather into retirement (Buruma, 2005). Powerline was ranked as the 31st-most popular weblog by Technorati (2007) and as the sixth-most influential by The Truth Laid Bear (2007). It was used in a sample by Cornfield et al. (2005), Harp and Tremayne (2006), Schiffer (2006), and Tremayne et al. (2006).

Captain’s Quarters was published by call-center manager Edward Morrissey. He gained international attention when he linked Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin to a corruption investigation (Kirtley, 2005; Krauss, 2005). The conservative blogger was also one of 15, who were invited to the 2004 Republican National Convention (Schmickle, 2004). The blog was included in samples by Harp and Tremayne (2006) and by Schiffer (2006). Technorati (2007) ranked it as the 55th-most popular blog overall and The Truth Laid Bear (2007) ranked it as the fifth-most influential in the blogosphere. This blog was discontinued in February 2008 as Morrissey moved on to write for the conservative blog Hot Air (Morrissey, 2008). This circumstance, however, had no impact on the blog’s role during the defined time frame for this study.

All 10 blogs had online archives that extended to the date when they were started. This sample is not representative for all blogs. However, research has shown that journalists concentrate on certain filter blogs, which have a strong influence within the blogosphere, similar to that of national newspapers and television networks on the traditional news media. Therefore, the findings based on this sample have implications for the blogosphere as a whole.
Data Collection

Because research has shown that blogs have their greatest impact on the political reporting of the traditional news media, this study attempted to analyze the interaction during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States, a topic that has only received minimal scholarly attention at this point, but has shown anecdotal evidence of a blog impact on the traditional news media (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kornblut & Seelye, 2006; Shear & Craig, 2006).

Previous studies have analyzed election coverage during two-month periods before elections (Bichard, 2006; Boyle, 2001; Ku et al., 2003). This study, therefore, also followed that scheme. The 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections were held on November 7, 2006. Consequently, the traditional news media and blog content was analyzed in the two-month period leading up to election day -- from September 8, 2006 to November 7, 2006. No sample was drawn within this time frame as previous studies have done, as it was the overall purpose of this study to analyze the interaction of traditional news media and blogs on a continuous basis. Only a census of all traditional news media and blog content during the time frame allowed an analysis of the interaction among the traditional news media and the blogs.

In order to access the newspaper articles and television news transcripts, the guided news search function of LexisNexis Academic was utilized for the defined time frame. Articles and transcripts were retrieved by a search for the keywords blog, blogger, and blogosphere in the full-text mode. These searches resulted in a total count of 1226 newspaper articles and television news transcripts. The number was reduced by eliminating articles and transcripts that showed up several times in the search results. A
few articles were also included in the search results that did not include any of the search terms. They were eliminated as well. Therefore, 24 articles of *The New York Times* were eliminated, four of *The Washington Post*, 10 of the *Los Angeles Times*, five of *USA Today*, and one of *The Christian Science Monitor*. Two transcripts of ABC News and three of CBS News had to be eliminated. In addition, the search results of CNN were reduced by 50 as online articles from CNN.com showed up in the search results and had to be eliminated based on the previously described sampling criteria. No transcripts of Fox News and NBC News had to be eliminated.

These eliminations resulted in a final article and transcript count of 1127, including 833 newspaper articles and 294 television news transcripts. The 833 newspaper articles were divided as follows: *The New York Times* (n=270), *The Washington Post* (n=237), *Los Angeles Times* (n=214), *USA Today* (n=86), and *Christian Science Monitor* (n=26). The 294 television news transcripts were divided as follows: CNN (n=184), Fox News (n=57), NBC News (n=20), ABC News (n=18), and CBS News (n=15).

**Measurement**

The unit of analysis in this study was the blog news source, which was defined as a direct or indirect quotation that attributes information to blogs. This source was evaluated in the context of newspaper articles and television news transcripts. Articles and transcripts found through the search criteria of this study mentioned one or several blog sources, which were coded based on coding protocols (Appendices A and B). Both coding protocols were developed in accordance with the topics addressed in research questions 1-4: frequency of blog source use, prominence of blog source use, blog source
use as factual and opinion sources, and differences among traditional news media in their blog source use.

Newspapers

The coding protocol for the newspaper articles (Appendix A) included coding for the following mutually exclusive categories: (a) Media category defined the traditional news media outlet as a newspaper; (b) the newspaper name was assigned to one of the five choices in the sample; (c) the article number was assigned based on the numbered listings of articles for each newspaper in LexisNexis, which was ranked dating backwards; (d) the month and day of publication as well as the position of the article were also assigned based on the information in LexisNexis; (e) the position of the article was operationally defined as front page for the first page of the newspapers, the A-section as the first section of the newspapers excluding the front page and editorial page, local section, business/finance section, or other for the remaining sections of the newspapers. It was also coded whether an article was located on the editorial page, which is part of the A-section in these newspapers.

The position of the search term in the article was operationally defined as follows: (a) headline as the title of the article; (b) lead as the first paragraph of the article; (c) body of the story as the remainder of the article; (d) other. The position of the search term was able to be determined as LexisNexis presents the search terms in bold letters within the articles. By the bold search terms, the number of mentions of blog, blogger, or blogosphere within an article was also able to be determined.
It is also of particular interest for this study in which type of story blogs were used as sources. Different types of news stories were operationally defined as news stories, which included all news reports, feature stories, and portraits. News briefs were defined as short news stories running no longer than five sentences. Interviews were defined by their style, which was in a question-and-answer format. Editorials expressed opinion and were determined by the classification of the editorial page and as commentaries, columns, and opinions in LexisNexis.

The use of blogs in newspapers was operationally defined as a factual source, as an opinion source, as a simple mention, or other. The distinction was made to separate the use of a blog source from other uses of blogs within an article. A blog source overall was defined as a direct or indirect quote that attributed information or opinion to blogs. A factual source in this context was operationally defined as an information-contributing source, while an opinion source in contrast editorialized on facts and presented one side of an argument. A simple mention of a blog did not contribute information or opinion to the news story and only addressed blogs in a general way.

In addition, a filter question also separated sources that were used in a context of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections from other possible contexts. It was also analyzed which specific blogs the newspapers were referring to in order to be able to separate the blog sample from other blogs for later analysis. Blogs that were used as sources, but were not included in the sample, were recorded with their names.
Television Networks

The news transcripts of the television networks were coded in a very similar way as the newspaper articles, but with another coding protocol (Appendix B) to account for differences of the medium. The protocol included coding for the following: (a) the media category for television; (b) the network name for one of the five networks in the sample; (c) the transcript number in LexisNexis; (d) the month; (e) the day; (f) the time for the transcribed newscast. The time was coded to be able to draw conclusions on whether blogs were used as sources in the prime time newscasts, when most people are watching, or during other times of the day. The number of the mentions of a blog within the transcript was also assigned based on LexisNexis, which presented the search terms within the transcripts in bold letters. It was also coded for the type of news segment, which was operationally defined as news/video segments, moderation and other, and the position of the mention of blogs within the segment, which was defined as beginning with the first five paragraphs and the body of the segment.

The blog use as factual source, opinion source, simple mention, and other, the context of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections as well as the specification of the blog used were identical to the coding protocol for the newspaper articles (Appendix A).

Reliability and Validity

Two coders of similar experience and training were used for this study. A pretest was conducted to assess the external validity of both coding protocols. Based on the results of the pretest, amendments were made to the protocol before the actual coding began. The first coder then coded all of the newspaper articles and television news
transcripts, while the second coder coded approximately 10% of the newspaper articles (n=83) and the broadcast transcripts (n=34) to establish intercoder reliability. Such 10% samples for intercoder reliability have been considered adequate by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) and Neuendorf (2002). The intercoder samples were drawn with a systematic random sampling technique using every 10th newspaper article and every 10th broadcast transcript. The random starting point was 1. This method allowed intercoder assessment throughout all categories of the coding protocols. Intercoder reliability was calculated with the Program for Reliability Assessment of Multiple Coders (PRAM) as suggested by Neuendorf (2002).

The overall intercoder reliability for the newspaper articles was .92 for Scott’s $\pi$ (1955) with individual categories as follows: media category (1.0), newspaper (1.0), article number (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), article position (.96), story type (.85), blog number (.99), blog position (.80), blog use (.82), relation to election (.86), and specific blog (.87).

The overall intercoder reliability for the television news transcripts was .92 for Scott’s $\pi$ (1955) with individual categories as follows: media category (1.0), television network (1.0), transcript number (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), time (.93), blog number (1.0), news segment type (.86), blog position (.79), blog use (.81), relation to election (.87), and specific blog (.87).

According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) as well as Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002), each of the coefficients was acceptable, especially considering that the more conservative measurement of Scott’s $\pi$ accounts for chance agreement and that this
study is an exploratory study. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) described acceptable coefficients as follows:

Research usually reports reliability figures in the .80 and .90 range. Research that is breaking new ground with concepts that are rich in analytical value may go forward with reliability levels somewhat below that range…. However, substantive content research with reliability assessment below .70 becomes hard to interpret and the method of dubious value to replicate. (p. 131)

For this study, the lowest coefficient was calculated for the category blog position for the television networks, which ranked at .79 for Scott’s $pi$. Lombard et al. (2002) pointed out the following in regards to considering differences between percent agreement standards and Scott’s $pi$:

Coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices. Higher criteria should be used for indices known to be liberal (i.e., percent agreement) and lower criteria can be used for indices known to be more conservative (Cohen’s kappa, Scott’s $pi$, and Krippendorff’s alpha). (p. 600)

**Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs**

The second study utilized another quantitative content analysis to answer research questions 5-7 and addressed the use of traditional news media sources in blogs. It used the same sample of traditional news media and blogs as the first study and the same time period between September 8, 2006 and November 7, 2006 for the collection of data.

**Data Collection**

A census of the blog content was taken from the defined time period. The content was accessed through the online archives of the 10 blogs. The unit of analysis was the
traditional news media source. All blog posts were searched one-by-one for traditional news media sources. Posts could contain none, one or several sources. Traditional news media were defined for this purpose as media, which are published in print, broadcast or are transmitted via cable. The websites of these media were included in this definition. However, Internet-only media, which are only published online, were excluded from the search (e.g., Salon). The search resulted in a count of 4794 traditional news media sources, which were divided among the blogs as follows: *DailyKos* (n=943), *Talking Points Memo* (n=461), *Eschaton* (n=262), *Crooks and Liars* (n=531), *Think Progress* (n=719), *Instapundit* (n=397), *Michelle Malkin* (n=425), *Little Green Footballs* (n=389), *Powerline* (n=358), and *Captain’s Quarters* (n=309).

**Measurement**

All traditional news media sources were coded based on the coding protocol (Appendix C), which was developed in accordance with the topics addressed in research questions 5-7: frequency of traditional news media source use, traditional news media source use as factual and opinion sources, and differences among blogs in their traditional news media source use.

This coding protocol also included coding for mutually exclusive categories: (a) the media category for blogs; (b) the blog name for one of the 10 choices in the sample; (c) the political orientation of the blog as liberal or conservative; (d) the month and day of the post; (e) the number of the post; (f) the number of the source within the post. The traditional news media use as factual source, opinion source, or other source as well as
the context of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections were identical to the coding protocols for the newspaper articles and television transcripts.

It was also analyzed in which topical context the source was used and which specific traditional news media were used as sources in the posts. Traditional news media that were used as sources, but were not included in the traditional news media sample, were recorded in the coding.

Reliability and Validity

Intercoder reliability was assessed for this study by the same two coders using the same procedures as in the first study. After pretesting, the coding protocol was amended before the actual coding began. The first coder coded all blog content, the second coder approximately 10% of the content. The second coder utilized a systematic random sampling technique using every 10th day in the time period. The random starting point was determined to be 7. The coder then analyzed all blog posts on September 14, September 24, October 4, October 14, October 24, and November 3, 2006. This resulted in a count of 402 traditional news media sources to establish intercoder reliability, which was calculated through all categories with PRAM.

The overall intercoder reliability for the blog content was .88 for Scott’s *pi* (1955). Individual categories had the following coefficients: media category (1.0), blog (1.0), political orientation (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), post number (.99), source number (.95), topic of source use (.74), source use (.78), relation to election (.91), and specific traditional media (.92).
The coefficients for topic of source use and source use were lower than the other coefficients. However, the percentage agreement on these two categories ranked at 92% and 88%, which were at acceptable levels based on the guidelines of Lombard et al. (2002).

**Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs**

The third study built on the results of the previous two to address research question 8. A qualitative case study analyzed whether traditional news media and blogs develop a source cycle by continuously using each other as sources. This study used the same overall samples of the previous studies as well as the same time period.

**Sampling**

Yin (2003) suggests that a case study should be conducted on a narrowly defined topic or area of inquiry. This approach allows the researcher to study a specific phenomenon in depth. Subsequently, the predominant topic relating to the source use during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections was determined in order to study the interaction of traditional news media and blogs. All 235 blog source uses by traditional news media in an election context were examined in a qualitative content analysis. Categories for major election topics were developed during a preliminary analysis, which clustered individual topics into categories. All content was analyzed several times in the category development process.

The final categories included election topics such as the war in Iraq as well as unusual occurrences such as the Foley scandal and specific congressional races such as
the Virginia Senate race. The two predominant topics of the blog source uses by traditional news media were determined to be the Foley scandal with 20.4% (n=48) and the U.S. Senate race in Virginia with 14% (n=33). Other topics with five or more source uses included the rising gas prices, controversial remarks of Senator John Kerry about the United States military, the general election campaign between Democrats and Republicans as well as the election results and exit polls, a controversial interview of former President Bill Clinton with Fox News, several state races and the war in Iraq. The analysis also showed that there was still a considerate amount of coverage dedicated to the blog phenomenon itself (Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foley scandal</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Senate race</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog phenomenon</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas prices</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry controversy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General campaign</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Fox News interview</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut Senate race</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election results</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland Senate race</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota House race</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War in Iraq</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>235</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This topical analysis was then extended to the blog content. Of the 4,794 traditional news media sources in the blog posts, 2,352 (49.1%) were used in an election context. These source uses were then filtered for the categories of the Foley scandal and
the Virginia Senate race. It was found that 13.9% (n=326) of the traditional news media sources in an election context were used in reference to the Foley scandal and 5.1% (n=119) in reference to the Virginia Senate race, while 81.1% (n=1,907) of the sources were used in other contexts.

Based on this analysis of the categories, the Foley scandal was determined to have been the predominant topic of the source use between traditional news media and blogs during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections.

**Analysis**

The source interaction between traditional news media and blogs during the Foley scandal was examined through a qualitative case study, which tracked the source uses in both media types in chronological order during the two months leading up to the election. The analysis was conducted with 48 blog sources in traditional news media articles and transcripts as well as 326 traditional news media sources in blog posts. The study was conducted based on the case study guidelines provided by Yin (2003).

The case study helped to develop source categories throughout the analysis, which allowed for cross–case analysis among different media outlets and types. The first layer of the analysis tracked the source interaction between elite traditional news media and filter blogs included in the sample for this study. The second layer of the analysis broadened the approach to all traditional news media and blogs found in the media and blog content. The analysis was conducted on a day-by-day basis, tracking the uses of sources by each medium as the Foley scandal unfolded in the media and blog coverage in September and October 2006.
This case study presents a qualitative analysis of hundreds of newspaper articles, television transcripts and blog posts. Due to concerns over the readability of this section, no citations are used within the text. Most sentences would have required numerous citations. However, all content described is addressed by source and date of publication. It is available in LexisNexis and in the archives of the blogs. Following the instructions to access the content outlined in this chapter, all referenced material can be retrieved, making this qualitative part of the study replicable as well.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The results of the analysis of the eight research questions are presented in three different parts within this chapter. The results of the quantitative content analysis of traditional news media content are presented in the first part. The second part addresses the quantitative analysis of blog content, while the third part combines the results of the previous two in a qualitative case study analyzing the interaction between traditional news media and blogs and their use of each other as sources during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections.

Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media

The first study addressed research questions 1-4 by analyzing the use of blogs as sources by traditional news media. Based on the methodology for this study, 1,127 newspaper articles and television news transcripts were identified that included the words blog, blogger, and/or blogosphere. A total of 73.9% (n=833) of those were newspaper articles and 26.1% (n=294) television news transcripts. The breakdown by individual media outlet is presented in Table 4.1. The most articles were found in The New York Times (n=270), the fewest transcripts by CBS News (n=15).

Further analysis showed that there were 2102 references of the search terms in these articles and transcripts, of which 70% (n=1470) were made in newspaper articles and 30% (n=632) in television news transcripts. The breakdown by individual media outlet is shown in Table 4.2. The most references were made by The New York Times.
(n=537), the fewest by ABC News (n=21). The highest number of blog references in one article/transcript was 44, the lowest was one.

Table 4.1
Traditional Media: Overall Articles and News Transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Television

CNN                          | 184 | 16.3 |
Fox News                     | 57  | 5.1 |
NBC News                     | 20  | 1.8 |
ABC News                     | 18  | 1.6 |
CBS News                     | 15  | 1.3 |

Total                        | 1,127 | 100 |

Table 4.2
Traditional Media: Overall Blog References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Television

CNN                          | 437 | 20.8 |
Fox News                     | 128 | 6.1 |
CBS News                     | 24  | 1.1 |
NBC News                     | 22  | 1.0 |
ABC News                     | 21  | 1.0 |

Total                        | 2,102 | 100 |
The time frame for this study was the two-month period leading up to the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. Therefore, a filter question was included in the coding protocols to distinguish among the election context and other contexts in which the blog references were made. It was found that 27.1% (n=570) of all references were made in the context of the election and that 72.9% (n=1532) were not. These split into 46.3% (n=264) references in newspaper articles and 53.7% (n=306) in television news transcripts. The breakdown by individual news outlet is provided in Table 4.3. The most blog references in the election context were made by CNN (n=219), the least by NBC News (n=3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>570</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following, each research question was answered individually. The data were screened for missing values and typing errors in Microsoft Excel. No missing values were found and several typing errors were corrected. The data were then analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 16.0), using descriptive
statistics and cross tabulations. Differences were not tested statistically on their significance, since the data were derived from a census, not a sample.

*Research Question 1*

The first research question asked how frequently traditional news media use blogs as sources. To answer this question, a distinction had to be made between overall references to blogs and the use of blogs as sources. It was found, that of the overall references, 21.7% (n=666) constituted the use of blogs as sources, 59% (n=1241) a simple mention of blogs, and 9.3% (n=195) other uses. On average, therefore, the 10 traditional news media used blogs 10.9 times per day as a source during the 61-day election period. The relative high number of other uses can be explained by the fact that many news organizations still reported on the blog phenomenon itself, which constituted neither a use as a source nor a simple mention of blogs.

Of the overall source uses, 35.3% (n=235) were made in the context of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections, 64.7% (n=431) were not. Therefore, the 10 traditional news media used blogs on average 3.9 times per day as sources in their election coverage. In comparison, a lower result was found for the simple mentions of blogs. Only 23.3% (n=290) of the simple mentions were made in the election context, 76.7% (n=951) were not. However, the majority of source uses during the two-month period were not in a context of the elections.

An analysis of the blog source uses in the context of the elections showed that many source uses did not specify which source was cited. A total of 44.7% (n=105) of the blog source uses did not name a certain blog, but cited blogs in general or the
blogosphere instead. Only 7.7% (n=18) of the source uses were citations of the filter blogs included in the sample for this study, with Michelle Malkin (n=9) as the most-cited filter blog (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Traditional Media: Filter Blogs Cited in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DailyKos</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Points Memo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschaton</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooks and Liars</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Progress</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain’s Quarters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5
Traditional Media: Other Blogs Cited in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Sullivan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmericaBlog/John Aravosis</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MyDD.com</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huffington Post</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucianne Goldberg</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 47.7% (n=112) of the source uses cited other blogs, with conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan (n=12), who had temporarily affiliated himself with *Time*, as the most-cited blog (Table 4.5). Only five of these other blogs were cited four or more
times: The liberal blogs AmericaBlog and MyDD, the former blog Huffington Post, which has developed into an online newspaper, and conservative blogger Lucianne Goldberg. Of these other blogs source uses, 71.4% (n=80) named 48 different blogs with three or fewer citations.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked how prominently blogs are used as sources in the traditional news media. The prominence of the source had to be evaluated differently for newspapers and television networks due to the characteristics of each medium. Prominence in newspapers was measured by the position of the source within the newspaper and within the articles. Prominence in the television news transcripts was measured by the time of the newscast and the mentioning in a moderation or video segment. Of the 235 blog sources in the election context, 47.2% (n=111) were used in newspapers and 52.8% (n=124) in television news transcripts.

In the newspapers, 20.7% (n=23) of the blog sources with an election context were used on the front page, 36% (n=40) within the A-section, and 4.5% (n=5) on the editorial page, which, for the purpose of this study, was not included in the A-section count. Therefore, 61.2% (n=68) of the blog sources were used in one of the parts of the A-section. A total of 30.6% (n=34) of the sources were used in the local sections and 2.7% (n=3) in the business sections. Only 4.5% (n=5) of the sources were used in other sections of the newspapers. One source use could not be localized within a certain section.
Within the articles, 90.1% (n=100) of the sources were used in news or feature stories, 6.3% (n=7) in editorials, 2.7% (n=3) in news briefs, and 0.9% (n=1) in other types of stories. A total of 95.5% (n=106) of the sources were used in the bodies of the articles. Only 1.8% (n=2) of the sources were used in the lead and 0.9% (n=1) in the headline. Only 0.9% (n=1) were used in other parts of the story.

Only four of these source uses in an election context named one of the filter blogs in the sample of this study. One filter blog source was used in the A-section, one on the editorial page and two in other sections of the newspaper. Two were located in news or feature stories, two in editorials. All of the filter blog sources were used in the body of the articles.

In the television news transcripts, 50% (n=62) of the blog sources were used during prime-time newscasts between 6 p.m. and midnight. A total of 33.9% (n=42) of the sources were used in the afternoons between noon and 6 p.m. and 16.1% (n=20) in the mornings between 6 a.m. and noon. No sources were used between midnight and 6 a.m. A total of 83.1% (n=103) of the blog sources were used during moderations or discussions of the anchors by themselves or with studio guests, 16.9% (n=21) were used in news segments with video. Only 8.1% (n=10) of the blog sources were used at the beginning of the newscasts, which was defined as the first five paragraphs of the news transcript, while 91.1% (n=113) were within the newscasts.

Only 11.3% (n=14) of the source uses named a filter blog that was in the sample for this study. Of these, 71.4% (n=10) were used during prime time, 28.6% (n=4) in the afternoons. All of them were used in the moderations or discussions of the anchors by themselves or with guests, and all of them were used within the newscasts.
Research Question 3

The third research question asked whether traditional news media predominantly use blogs as factual or as opinion sources. A factual source was defined as an information-contributing source, while an opinion source was defined as a source that editorializes on facts and takes a side in an argument.

It was found that 60.4% (n=142) of the blog sources in the election context were used as opinion sources and 39.6% (n=93) as factual sources. The results for the filter blogs showed a reverse source use. Of the filter blogs, 44.4% (n=8) were used as opinion sources, while 55.6% (n=10) were used as factual sources.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question asked whether there are differences among traditional news media in their use of blogs as sources. The question was answered by comparing the two media types, newspapers and television networks, as well as the 10 individual media outlets in their use of blog sources.

As mentioned above, 47.2% (n=111) of the 235 blog sources used in the election context were used by newspapers and 52.8% (n=124) by television networks. An analysis of the blog source uses by media outlet found differences. The most blog sources in the election context were used by CNN (n=84). On the other hand, USA Today (n=3) and The Christian Science Monitor (n=3) as well as NBC News (n=2), ABC News (n=1), and CBS News (n=1) hardly ever used blog sources in an election context.

There were also differences in how the 10 media outlets used their blog sources. As mentioned above, 77.8% (n=14) of the filter blogs sources were used by television
networks and 22.2% (n=4) by newspapers. Only Fox News (n=9), CNN (n=5), *The New York Times* (n=3), and *The Washington Post* (n=1) used the filter blogs in the sample of this study as sources. Most of these outlets balanced their use of named and unnamed blog sources. CNN, however, used more unnamed blog sources than named ones (Table 4.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Filter Blog</th>
<th>Other Blog</th>
<th>No Name</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The New York Times</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Washington Post</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Christian Science Monitor</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>USA Today</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both newspapers and television networks used blog sources more to show opinions than to present facts. However, television networks used more opinion sources than newspapers. Newspapers used 55.9% (n=62) opinion sources and 44.1% (n=49) factual sources, television networks 64.5% (n=80) opinion sources and 35.5% (n=44) factual sources. There were also differences in the source use of the different media outlets. CNN and *The New York Times* used more opinion than factual sources, while Fox News used more factual sources. *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* balanced their use of factual and opinion sources (Table 4.7).
Table 4.7
Traditional Media: Type of Blog Source Use in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Factual Source</th>
<th>Opinion Source</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were additional differences in how prominently newspapers used their blog sources in the election context. The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times used blog sources predominantly in the A-section, while The Washington Post had a balanced use between the A-section and the other sections of the newspapers, which is not surprising as its local section also covers Virginia, which had – as previously mentioned – a very competitive senatorial race in this election with the potential of increasing political debates. USA Today and The Christian Science Monitor also used most blog sources in the A-section, but only used very few blog sources overall (Table 4.8). The Washington Post (n=11), however, had more blog sources in articles on its front page than The New York Times (n=7) and the Los Angeles Times (n=4). Only very few blog sources (n=5) were used on the editorial pages of all newspapers. Most of them were in The New York Times (n=3), while USA Today and The Christian Science Monitor had none at all (Table 4.9).
Table 4.8
Newspapers: Blog Source Use by Sections in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>A-section Overall</th>
<th>Local Section</th>
<th>Other Sections/ Cannot Determine</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9
Newspapers: A-Section Blog Source Use in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Front Page</th>
<th>Editorial Page</th>
<th>Rest of A-section</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant differences were also found in the way television networks used blogs as sources. A total of 96.8% (n=120) of all blog source uses in the election context were made by the cable news channels CNN and Fox News. The network newscasts of ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News accounted for only 3.2% (n=4) of the blog sources used. CNN used blogs most frequently as sources during the afternoon (n=33) and evening prime-time (n=34) with some uses during the morning (n=17). Fox News, on the
other hand, predominantly used blog sources during evening prime-time (n=27) with some uses during the afternoon (n=9). Fox News used no blog sources in its morning shows (Table 4.10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Night</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11
TV: Blog Source Use by Segments in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television</th>
<th>News/Video Segment</th>
<th>Moderation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional differences were also found in the way the cable news channels used blog sources in different segments of their shows. Both, CNN (n=67) and Fox News (n=32), used blog sources predominantly in the moderations of their anchors and their discussions and interviews with guests. However, CNN used 20.2% (n=17) of the blog
sources in its news segments with video, while Fox News only used 11.1% (n=4) in those segments. The blog source uses of ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News were not further analyzed due to the few overall citations of blogs in their newscasts (Table 4.11).

Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs

The second study analyzed the use of traditional news media sources by blogs during the two-month period leading up to the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections and answered research questions 5-7. A total of 4,794 traditional news media sources were identified in the 10 blogs based on the methodology outlined for this study. A breakdown by individual blog, which is displayed in Table 4.12, showed that the number of traditional news media source uses varied greatly. The most sources were found in DailyKos (n=943), the fewest in Eschaton (n=262). Liberal bloggers accounted for 60.8% (n=2,916) of the sources, conservative bloggers for 39.2% (n=1,878)

Table 4.12
Blogs: Overall Use of Traditional Media Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DailyKos</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Progress</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooks and Liars</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Points Memo</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain’s Quarters</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschaton</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 4,794 100
The methodology also incorporated a filter question to distinguish political, business, and other contexts these sources were used in by the political blogs. It was found that 91.9% (n=4,406) of the traditional news media sources were used in a political context, 1.3 % (n=63) in a business context, and 6.7% (n=323) in other contexts. For two sources, the context could not be determined.

However, not all source uses in a political context were equal to uses in an election context. Another filter question determined the source distribution among election and other contexts. It was found that 49.1% (n=2,352) of the traditional news media sources were used in the context of the election and 50.9% (n=2,438) in other contexts. The context could not be clearly determined for four sources. This shows that many other political issues were addressed in these source uses that were not directly related to the elections.

The source uses in an election context broken down by individual blogs, displayed in Table 4.13, varied greatly with the most sources used by DailyKos (n=703) and the fewest by Little Green Footballs (n=31). The ratio of sources used in an election context versus those used in other contexts also varied greatly by individual blog. While 75.5% (n=703) of all traditional news media sources in DailyKos and 72.2% (n=333) in Talking Points Memo were used in an election context, only 8% (n=31) of the sources in Little Green Footballs were used in reference to the election. In the seven other blogs the percentage of source uses in an election context varied between 34.6% and 54.8%. Overall, liberal bloggers accounted for 74.1% (n=1,744) of the source uses in the election context, conservative bloggers for 25.9% (n=608).
Table 4.13
Blogs: Traditional Media Sources in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Kos</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Points Memo</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooks and Liars</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Progress</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschaton</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain’s Quarters</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,352</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following, each of the research questions was answered separately. The data were again entered and analyzed in SPSS through descriptive statistics and cross tabulations. Several missing values were found, which were then re-entered from the coding sheets. Several typing errors were also identified and corrected. As in the first study, differences were not tested statistically, since the data was derived from a census of the blog content during the defined time period.

Research Question 5

The fifth research question asked how frequently blogs use traditional news media as sources. The analysis found that the 10 filter blogs used 4,794 traditional news media sources during the 61-day period leading up to the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. On average, the 10 blogs used traditional news media 78.6 times per day. Of the overall source uses, 49.1% (n=2,352) were made in the context of the election.
Therefore, the 10 blogs on average used traditional news media sources 38.6 times per
day in their election coverage.

A breakdown by specific traditional news media cited in the blog posts showed
that The Washington Post was the most frequently cited traditional news media source.
Of the 2,352 citations in the election context, 11.1% (n=260) referred to The Washington
Post, which was followed by CNN with 9.3% (n=218) of the sources. Again, great
differences were revealed with the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, CBS News, and The
Christian Science Monitor combined accounting for only 5.5% (n=130) of the traditional
news media sources in the blog posts. However, 48.5% (n=1140) of all sources used in
the context of the election were traditional news media not included in the sample of this
study (Table 4.14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Determine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,352</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding for this study had accounted for other traditional news media to be
included as sources in blog posts and recorded the specific media. An analysis of the
1,140 other traditional news media sources showed that the news agencies Associated Press and Reuters, the *National Journal*, the *National Review*, *Congressional Quarterly* and *The Wall Street Journal* were also widely cited in blog posts covering the election.

Table 4.15 displays all traditional news media that were cited 10 or more times by the blogs. Nevertheless, 40.7% (n=464) of these other traditional news media sources were cited fewer than 10 times, showing the great variety of the sources used by the blogs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Journal</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Review</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Quarterly</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Times</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll Call</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford Courant</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsweek</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US News &amp; World Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Daily News</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Post</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Monthly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WKRN (Nashville)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Standard</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billings Gazette</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Post</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Republic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia Inquirer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 6

The sixth research question asked whether blogs predominantly use traditional news media as factual or opinion sources. The same definitions were applied as in the first study. The results of this analysis showed that 76% (n=1,787) of the traditional news media sources used in the election context were factual sources and 19.9% (n=467) were used as opinion sources. Other uses and cases which could not be determined accounted for 4.1% (n=98). There were only minor differences found between the source use of elite traditional news media sources in the sample and other traditional news media sources during the coding process. The 10 elite traditional news media in the sample were used 77.9% (n=933) as factual sources and 18.4% (n=221) as opinion sources. The other traditional news media sources were used 74% (n=844) as factual sources and 21.5% (n=245) as opinion sources.

Research Question 7

The seventh research question asked whether there are differences among blogs in their use of sources, specifically between liberal and conservative political blogs. These two different types of political blogs were compared as well as the 10 individual blogs.

The first difference between liberal and conservative blogs was detected in the frequency of traditional news media source use during the two-month period leading up to the elections. Liberals blogs used traditional news media sources much more frequently than conservative blogs. In the election context, liberal blogs accounted for 74.1% (n=1,744) of the source uses and conservative blogs for 25.9% (n=608). Most of
the traditional news media sources in the election context were used by *DailyKos* (n=703) and the fewest by *Little Green Footballs* (n=31).

An analysis of the selection of specific traditional news media sources showed significant differences between liberal and conservative blogs. While liberal blogs used 54.1% (n=945) elite traditional news media sources and 45.1% (n=787) other traditional news media sources, conservative blogs used 41.6% (n=253) elite traditional news media sources and 58.1% (n=353) other traditional news media sources.

A closer examination of individual blogs, however, revealed a more diverse selection of traditional news media sources. *Talking Points Memo, Eschaton, Crooks and Liars, Think Progress, Little Green Footballs*, and *Captain’s Quarters* selected the majority of their sources from elite traditional news media, while *DailyKos, Instapundit, Michelle Malkin*, and *Powerline* selected the majority of their sources from other traditional news media (Table 4.16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Elite Media</th>
<th>Other Media</th>
<th>Other/</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DailyKos</td>
<td>285/23.8%</td>
<td>412/36.1%</td>
<td>6/42.9%</td>
<td>703/29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Points Memo</td>
<td>169/14.1%</td>
<td>162/14.2%</td>
<td>2/14.3%</td>
<td>333/14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooks and Liars</td>
<td>217/18.1%</td>
<td>74/6.5%</td>
<td>0/0.0%</td>
<td>291/12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Progress</td>
<td>179/14.9%</td>
<td>96/8.4%</td>
<td>1/7.1%</td>
<td>276/11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>58/4.8%</td>
<td>104/9.1%</td>
<td>0/0.0%</td>
<td>162/6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>53/4.4%</td>
<td>102/8.9%</td>
<td>2/14.3%</td>
<td>157/6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>64/5.3%</td>
<td>82/7.2%</td>
<td>0/0.0%</td>
<td>146/6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschaton</td>
<td>95/7.9%</td>
<td>43/3.8%</td>
<td>3/21.4%</td>
<td>141/6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain’s Quarters</td>
<td>60/5.0%</td>
<td>52/4.6%</td>
<td>0/0.0%</td>
<td>112/4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>18/1.5%</td>
<td>13/1.1%</td>
<td>0/0.0%</td>
<td>31/1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,198/100</td>
<td>1,140/100</td>
<td>14/100</td>
<td>2,352/100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of the use of traditional news media sources as factual and opinion sources showed differences between liberal and conservative blogs. Liberal blogs used more factual sources and fewer opinion sources than conservative blogs. While the traditional news media sources in liberal blogs were 78.1% (n=1,362) factual and 18.1% (n=315) opinion, they were 69.9% (n=425) factual and 25% (n=152) opinion in conservative blogs. Nevertheless, all blogs used traditional news media more frequently as factual sources than as opinion sources (Table 4.17).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Factual Source</th>
<th>Opinion Source</th>
<th>Other/ Cannot Determine</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DailyKos</td>
<td>539 30.2</td>
<td>133 28.5</td>
<td>31 31.6</td>
<td>703 35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Points Memo</td>
<td>295 16.5</td>
<td>25 5.4</td>
<td>13 13.3</td>
<td>333 19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eschaton</td>
<td>105 5.9</td>
<td>34 7.3</td>
<td>2 2.0</td>
<td>141 18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crooks and Liars</td>
<td>196 11.0</td>
<td>92 19.7</td>
<td>3 3.1</td>
<td>291 15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Progress</td>
<td>227 12.7</td>
<td>31 6.6</td>
<td>18 18.4</td>
<td>276 6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instapundit</td>
<td>93 5.2</td>
<td>65 13.9</td>
<td>4 4.1</td>
<td>162 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>118 6.6</td>
<td>20 4.3</td>
<td>8 8.2</td>
<td>146 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Green Footballs</td>
<td>26 1.5</td>
<td>4 0.9</td>
<td>1 1.0</td>
<td>31 0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerline</td>
<td>96 5.4</td>
<td>48 10.3</td>
<td>13 13.3</td>
<td>157 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain’s Quarters</td>
<td>92 5.1</td>
<td>15 3.2</td>
<td>5 5.1</td>
<td>112 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,787 100</td>
<td>467 100</td>
<td>98 100</td>
<td>2,352 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, an analysis of the choice of specific traditional news media sources showed different trends for liberal and conservative blogs (Table 4.18). Liberal bloggers predominantly relied on the elite traditional news media in this study with National Journal (n=51), the Associated Press (n=49), Congressional Quarterly (n=48), and Reuters (n=39) as the exceptions at the bottom of their 10 most frequent choices. CNN
(n=197), *The Washington Post* (n=178), and NBC News (n=155) were the top three choices of liberal blogs.

*Table 4.18*
Liberal Blogs: Specific Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Washington Post</em></td>
<td>178</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The New York Times</em></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>National Journal</em></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Congressional Quarterly</em></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.19*
Conservative Blogs: Specific Traditional Media Source Use in Election Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Washington Post</em></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The New York Times</em></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>National Review</em></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune</em></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Washington Times</em></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wall Street Journal</em></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>608</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the top source choices of the conservative bloggers were *The Washington Post* (n=82) and *The New York Times* (n=47), CNN (n=21) only ranked ninth among their top 10 source choices. Moreover, several conservative-leaning traditional news media were frequently used as sources by conservative bloggers. With *National Review* (n=44), the *Washington Times* (n=32), Fox News (n=32), and the *Wall Street Journal* (n=22), four of the top 10 source choices were conservative-leaning traditional news media (Table 4.19).

**Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs**

The third study addressed research question 8 and analyzed the source interaction among traditional news media and blogs. The predominant topic relating to the source use during the two-month period leading up to the election was determined to study this phenomenon in depth. Preliminary analysis found that the Foley scandal was the predominant topic in the traditional news media and blogs in this study. The scandal broke when the blog *Stop Sex Predators* (2006), published sexually explicit e-mails of Florida Congressman Mark Foley to teenage congressional pages on September 24, 2006. Beginning on September 28, 2006, the scandal received widespread coverage in traditional news media and other blogs and played a major role in the Democratic victory in the 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections (Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kornblut & Seelye, 2006).

Analysis for this study found that traditional news media used 48 blog sources in their coverage of the scandal. Blogs, on the other hand, used 326 traditional news media sources in their coverage. The source use, however, was not equal among individual
traditional news media and blogs. Television networks accounted for 75% (n=36) of the blog source uses, while newspapers only accounted for 25% (n=12). CNN alone used 64.6% (n=31) of all blog sources in traditional news media. CBS News, on the other hand, did not use one blog source in its coverage of the Foley scandal (Table 4.20). A similar disparity was found in the blogosphere. Liberal bloggers accounted for 89.9% (n=293) of the traditional news media sources, while conservative bloggers accounted for only 10.1% (n=33). While the liberal blog DailyKos used 27% (n=88) of the traditional news media sources, the conservative blog Little Green Footballs only used 0.3% (n=1) (Table 4.21).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the most frequently cited sources also showed great differences. While traditional news media did not specify 64.6% (n=31) of their blog sources in their coverage of the Foley scandal, they also very rarely used the filter blogs in this study’s
sample. The only filter blogs used as sources were *DailyKos* and *Powerline*, both only being used once. The most frequently cited blogs were Andrew Sullivan (n=4) and *AmericaBlog* (n=4) as well as *Stop Sex Predators* (n=3), which broke the scandal (Table 4.22).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.21</th>
<th>Blogs: Traditional Media Sources in Context of Foley Scandal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>DailyKos</em></td>
<td>n=88, %27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Think Progress</em></td>
<td>n=80, %24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Talking Points Memo</em></td>
<td>n=70, %21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Crooks and Liars</em></td>
<td>n=36, %11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eschaton</em></td>
<td>n=19, %5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Conservative |                                                             |
| *Michelle Malkin* | n=11, %3.4                                                   |
| *Captain’s Quarters* | n=10, %3.1                                                   |
| *Powerline* | n=8, %2.5                                                   |
| *Instapundit* | n=3, %0.9                                                   |
| *Little Green Footballs* | n=1, %0.3                                                   |

| Total     | n=326, %100                                                   |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.22</th>
<th>Traditional Media: Blogs Cited in Context of Foley Scandal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Andrew Sullivan</em></td>
<td>n=4, %8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>AmericaBlog/John Aravosis</em></td>
<td>n=4, %8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stop Sex Predators</em></td>
<td>n=3, %6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>n=6, %12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>n=31, %64.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total     | n=48, %100                                                   |
Blogs, however, used elite traditional news media in the study’s sample much more often than traditional news media used filter blogs. ABC News was the most-quoted traditional news media source with 23% (n=75) of the citations, followed by The Washington Post with 12.3% (n=40) and CNN with 7.4% (n=24). The Christian Science Monitor (n=2) and the Los Angeles Times (n=3) were cited the least in the context of the Foley scandal (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23
Blogs: Traditional Media Cited in Context of Foley Scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Determine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, 39% (n=127) of the traditional news media sources in blogs were citations of other traditional news media not included in the study’s sample. The Associated Press (n=14) and the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call (n=14) were the most frequently cited among these other traditional news media (Table 4.24).

Newspapers and television stations used blog sources very prominently in their Foley coverage. Newspapers used 33% (n=4) of the blog sources on their front pages and 66% (n=8) in the rest of their A-sections. All blog sources (n=12) were used in news or
feature stories. Television stations used 55.6% (n=20) of their blog sources in news segments and 19.4% (n=7) in moderations. Traditional news media overall used 62.5% (n=30) of the blog sources in their Foley scandal coverage as factual sources and 37.5% (n=18) as opinion sources. Blogs, on the other hand, used 81.6% (n=266) of their traditional news media sources as factual sources and 18% (n=48) as opinion sources.

<p>| Table 4.24 | Blogs: Other Traditional Media Cited in Context of Foley Scandal |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Roll Call</em></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>National Journal</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Times</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach Post</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question 8*

The eighth research question asked whether traditional news media and blogs develop a source cycle by continuously using each other as sources. This question was answered by tracking the source uses by each medium in their coverage of the Foley scandal. Source uses in this context were recorded between September 8 and November 7, 2006.

The source uses during the two-month period leading up to the elections were very unevenly distributed. No sources in the context of the Foley scandal were used by traditional news media and blogs between September 8 and 27. Blogs used the first
traditional news media source on September 28 and the last on November 6. Traditional news media used a blog source first on September 29 and last on October 27. During the time period, blogs reached high points of their daily traditional news media source uses on September 30 (n=40), October 3 (n=39), and October 2 (n=38). Traditional news media reached their high points of blog source uses on October 3 (n=8), October 5 (n=6), October 6 (n=6), and October 7 (n=6). Blogs used traditional news media sources in their Foley scandal coverage on 29 of the 61 days, traditional news media only on 17 days (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Daily Traditional Media and Blog Source Use in Context of Foley Scandal
(September 28 – November 7, 2006)

The blog source uses were also unevenly distributed between traditional news media formats. Newspapers only used 12 blog sources between September 29 and
October 12, while television networks used 36 blog sources between September 30 and October 27. Newspapers had their high point of the daily blog source use on October 6 (n=3), while television networks had theirs on October 3 (n=7). Newspapers used blog sources on 9 out of the 61 days, television networks on 15 days (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2
Daily Blog Source Use in Newspaper and Television Networks in Context of Foley Scandal (September 28 – November 7, 2006)

Differences were also found in the traditional news media source uses by liberal and conservative blogs. Liberal blogs used 293 traditional news media sources between September 28 and November 6, while conservative blogs used only 33 sources between September 29 and October 20. Liberal blogs had their high point of their daily blog source use on September 30 (n=37), while conservative blogs had theirs on September 29
(n=6) and October 2 (n=6). Liberal blogs used blog sources on 27 out of the 61 days, conservative blogs only on 10 days (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3**
Daily Traditional Media Source Use in Liberal and Conservative Blogs in Context of Foley Scandal (September 28 – November 7, 2006)

*Breaking the Foley Scandal*

The liberal blog *Crooks & Liars* was the first blog at 3:55 p.m., on September 28, to point to reports by ABC News, which broke the Foley scandal for the American public. The blog cites the television network directly, which reports that it has confronted Republican Congressman Mark Foley with sexually explicit e-mails to congressional pages, and that Foley has submitted a letter of resignation to the House of Representatives. Six minutes later, *Think Progress* also directly quotes the coverage of
ABC News, making specific references to the content of Foley’s e-mails to the pages. *DailyKos* follows with the same source two hours later.

Later that day, *Crooks and Liars* also posts a video link to an ABC News interview with its own reporter Brian Ross, who broke the story beyond the blogosphere to the American public. The post also cites Foley’s e-mails as they were published by ABC News. The blog later also posts a link to a C-Span video that shows Foley’s resignation letter being read aloud by a clerk on the floor of the House of Representatives. Most of the traditional news media sources in the blogs on this first day of the scandal are direct quotations and links without any additions from the bloggers.

On September 29, blogs are already quoting traditional news media sources 24 times in the context of the scandal. In 10 of the instances, the liberal blogs *DailyKos, Talking Points Memo, Eschaton,* and *Think Progress* as well as the conservative blogs *Michelle Malkin* and *Captain’s Quarters* directly cite ABC News as the traditional news media source that broke the scandal, the explicit e-mail details from the television network’s reports as well as the coverage of Foley’s resignation announcement. *Think Progress* also cites CNN’s breaking news coverage on the scandal.

*DailyKos, Talking Points Memo,* and *Crooks and Liars* also advance the scandal story by pointing to a story by the Associated Press that reports that the leadership of the House of Representatives knew about Foley’s advances to the pages and did not intervene. The three blogs also report that *The News Star* in Louisiana found out that Republican Majority Leader John Boehner was informed of Foley’s behavior long before the scandal became public. *Talking Points Memo* also cites a *Roll Call* story reporting that the House Page Board had interviewed Foley in 2005 and informed the Republican
leadership. *Think Progress* cites another *Roll Call* story reporting that Republican Representative and National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Tom Reynolds had warned House Speaker Dennis Hastert about Foley’s behavior.¹

*DailyKos, Crooks and Liars,* and *Think Progress* also cite a *Washington Post* story that reports that Boehner had told Hastert about Foley and that Hastert had indicated that he would take care of the problem. *Captain’s Quarters,* on the other hand, looks ahead to the November elections by citing a *USA Today* article discussing whether the GOP will be able to replace Foley with another candidate on the ballot.

The first traditional news media outlet to cite blogs in its coverage of the Foley scandal is the *Los Angeles Times* with the article “Lawmakers Questioned On E-Mails to Page” on September 29. The article makes a vague reference without naming the specific source: “Some of the e-mails were posted on the Internet by a blogger over the weekend.” A day later, the *Los Angeles Times* makes another vague reference in the article “Congressman Quits After Messages to Teens Revealed” in regard to the same context: “Foley’s troubles began surfacing publicly last weekend when a blogger posted the e-mails sent to the page. News reports on the e-mails followed, including stories in Foley’s district.”

Also on September 30, CNN Newsroom reports in its 5 p.m. newscast (“Fallout from Capitol Hill Scandal”) that “Capitol Hill is hanging its head and blogs are abuzz.”

¹ All persons mentioned in this analysis are indentified with the titles and positions they had in September, October, and November 2006. However, many of their titles have changed since then, especially after the Democrats won the majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate in the 2006 elections. As of September 2009, John Boehner is the Republican Minority Leader in the House of Representatives. Tom Reynolds was reelected to Congress in 2006 for one more term, but not as NRCC chair. Dennis Hastert was not reelected speaker after the 2006 elections and was succeeded by Nancy Pelosi. Roy Blunt became Republican Minority Whip after the 2006 elections and held that position until 2009. Rahm Emanuel today serves as chief of staff for President Barack Obama, who succeeded George W. Bush in 2009. Dick Cheney was also replaced as vice president after the 2008 elections. Fox News anchor Brit Hume retired in 2008, and Glenn Beck moved his TV show from CNN to Fox News in 2009.
Anchor Carol Lin points out that the question of how the House of Representatives will address the scandal created a buzz in the blogosphere:

That is the burning question on the blogs right now. Did House majority leader John Boehner change his story about how he responded to reports Foley was e-mailing a teenage page. Well, bloggers point to a ‘Washington Post’ story that quotes Boehner as saying he told House speaker Dennis Hastert about the matter this spring.

With her comment, Lin makes a direct reference to the sourcing of The Washington Post by DailyKos, Crooks and Liars, and Think Progress a day earlier.

Creating a Buzz

On September 30, the blogosphere is already buzzing about the scandal and has the highest number of traditional news media sources in its coverage for a single day during the two-month period leading up to the elections. Blogs cite traditional news media 40 times on this day. Blogs are still buzzing about The Washington Post article citing Majority Leader Boehner. Captain’s Quarters and Eschaton cite the initial story, while Crooks and Liars cites The Washington Post and Roll Call reporting updates on Boehner retracting his initial interview: “The Washington Post had a change of heart and cleaned up one of their stories to give Boehner some room to maneuver.” Talking Points Memo cited this circumstance as well.

There are still some blogs, such as Talking Points Memo, Crooks and Liars, and Captain’s Quarters, who cite the initial reporting of ABC News. DailyKos, Talking Points Memo, Eschaton, and Captain’s Quarters also cite the Roll Call story again that stated that Reynolds had warned Hastert. Captain’s Quarters, on the other hand, also cites a Palm Beach Post story in which Hastert’s spokesperson denies that the speaker
had any previous knowledge of the matter and a Roll Call article in which Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi criticizes the GOP leadership. Talking Points Memo also cites a story by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that questions the Republican leadership’s assertion that it was unaware of Foley’s behavior.

There are also the first analyses of the scandal. DailyKos and Talking Points Memo cite an analysis by The New York Times, and Think Progress provides its own scandal chronology of traditional news coverage. Crooks and Liars is also linking to a video with Fox News anchor Brit Hume, in which he compares the Foley scandal to other scandals of Democratic politicians. A day later, Think Progress also links to a video from Fox News, in which Hume compares the Foley scandal to former President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky.

On October 1, DailyKos, Talking Points Memo, and Eschaton cite an ABC News story about a congressional page who was warned about Foley by the House clerk’s office five years before the scandal broke. Talking Points Memo also cites another Palm Beach Post story that outlines that congressional staffers were well aware of Foley’s behavior. In addition, Crooks and Liars quotes from additional Foley e-mails obtained by ABC News. Talking Points Memo also cites Hastert’s letter to the attorney general, which is published by Roll Call, and his call for an investigation as reported by The New York Times. Talking Points Memo and Think Progress cite ABC News again on the opening of an FBI investigation into Foley’s conduct.

A Palm Beach Post report is cited by Talking Points Memo on the long-time connection of NRCC chair Reynolds with Foley. The blog also cites The Washington Post, which reports that the NRCC wants to claim Foley’s campaign funds for other
races. Think Progress also cites a New York Daily News story reporting that Reynolds was informed about Foley’s behavior earlier in the year. Talking Points Memo cites the explanation of the St. Petersburg Times on why it did not publish the Foley scandal despite having possession of the e-mails.

Blogs also increasingly cite the traditional news media’s reporting on the political reaction to the scandal. Crooks and Liars cites reaction of pundits by linking to videos of CNN, including one, in which White House spokesperson Tony Snow asks the public to wait for judgment until all the facts are known. Think Progress links to an ABC News video, in which White House aide Dan Bartlett speaks out against an independent investigation of the scandal, and a Fox News video, in which former speaker Newt Gingrich defends the House leadership. An Associated Press story is also cited with additional White House reactions to the scandal. Crooks and Liars also links to a MSNBC video, in which Democratic and Republican strategists debate the impact of the scandal. The only post by a conservative blogger on this day is also the first traditional news media source use by Little Green Footballs, which cites an Associated Press story that reports that GOP leaders had knowledge of the scandal long before it became public.

Traditional news media only cite blogs twice on October 1. Both instances occur in the newscast CNN Newsroom when anchor Carol Lin cites the liberal AmericaBlog’s attack on the GOP leadership’s role in the scandal and the conservative Powerline blog’s defense for it. A day later, traditional news media are not citing blogs at all.

However, the buzz within the blogosphere is increasing again on October 2 when a conservative newspaper breaks ranks with the GOP leadership. DailyKos reports extensively on the Washington Times’ editorial that asks Speaker Hastert to resign:
Let the editors of the paper of Sun Myung Moon speak for themselves, Resign, Mr. Speaker … Of course the Times can’t let this pass without some digs at the Democrats, who, it is claimed, are trying to turn this into a ‘Republican scandal’ …

_Talking Points Memo_’s Josh Marshall highlights this editorial as well and comments on it himself:

Is it over for Denny Hastert? I’ve thought since late Friday night that Hastert and probably other members of the House leadership were finished. And you’ve likely seen now that the _Washington Times_ has called for Hastert’s resignation. My take is that Hastert cooked his own goose in the first half dozen or so hours of this scandal.

_Think Progress_ and _Michelle Malkin_ also cite this editorial as well as _Captain’s Quarters_ a day later, while _Instapundit_ links to an analysis regarding all resignation calls by the _National Journal_. _Malkin_ also cites ABC News and _USA Today_ to present facts on the Foley scandal, but also uses these sources to link it to previous sex scandals involving Democratic politicians. However, later in the day, Malkin cites the Associated Press on a chronology of the scandal and becomes more critical of Republicans and their defenses as well as media criticisms:

At this point, I think the GOP is making a mistake banging the drum so hard over the apparent far left/MSM orchestration of the story. However long the other side sat on the e-mails and IMs, the fact is that Mark Foley – and Mark Foley alone – is responsible for giving his enemies something to spring upon his campaign in the first place.

_Crooks and Liars_, on the other hand, cites a _U.S. News & World Report_ story, in which a Republican strategist gives the GOP leadership one to two days to control the issue, before they might be forced to resign. This story is also cited by _Talking Points Memo_ a day later. _Crooks and Liars_ also cites a _New York Daily News_ story on a press conference of Tom Reynolds, in which he surrounded himself with small children and refused to answer questions on the Foley scandal. _DailyKos_ also quotes ABC News’
George Stephanopoulos saying that if GOP leaders knew about Foley’s behavior, they needed to resign. In a new development, *Crooks and Liars* also cites ABC News’ reporting that John Boehner again blamed Hastert for the mishandling of the scandal. This story is also cited by *Eschaton* and *Think Progress* the following day. *Think Progress* also cites a *National Journal* story, in which Reynolds says that he informed Hastert about Foley, and ABC News, which reports that pages were warned about Foley. It also links to a Fox News video from 2002, in which Foley gives a speech to House pages.

*DailyKos* cites a story from the *Charleston Daily Mail*, which interviewed Republican Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito, a member of the House’s Page Board, who says she was never informed about Foley’s behavior. *DailyKos* and *Eschaton* also cite additional e-mails published by ABC News, and *Think Progress* cites the network that there may be many more to come. *DailyKos* also cites stories by the *Chicago Sun-Times* on Hastert’s call for an investigation and by the *Washington Post* on who learned about the e-mails at what time.

*Talking Points Memo* now cites a *New York Times* story reporting that the NRCC wants to keep Foley’s campaign funds. *Eschaton* also refers to a story from the *St. Petersburg Times* explaining why the newspaper initially did not publish the e-mails. *Crooks and Liars* also cites MSNBC, which investigates whether a donation by Foley was used to buy silence by the GOP leadership on the scandal. The blog also links to a CNN video of Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, who blames the scandal on “a society that rejects sexual restraints in the name of diversity.” This video is also linked to by *Think Progress* on the following day.
Think Progress also links to a CNN video with GOP strategist Bay Buchanan blaming Hastert that he “failed the parents of this country.” In addition, Think Progress links to two videos from CNN and ABC News, in which Tony Snow tries to contain the scandal. The blog, however, also reiterates previous traditional news media coverage on the scandal in an effort to debunk Republican defense strategies.

The next day, on October 3, the traditional news media reach their high point of blog source uses in the context of the Foley scandal. However, the eight blog sources are used in only three separate instances. The New York Times reports in the article “Papers Knew of Foley E-Mail But Did Not Publish Articles” how the Foley scandal was made public and cites the blog Stop Sex Predators for publishing Foley’s e-mails. On CNN’s Situation Room, Web reporter Abbi Tatton quotes blogger John Aravosis from AmericaBlog saying that he received the Foley e-mails, but decided not to publish them after he was not able to confirm them. Tatton also makes a reference to the blog that broke the scandal without naming it. She then goes on to cite DailyKos, which linked to the e-mails on the unidentified blog before the scandal became public. Tatton also describes that blogs now seek answers to questions about who was responsible for distributing the e-mail to several news outlets and blogs:

The liberal blogger John Aravosis said he got them a few months ago but could not confirm them and didn't put them on his site…. But as far as we can tell it's this mysterious blog that first posted the e-mails….We also know at the same time that the e-mails appeared on this site, there are a couple of mysterious comments on the widely read liberal blog "Daily Kos" alluding to the site, linking to it and also hinting at what Foley might be up to…. Now that the story is out bloggers are asking questions about who was shopping the e-mails on line.

That same day, CNN’s Glenn Beck also cites an unnamed blog that posted the e-mails and thereby broke the scandal. Fox News’ Major Garrett also reports that a blogger
identified Foley in an online chat room that day, while he was supposed to be in rehab for alcoholism treatment: “And a gay activist blogger said he captured this evidence that Foley, who uses the logon MAF54, was today briefly on an Internet online chat room.”

The bloggers use the second highest number of traditional news media sources on this day. Most of the 39 source uses still focus on calls for Hastert’s resignation. 

*DailyKos* cites a Reuters report and a *Christian Science Monitor* story in which conservative activists ask Hastert to step down. *Crooks and Liars* refers to reporting of MSNBC’s David Shuster that Hastert will have to resign within the next week. *Think Progress*, however, cites MSNBC as well reporting that Hastert will not resign. The conservative *Powerline* blog even takes a stand against the *Washington Times*’ call for Hastert to resign:

> I do not agree with the Washington Times that Hastert should resign for his error of omission. Assuming that Hastert is guilty of failing to ask the right (or apparently any probing) questions when told of overly friendly emails, I do not see this as a “firing” offense. But if it turns out that Hastert had more damning information and failed to act, I would view the matter differently since (a) his obligation to act would have been stronger and (b) his claim that he lacked such information would be false.

*DailyKos* cites an editorial by *The New York Times* accusing Republican leaders of a pattern of wrongdoing. *Think Progress* links to ABC News stories that report on a possible Republican cover-up. *Talking Points Memo* and *Think Progress*, on the other hand, cite a *Wall Street Journal* editorial suggesting that Republican leaders might have not ousted Foley before the scandal broke because he is gay. *Crooks and Liars*, nevertheless, cites talk show host Bill Maher, who attributes the scandal to conservative repression on CNN’s Situation Room. *DailyKos* also quotes from a story in the *International Herald Tribune*, which examines why several newspapers and television
networks did not publish Foley’s e-mails when they received them. In addition, 
*Instapundit* cites the *Washington Post*’s Howard Kurtz criticizing that the pages should have turned Foley in themselves.

*Talking Points Memo* cites *The Washington Post* on warnings that were issued to pages about Foley and *The New York Times* on the ongoing FBI investigation. Another *New York Times* story is quoted in which Foley’s lawyer denies all accusations against his client. *Think Progress* also refers to columns in the *American Spectator* and *National Review*, who try to belittle Foley’s advances to teenage boys, and links to a video of Fox News host Sean Hannity, who accuses Democrats of planning the release of Foley’s e-mails. The blog also cites ABC News, which reports that President Bush still stands behind Hastert.

In a new development that day, *Eschaton, Think Progress*, and *Captain’s Quarters* cite ABC News, which reports that Foley admits to being abused himself as a teenager. The blogs also cite another story of the network that reports that Foley once delayed his House vote to engage in Internet sex with a former page. But *Crooks and Liars* also cites Catholic League President William Donohue, who on MSNBC questions Foley’s statement that he was abused himself as a teenager. The blog also cites ABC News on a report that the chief of staff of Tom Reynolds, Kirk Fordham, resigned over questions about his conduct in the scandal. *Eschaton* and *Think Progress* cite this story as well a day later. In addition, *Michelle Malkin* links to additional e-mails published by ABC News.

On October 4, the traditional news media source use by the blogs starts to decrease. There is also only one blog source used in the traditional news media in the
context of the scandal. The *Los Angeles Times* in its article “Foley Case Shakes GOP” makes once again another reference to the blog *Stop Sex Predators* and its role in breaking the scandal. In the blogs, the predominant source related topic remains the future of Speaker Hastert. The conservative blog *Powerline* discusses the *Washington Times*’ editorial for another day and concludes that it goes too far calling for Hastert’s resignation. *Think Progress* cites ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos, who sees Hastert “hanging by a threat.” The blog also reiterates the traditional news media coverage of the previous days.

In a new development, *Talking Points Memo* cites *Washington Post* and *New York Times* stories that describe how Reynold’s chief of staff, Kirk Fordham, had approached Hastert three years before the scandal broke to stop Foley from approaching pages. The blog also cites the Associated Press with a direct statement from Fordham and ABC News with an accusation from Hastert that Fordham is lying. *Think Progress* cites the Associated Press story as well. The blog also cites a story in the *New York Post* that reports that Fordham said that Foley did not want to run for another term in this election, but was convinced by Reynolds to stay on.

*Talking Points Memo* also cites a story in the *Chicago Tribune* that Boehner is calling the scandal a “dirty trick.” However, *Think Progress* links to a quote of ABC News’ Brian Ross in *The New York Times* rejecting any partisan motives on his behalf. In addition, *Think Progress* cites *Forbes*’ reporting that Majority Whip Roy Blunt has regrets over the way the Foley matter was handled. *Eschaton* also cites a CBS News story that reports on the worries of Republicans in regard to the election outcome in November.
The blogs also reference new developments reported in traditional news media directly related to Foley’s behavior. *Crooks and Liars* links to an ABC News story about three additional House pages who have come forward and accused Foley. *Eschaton, Michelle Malkin*, and *Think Progress* link to the same story the following day. *Little Green Footballs* commented on this new development: “ABC News says they have three more former pages coming forward to hammer some more nails in Foley’s coffin.” *Talking Points Memo* also links to a story from Gannett newspapers reporting that Foley had been turned away from the pages’ dorm once while being intoxicated and to a story in *The Miami Herald* that reports that Foley had protested against a nude summer camp for teenagers in Tampa a few years earlier.

During the following three days, October 5-7, the traditional news media have their second highest usage of blog sources in the scandal context with six uses per day. The traditional news media source use in the blogs, however, is further declining from 22 to nine uses. On October 5, *The Washington Post* cites in its article “Lawmaker’s Intentions Appear Clear in Exchanges” unidentified bloggers who were able to identify one of the pages Foley had e-mailed with, because ABC News had posted the page’s screen name online for a short time. CNN’ Situation Room also cites these unnamed bloggers on this incident. Later in the show, Web reporter Tatton also cites “a little known conservative blogger,” who published the screen name. She then also refers to other bloggers, who criticize the actions of this particular blogger. Later, the blogger is cited again on CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360.

The blogs are increasingly preoccupied with the effects of the scandal on the November elections. *Daily Kos* cites the *National Journal* and Fox News reporting that
Democratic chances in key races are increasing due to the fallout of the Foley scandal.

The blog, for instance, cites the *National Journal* on the U.S. Senate race in Tennessee:

In TN, How does Harold Ford, Jr. beat back an NRSC ad that notes he once partied with Playboy bunnies? Says Ford: “I’m not going to take a lecture on morality from a party that took hush money from a child predator.”

The blog also cites *National Journal* stories on the beginning investigation of the House Ethics Committee and the fact that ABC News received Foley’s e-mails from a Republican and not, as alleged by GOP leaders, from a Democrat. One of the stories also analyzes the media dominance of ABC News in the uncovering of the scandal paired with increasing links on the Web to ABC News stories.

*DailyKos* also links to a story in the *Chicago Tribune* in which a Republican strategist claims that a Hastert resignation will not solve the party’s problems, since Boehner is allegedly as much involved in the scandal. *Talking Points Memo*, on the other hand, links to a story in the *Hartford Courant* reporting that Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman defends Hastert against calls for resignation. *DailyKos* links to the *Journal Inquirer* in Connecticut the next day on the same issue, criticizing Lieberman for his stance: “So Lieberman thinks it’s okay for congressmen to run around the House preying on teenage pages. Why else would he adamantly refuse to hold people accountable for enabling Foley’s sexual predation?”

*Think Progress* also links to the *Washington Examiner* reporting that Vice President Dick Cheney stands behind Hastert. However, the blog also quotes Fox News with a report on Republicans’ decreasing chances in the elections if Hastert does not resign. The conservative blog *Captain's Quarters* disputes a story by CBS News that the GOP leadership covered up the scandal.
Think Progress cites MSNBC reporting that Hastert tried to convince former FBI Director Louis Freeh to lead the investigation, a plan rejected by Minority Leader Pelosi. Signals from the speaker’s office are mixed on this day. The blog also cites a CNN report that Hastert wants to be more aggressive and go on the offensive, but at the same time quotes MSNBC that Hastert has cancelled fundraising events for the following two weeks. A link to the Los Angeles Times, however, shows that Hastert still calls Foley’s e-mails “overly friendly” and not explicit enough to raise alerts.

DailyKos also links to a story in the Buffalo News that reports that Reynolds surrounded himself in a press conference with small children to avoid taking questions about the Foley scandal. Crooks and Liars had linked to a similar story three days earlier. Instapundit, on the other hand, cites a National Review story that raises the possibility that Foley has been tricked by the congressional pages.

On October 6, a day after Hastert’s press conference about the scandal, DailyKos cites stories in The Washington Post and The New York Times, which hint at new disclosures about the timing of the speaker’s knowledge about Foley’s conduct. The blog also links to the National Journal, which reports on more Republicans calling on Hastert to resign. Eschaton, however, quotes a story by ABC News, in which Hastert says that he never talked to Boehner about Foley’s conduct. Think Progress links to a National Journal story, in which Hastert is quoted saying that he would have demanded Foley’s resignation had he not immediately resigned himself. Talking Points Memo, on the other hand, cites a CNN story that Republicans ask for Democrats to be investigated in the context of the scandal on whether they “engaged in partisan trickery.” Powerline cites a
Star Tribune story that criticizes politicians making the Foley scandal part of their campaign.

DailyKos also cites the Salt Lake Tribune about an interview in which Republican Congressman Chris Cannon downplayed the scandal as a “prank.” CNN’s Web Reporter Jacki Schechner also reports the same day on this interview, which was conducted by political blogger Ethan Millard in Salt Lake City. CNN American Morning and CNN Newsroom also again make a reference to the blogger who revealed the identity of one of the pages.

In the discussion over the future of Speaker Hastert in the article “New Media A Weapon in New World of Politics,” The Washington Post quotes conservative blogger Hugh Hewitt as saying that Hastert is the “target right now of the left-wing media machine“ (p. 2). In another article (“Hastert Can Be Booed but Not Ousted”) that same day, the newspaper also cites bloggers who are distributing photos showing President George W. Bush walking with Foley and former FEMA director Michael Brown. DailyKos alone publishes these Reuters photos six times. On the other hand, The Christian Science Monitor, in its only blog source use in this context, presents an analysis of the scandal (“How the Foley scandal unfolded”) and cites the Stop Sex Predators blog that broke the scandal.

The Washington Post cites several unnamed conservative bloggers in its story “Speculation Centers on a Republican Former Page” on October 7, who have begun targeting the former page and have called the scandal “a prank … to solicit sexually suggestive messages from Foley” (p. 2). CNN Live Saturday reports on the scandal and anchor Carol Lin points out that “much of the Foley story is being driven by Internet
bloggers” (p. 8). She interviews *AmericaBlog*’s John Aravosis and *National Review* blogger Jim Geraghty, who discuss Hastert’s future and the possible outcome of the elections. Fox News’ contributor Jane Hall, on the other hand, again refers to an unnamed blogger who published the initial e-mails on Fox News Watch. On NBC News, however, Foley’s lawyer cites the blogger who published the e-mails, but questions the reliability of the blogger and the authenticity of the e-mails.

On this day, *DailyKos* cites a story in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* reporting that one of the former pages approached by Foley now serves in Iraq and has informed the authorities. This has led to local politicians to distance themselves from Speaker Hastert. *Talking Points Memo* and *Crooks and Liars* refer to several stories by ABC News and *The Washington Post* on this day and on the following day, which confirm that Hastert’s staffers met with Foley about his conduct long before the e-mails surfaced. *Crooks and Liars* also links to a video of ABC News’ This Week, in which Democratic Congressman Rahm Emanuel attacks Republicans for their handling of the scandal, while Tom Reynolds had cancelled his appearance on the program.

On October 8, the traditional news media sources in the blogs significantly increase one last time before the election to 18 uses. *DailyKos* cites a *Washington Post* story that underlines once more that the GOP leadership had prior knowledge of the scandal. *Think Progress* links to the same story the following day. *Crooks and Liars* links to a video, in which MSNBC host Chris Matthews criticizes the Republican leadership for its handling of the scandal. The blog also links to a *Newsweek* poll that shows that 52% of Americans believe that Hastert covered up for Foley. A link from *Think Progress* to a CNN video also shows how anchor Wolf Blitzer challenges Republican
Congressman Patrick McHenry, who questions whether the release of Foley’s e-mails was planned by Democrats.

*DailyKos* also cites a story in the *Buffalo News* showing that Tom Reynolds has suffered severe setbacks in the polls for his reelection campaign due to his involvement in the Foley scandal. Links to *Newsweek* and *Time* polls also show an overall weakening of the Republican voter base and demoralized Republican candidates, who according to a linked *Washington Post* story can hardly change the topic with the electorate. A link to a story by the Associated Press also stresses again that Reynolds had cancelled an appearance on ABC News’ This Week. *Talking Points Memo* and *Think Progress*, on the other hand, also link to a *Los Angeles Times* story, in which a former page claims “he had sex with Foley.”

However, there are hardly any connections between the source uses on this day. *The New York Times* reports in its article “Foley Case Upsets Tough Balance Of Capitol Hill’s Gay Republicans” that conservative bloggers have begin targeting gay congressionals for their alleged role in the scandal:

Conservative blogs and Web sites pointed out that gay staff members played principal roles in investigating the Foley case, suggesting that the party was betrayed by gay men trying to hide misconduct by one of their own.

CNN’s Newsroom makes another reference to bloggers’ influence on the scandal: “And bloggers left and right talk about the future of House Speaker Dennis Hastert.” CNN Reliable Sources also discusses the incident in which a blogger revealed the identity of one of the pages. There were again no blog source uses in traditional news media on the following day.
*DailyKos* quotes the *Manchester Union Leader* on October 9, which has also called for Hastert to step down. Several polls by CNN and *USA Today*, which the blog links to, show further decreasing chances for Republican candidates due to the Foley scandal. The blog also cites stories in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The New York Times*, which look beyond the November election and try to predict the lasting effects of the Foley scandal on the Republican Party. *Crooks and Liars* also quotes a CBS News poll that shows that 79% of Americans believe that GOP leaders were more concerned about politics than the pages.

On October 10, *DailyKos* and *Eschaton* make fun of a CNN screenshot, which shows Hastert holding a press conference in front of a graveyard. *Think Progress* links to a CNN video, which shows Hastert blaming his staff for a possible cover up of the scandal. The blog also references stories in *The Washington Post* and *Roll Call*, which report that Hastert was personally informed by Boehner and Reynolds about the problem with Mark Foley.

*DailyKos* also cites polls by *The New York Times*, CNN, *USA Today*, ABC News and NBC News, which all show that the American public thinks Republicans badly handled the Foley scandal. CNN Newsroom also cites an unnamed blog criticizing the political establishment in general:

> This was a quote that we came across in one of the blogs, as you can imagine. There's so many people blogging about the Mark Foley situation. And this blogger says that Washington creates within the minds of elected officials a mentality that says laws, morality and normal bounds of decency don't apply to me, because I'm an elected official.

*Talking Points Memo* links to an ABC News story, in which Senator John McCain demands an independent investigation of the Foley scandal.
Declining Source Uses

After October 10, the source uses of blogs and traditional news media in the context of the Foley scandal are declining quickly. Between October 11 and November 7, traditional news media only use 18.8% (n=9) of their blogs sources and blogs only 12.3% (n=40) of their traditional news media sources in this context.

On October 11, blogs cite seven traditional news media sources, while traditional news media cite no blog sources. DailyKos makes a reference to a comment of a Democratic candidate defending the GOP reaction to the Foley scandal in the Lexington Herald-Leader. It also cites a story by Time, predicting that the scandal will lead to major gains for Democrats in the South. It also quotes a Washington Post story on a Democratic operative trying for a year to gain the attention of traditional news media to Foley’s behavior and an ABC News story on a GOP staffer testifying on the previous knowledge of his party’s leadership. Talking Points Memo cites another ABC News story on an incident in which Foley visited pages in 2000. Crooks and Liars also cites a Roll Call story on representatives on the House Page Board, who were kept uninformed on Foley’s behavior.

On the following day, Talking Points Memo refers to a Washington Post story also covering several GOP staffers testifying in front of the House Ethics Committee and a story in the New Republic on White House Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove pressuring Foley to run for another term before the scandal broke. DailyKos also quotes stories by Reuters and ABC News on the questions about who in the GOP leadership knew about the scandal at what time. It also cites a National Journal story on the worsening chances of GOP candidates and a CNN poll on close races affected by the Foley scandal. USA
Today, on the other hand, is quoting John Aravosis of AmericaBlog on the hypocrisy of gay GOP politicians like Foley in its article “Foley scandal exposes the GOP’s gay identity crisis.” CNN’s Larry King also invited conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan, who criticizes the GOP leadership for its handling of the scandal on the talk show. On October 13, ABC News also cites John Aravosis with his comments on conservative hypocrisy. Talking Points Memo follows up that day on the GOP staffers testimony by citing stories in The New York Times and The Washington Post, which contradicts Hastert’s version. Think Progress quotes a Palm Beach Post story reporting that Foley and Florida Governor Jeb Bush had corresponded via e-mail in 2004 over White House concerns about Foley’s conduct.

October 14 is the first day since the scandal became public on September 28 on which neither traditional news media nor blogs cite each other. A day later, CNN’s Reliable Sources invited Andrew Sullivan again to comment on Republican hypocrisy:

… there are two varieties of gay people on the Hill. There are the openly-gay people on the Hill … openly gay Republicans who are struggling with living here in a bigoted party, essentially, at this point. And then there are the closeted Republicans like Mark Foley, who are in such a dysfunctional state of being they can't even think straight and doing outrageous things. On the other hand, the conservative Powerline blog cites columns in the Boston Herald and the Chicago Sun-Times, which criticize the media coverage of the Foley scandal. On October 16, again neither media format cited the other on the Foley scandal.

Crooks and Liars cites a story in The Nation on October 17, which questions whether Democrats will be able to turn their advantage through the Foley scandal into majorities in the House and Senate. A day later, the blog cites ABC News on the latest development on the House Ethics Committee, where a House clerk testified that Hastert was informed about Foley earlier than he admitted. DailyKos also links to a story by
*Congressional Quarterly*, which reports on Republicans’ difficulties defending the seat held by Foley. CNN’s Larry King, on the other hand, interviews Andrew Sullivan, who does not believe that the Republican Party is discriminating against its gay members. It is the last time for a traditional news media outlet to use a blogger as a source in the context of the Foley scandal until October 22.

On the following three days, *Talking Points Memo* cites a *Washington Post* story and a CNN report about a priest who admitted abusing Foley in the mid-1960s as well as a story by the Associated Press which describes how several sex scandals have affected the elections. *Talking Points Memo, Eschaton,* and *Think Progress* also cite an ABC News story about another Hastert staffer being informed about Foley long before the scandal became public. *Captain’s Quarters,* on the other hand, quotes a *Washington Times’* story reporting that there might not be a majority among Democratic House members to elect Nancy Pelosi as the new speaker of the House.

In the remaining day’s of the election campaign source uses only occur very scattered without any interaction among traditional news media and blogs. On October 22, CNN’s Reliable Sources analyzes how a blog was used to break the Foley scandal to the American public. A day later, *DailyKos* quotes the *Topeka Capital Journal* reporting on the Foley effect on a congressional race in Kansas. *Think Progress* then quotes ABC News on October 24, which reports that Hastert testified before the House Ethics Committee.

Traditional news media last cite blogs on the Foley scandal on October 26 and 27. CNN’s Situation Room reports that the Human Rights Campaign has fired a junior staffer, who had created the blog *Stop Sex Predators,* which broke the Foley scandal in
September. In this context, CNN shows the blog again and reiterates how it published Foley’s e-mails. Fox News’ Special Report also reports on this incident a day later and explains how the blog broke the scandal, but does not specifically name the blog.

In the following days, blogs cite traditional news media several more times. On October 28, DailyKos and Talking Points Memo quote a Washington Post story reporting that the House Ethics Committee will not release its report on the Foley scandal before the elections on November 7. Eschaton, on the other hand, makes a reference to a Washington Post story explaining the role of the Drudge Report in breaking the Foley scandal.

On November 1 and 2, Crooks and Liars and Eschaton quote a story in the New York Daily News on a conference calls between staffers of the NRCC on September 27 trying to contain the about-to-break Foley scandal. Think Progress then accounts for the last two quotes of traditional news media in blogs by citing MSNBC on November 3 on the delayed release of the House Ethics Committee report and a Washington Post story on November 6 about the uncertain future of Speaker Hastert due to his handling of the Foley scandal. His reelection is called into question, even in the case that Republicans should be able to defend their House majority in the elections on the following day.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between traditional news media and blogs. The study analyzed how source uses of the respective media formats influence their media agendas and how one format becomes a source for the other. This is an important area of research because sources have an inherent agenda-setting power (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Research on intermedia agenda-setting influences of new media formats has shown that they have an impact on the traditional news media agenda (Lee et al., 2005; Ku et al., 2003). It has also been pointed out that a source relationship exists between traditional news media and blogs (Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005, Reese et al., 2007).

The findings of the three separate studies on the traditional news media and blog source interaction during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections are discussed in the following parts of this chapter. First, the uses of blogs as sources in traditional news media are addressed. Second, the uses of traditional news media sources in blogs are discussed. And third, the source interaction of transitional news media and blogs are examined in the context of the predominant election topic, the Mark Foley scandal. The concluding part of the discussion presents three models to explain the source relationship between traditional news media and blogs and the processes that drive the interaction.

Study 1: Blogs as Sources in Traditional News Media

The findings of the first study show that blogs are used as sources by traditional news media on a regular basis, but that the use among different media types and
individual media outlets is very different. The analysis found differences between newspapers and television networks as well as among individual newspapers and among individual networks. Overall, the finding that traditional news media frequently cite blogs confirms the results of previous studies by Gordon (2006), Perlmutter and McDaniel (2006) as well as Messner and Distaso (2008). However, surprisingly this study shows that traditional news media rely in their reporting on a great variety of blogs rather than a few prominent filter blogs, while almost half of the time not citing a specific blog but only referencing the blogosphere in general. Considering the general reporting practices in journalism, which require proper attribution of all information appearing in an article or news segment, this vague citation style in regards to blogs may constitute a shift in reporting standards. Mencher (2008) pointed out that a “reporter’s job is to put sources on the record, by name“ (p. 44). He also described in detail which exceptions exist for a reporter not to name a source:

Some publications and stations insist that all material be attributed to a named source, but others will use nonattributed information when the reporter is sure the material is reliable. In these cases, the editor usually wants to know the name of the source.” (p. 44)

While journalists might use anonymous sources in certain instances when a source needs to be protected, this practice would not apply to blogs as their content is already published on the Web and the blogger’s authorship is publicly known. Mencher (2008) even extended his attribution policy to media sources: “When reporters dig out information for their stories, the material can be attributed to the publication or station” (p. 44). Therefore, it is not understandable why traditional news media rarely cite specific blogs, but rather refer to them in generic terms.
While the study found more newspaper articles than television transcripts that referenced blogs within the two-month period before the election, it was revealed that television networks use blog sources more often than newspapers. Many of the newspaper articles that reference blogs do not necessarily cite them as sources. However, an in-depth analysis of the source uses also revealed that there are substantial differences in how individual newspapers and television networks cited blogs in the context of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. CNN is the media outlet with the highest number of unnamed blog sources, while *The New York Times*, Fox News, and the *Los Angeles Times* named the majority of theirs.

While CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Fox News, and the *Los Angeles Times* used blog sources on a regular basis, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *USA Today*, NBC News, CBS News, and ABC News almost ignored the content of blogs entirely in their reporting, despite the fact that blogs undeniably played a role in the election. While *The Christian Science Monitor* and *USA Today* do not have weekend editions and the three broadcast networks only have several newscasts during the day and not 24-hour news operations, these circumstances do not explain why there are so few blog sources in these media outlets. However, it was found that most blog sources in television networks occurred in anchor moderations and discussions. This might explain the few blog sources used by the three networks, which do not provide much time for their anchors, but much more time for the news segments with video. CNN and Fox News, on the other hand, run great lengths of their airtime with anchor moderations and discussions. These observed differences in how media outlets handle references to blogs
and citations of them raises the question whether newsrooms have attribution guidelines in general as well as specifically on how to handle Internet sources, including blogs.

Generally, journalists have been very skeptical of the reliability of blogs and Internet sources in general (Cooper, 2005; Ruggerio & Winch, 2004). As Stovall (2004) pointed out in regards to online sources, however, this view is changing:

To get good information, journalists have traditionally gone to official or expert sources…. They are people with titles, and by including those titles in their writing, journalists make the ad-hoc argument that what is presented in the story is the best information available….What this means is that knowledgeable people without titles … are often ignored as legitimate sources of information…. Because of the interactivity of the Web, journalists must think more expansively about sources. (pp. 61-62)

Some news organizations have already established attribution guidelines for their newsrooms especially in regard to the use of online sources. The news agency Reuters (2009), for instance, has established Internet reporting guidelines that ask the reporters to be very specific in their source uses: “In stories, we also must make it clear high up how we gathered the information. Retain those facts high in the story as it plays out. The reader wants to know how we obtained the information” (n.p.).

Guidelines in regard to blogs are still rare. Lieb (2009) stressed that “blogs are becoming a more important resource for journalists” (p. 41). However, the main uses he identifies for the use of blogs do not include the use as sources, but rather monitoring them for story ideas and public opinion. Journalistic guidelines in regards to blogs are rather concerned with starting and maintaining them for a news organization (Wilkinson, Grant, & Fisher, 2009). Nevertheless, Lieb (2009) wrote in regards to using online sources that “on the rare occasions when you might want to incorporate previously published information, you must include the source of the material” (p.40). This,
nevertheless, has clearly not happened in the majority of blog citations during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections.

While there seems to be hesitation in some media outlets to use blogs as sources, the outlets that do feature their blog sources prominently. Every fifth blog source in the newspapers was located on the front page, and almost two-thirds were located on one of the other pages of the A-sections, which generally include the most important national and international stories of the day. The blog sources were also used mostly in the bodies of regular news and feature stories. Similar uses were found in television networks. Half of the blog source uses occurred during prime time, which generally has more talk shows on the two cable news networks. In addition, the blog sources were predominantly used in moderations and discussions and in the middle of shows. These findings indicate that the use of blog sources has become rather normal for the media outlets that use them.

It is not surprising that most blog sources were used as opinion sources, since they are known for their partisan standpoints. However, it is also remarkable that two-fifths of the blog sources were contributing factual information to the traditional news media reporting. This finding shows that blogs are not only recognized by traditional news media for their opinions, but also for their reporting. This indicates that blogs have gained credibility and usefulness as sources with traditional news media journalists.

While journalists have been skeptical about the reliability of blogs, there is some indication that they are becoming conventional news sources. As Gans (2003) pointed out, the legitimacy of news sources is determined by their newsworthiness, which in turn is determined by the audience. This means for journalists that blogs gain significance as news sources the greater their audiences become and the more attention they get in public
discourse. The more blogs are used as sources, the more they will gain credibility for future references within the traditional news media. This may also lead to a transition from solely being an opinion source to being increasingly used factual source.

Nevertheless, it is also surprising to find that CNN and The New York Times, which are known for their balanced reporting, use more opinion blog sources, and Fox News, which is known for the commentaries of its prime-time anchors, uses more factual blog sources. The reason for these findings might lie in the fact that CNN and The New York Times use opinion sources to balance their reporting, while Fox News is more in a need for factual sources to advance its stories as it has many opinionated news shows in its program. As Scott (2007) pointed out, many journalists do not recognize blogs as media formats but rather as a part of the political system. By using blogs increasingly as factual and opinion sources, journalists legitimize them as credible news sources.

Overall, this study shows that there is no consistency in how traditional news media used blogs as sources in their reporting on the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections. There is no consistency in how individual news outlets use blog sources and in which blogs are used as sources. Certainly, there are no universal attribution or editorial practices in place that all traditional news media operate under when citing and referencing blogs. While journalists might monitor a small number of filter blogs, there is no indication that they are only citing these selected blogs. A great variety of blogs is cited in the traditional news media during the election period, and many of the blogs are not necessarily cited by name. This is an unusual journalistic practice, which might only be explained by the skepticism and competition perceived by some traditional news media journalists in regards to the blogosphere and Web content in general. All
attribution guidelines require that journalists specifically name their sources, unless the source demands to remain off the record (Mencher, 2008). This was certainly not the case with the bloggers in the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections, who published their posts online. Therefore, this practice of traditional news media citations of blogs should be closer examined by news organizations as it constitutes a change in traditional reporting standards.

The analysis also showed that while traditional news media used blog sources frequently, these sources only make up a small number compared to the hundreds of sources that are used by these 10 media outlets on a daily basis. Blog sources during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections were only used at an average of 3.9 citations per day by traditional news media. The number of simple blog references and mentions in the traditional news media is also still much greater than the actual use of blog sources. However, the findings also show that blogs are not only used in such high-profile events as the elections, but have become a routine part of journalists’ daily newsgathering and monitoring practices.

Study 2: Traditional News Media as Sources in Blogs

The second study analyzed the traditional news media sources used by blogs in the context of the elections. The findings show that traditional news media sources were very common in the blog posts during the election season. The blogs used traditional news media sources 10 times as often as traditional news media used blog sources during the two-month period. This demonstrates the strong reliance of bloggers on information provided by other media as well as the fact that they do very little original reporting
themselves, which confirms previous findings of Messner and DiStaso (2008) as well as Reese et al. (2007). However, in contrast to traditional news media’s use of blogs, blogs use traditional news media overwhelmingly as factual sources and are very specific in their attributions to them. Only very few traditional news media sources were not specifically attributed. In this regard, the bloggers follow standard attribution principles more than traditional news media. However, the citation and strong reliance on secondary sources, as practiced by the bloggers, is not a preferred newsgathering technique. Primary sources, gathered in original reporting, are preferred in journalism (Mencher, 2008). Lieb (2009) pointed out that quoting other media should be an exception under traditional reporting standards.

Nevertheless, this study also revealed differences in how different types of blogs and individual blogs used sources in their posts. It is an unexpected finding that liberal blogs used almost three times as many traditional news media sources as the conservative blogs in the context of the election. The liberal blog DailyKos alone used more than four times as many traditional news media sources than Instapundit, the conservative blog with the most source uses. In addition, Eschaton, the liberal blog with the fewest source uses, used only 21 sources fewer than Instapundit. The conservative blog Little Green Footballs almost ignored traditional news media sources in its coverage of the election. These findings indicate a very selective process of choosing sources based on political preferences.

Considering all contexts, the source use margin between liberal and conservative bloggers for the two-month period was only three to two. Therefore, the question arises why the margin is wider in the election context. Liberal bloggers used almost 60% of
their traditional news media sources in the election context, but conservative bloggers only used about one-third of their media sources in this context. While the scandal-ridden election campaign for Republicans might have had an impact on how much conservative bloggers post about the election, resignation in regard to the election outcome does not fully explain these differences. In-depth analysis of the source uses also showed that liberal and conservative bloggers use different traditional news media sources. While the elite newspapers *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were widely cited by both types of blogs, the other source choices in the election context differed greatly. Liberal blogs focused on a variety of sources ranging from the cable news channels CNN and Fox News as well the news agencies Associated Press and Reuters to political publications such as *National Journal* and *Congressional Quarterly*. Conservative bloggers, on the other hand, more frequently chose conservative-leaning media like *National Review*, the *Washington Times*, Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*. These different choices by the conservative bloggers mirror the skepticism of conservative circles in the United States towards the elite traditional news media. This is also underlined by the finding that conservative bloggers used a greater share of opinion sources than liberal bloggers. Elite news media do not seem to have the same role as agenda setters for conservative bloggers that they have for blogs in general (Messner & DiStaso, 2008; Reese et al., 2007).

Overall, the political filter blogs relied greatly on the elite traditional news media in the sample of this study. *The Washington Post*, CNN, NBC News, *The New York Times*, ABC News, and Fox News accounted for almost half of all traditional news media sources used in the context of the elections. Nevertheless, the other half of the traditional
news media sources showed a great variety of media outlets. These included other 
traditional news media that are considered to be among the elite as well, such as the *Wall 
Street Journal, Time*, and *Newsweek* as well as the Associated Press and Reuters. But the 
bloggers also included many regional media sources such as the *Star Tribune* in 
Minneapolis, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Billings Gazette*, and 
Nashville’s WKRN. This finding shows that the blogs did not only rely on the elite 
national media to provide information on many of the congressional and senatorial races, 
but on media outlets in those regions as well. Many of these source uses were occasional 
and were only chosen to address specific issues in certain races that are covered in-depth 
by regional media. Overall, almost 20% of the traditional news media sources in the 
election context were used less than 10 times by the blogs. This finding underlines the 
great spectrum of sources in blogs. While bloggers rely greatly on the information 
provided by other media, they make specific decisions which media outlets they cite in 
which circumstance.

*Study 3: Source Interaction Among Traditional News Media and Blogs*

The third study analyzed the continuous use of sources in traditional news media 
and blogs in the most predominant election topic, which was determined to be the Mark 
Foley scandal. The study was conducted to determine whether traditional news media 
engage in a source cycle, in which content is passed back and forth between the two 
media formats – a concept first introduced by Danielian and Reese (1989) and recently 
applied to the new media environment by Leskovec et al. (2009) as well as Messner and 
DiStaso (2008). The qualitative analysis found that both media formats used each other
heavily as sources during the 12-day period following the breaking of the scandal on the blog *Stop Sex Predators* and the initial reporting of ABC News. However, even in this scandal in which one blog played a major role in publishing Foley’s e-mails and breaking the issue to the American public, traditional news media did not cite blogs in the context of the scandal for two days during the main period of the news coverage between September 29 and October 10, 2006. Blogs, on the other hand, cited traditional news media on every one of the 12 days, with the lowest number of daily traditional news media citations still higher than the highest number of blog citations in the traditional news media.

This finding shows that even if a source cycle were to exist between traditional news media and blogs, it was discontinued on certain days due to the inconsistent blog source use of the newspapers and television networks. Traditional news media cited the blogs in the initial stage, when they played a fundamental role in breaking the scandal. Zeller (2005) had described this role of the blogs as presenting a “smoking gun” (p. C5). The number of source uses then decreased until a few days later, when blogs played a role again in the traditional news media analyses of the scandal. The source relationship in the context of the Foley scandal is also mainly based on blog source uses by television networks – most notably by CNN – and traditional news media source uses by liberal bloggers. Newspapers and conservative bloggers only play minor roles in citing the other media format during the Foley scandal coverage.

Traditional news media most often used blogs or their authors as sources in this context when (a) they provided exclusive information, (b) they created a buzz on the topic, and (c) they were chosen for television interviews to state their opinions on the
topic. It is remarkable to find, however, that filter blogs hardly played any role in the
traditional news media coverage of the Foley scandal, especially since previous studies
had shown a strong influence (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Haas, 2005). The filter blogs,
which have shown to be the agenda setters of the blogosphere that can create a buzz on a
certain topic, are only directly cited twice by the elite traditional news media. The only
filter blogs cited are the liberal blog Daily Kos and the conservative blog Powerline,
which were quoted once each in the scandal context. Traditional news media most often
referred to how Stop Sex Predators first published Foley’s e-mails and instant messages,
but they do not always refer to the specific blog by name. This represents again an
uncommon attribution practice, as previously discussed.

Citations of Stop Sex Predators occurred over and over again, specifically and
anonymously. One month into the coverage of the scandal, traditional news media still
referred to the circumstance that this blog first published the e-mails. The repeated source
use is also explained by the repeated analysis in traditional news media on how the
scandal developed as it becomes apparent that the blogosphere has a great impact on the
election outcome. In contrast to, for instance, the Drudge Report’s role in the Clinton-
Lewinsky scandal more than seven years earlier, Stop Sex Predators (2009) was only
created to break the scandal and was not continued after October 19, 2006. Therefore, it
is not surprising that the references to this blog are all very similar and do not progress to
other topics.

The Stop Sex Predators blog, however, was only used as a source after traditional
news media had started reporting on the Foley e-mails based on their own investigations.
None of the ten elite traditional news media used the information on Stop Sex Predators
as a source immediately after it was posted on September 24 and before ABC News broke the story on September 28. This finding shows that traditional reporting standards were used at these news organizations that show skepticism towards using unknown online sources. While unconventional online sources become more frequently used by traditional news media, these sources are still checked by journalists for their reliability. While certain blogs might have gained credibility with journalists, a new blog with an uncommon name will raise the question of credibility for reporters. Based on the reporting principles discussed earlier, traditional news media journalists will be very skeptical of using such a source without conducting their own research and confirming the information (Lieb 2009; Mencher, 2008).

Subsequently, no relevant news organization was willing to break a news story of the magnitude of the Foley scandal based on a previously unknown blog source. Only after they verified the information themselves were traditional news media outlets willing to report the story. In the aftermath, journalists then went back to attribute the blog where the e-mails were first published.

Blogs were also used as sources by traditional news media when they provided other exclusive information about the scandal, for instance that Foley was observed in an online chat room after the scandal broke or when a conservative blog revealed the identity of one of the pages involved. More often, nevertheless, blogs became sources in traditional news media when they created a buzz on a topic. In these cases, traditional news media did not refer to specific blogs, but used the generic terms “blogs,” “bloggers,” and the “blogosphere.” In their reporting, traditional news media continuously acknowledged the impact of bloggers on the scandal in these general terms,
but only rarely acknowledged specific bloggers as sources in their own reporting. Almost two-thirds of the blog sources used by traditional news media to cover the Foley scandal were not specified.

The exception, nevertheless, occurred when bloggers appeared as experts and pundits in television newscasts, which overall used blog sources much more often than newspapers. It was CNN that accounted for almost two-thirds of all blog source uses in the context of the scandal and that invited liberal and conservative bloggers to state their opinions. Interestingly, conservative bloggers interviewed in this context, most notably conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan, broke ranks with Republicans on how the party’s leadership handled the scandal. It seems as if CNN invited these bloggers not only to provide context on the blogosphere’s role in the scandal, but also to add fresh voices with independent views to the discussion, which too often is dominated by liberal and conservative pundits reiterating their party’s talking points (Farhi, 2008). The analysis showed that bloggers were only used once as sources in the usual left-right punditry, when CNN used AmericaBlog and Powerline to show liberal and conservative standpoints on the scandal. It is also noteworthy that the two bloggers most often used as sources were Sullivan, who at the time had an affiliation with Time, but always remained an independent voice, and liberal blogger John Aravosis of AmericaBlog. Both were very critical of the Republican leadership’s role in the scandal. And both were repeatedly interviewed and cited by television networks to state their opinions.

The political filter blogs, on the other hand, used traditional news media much more frequently in their coverage of the scandal than traditional news media used blogs. The analysis showed significant differences between liberal and conservative bloggers in
their use of sources. Liberal blogs accounted for almost nine out of 10 traditional news media sources used in the context of the Foley scandal. Coverage of this topic in the conservative blogs was much more limited, because it was demoralizing to the conservative base and damaging to Republican prospects in the November elections. Liberal bloggers, on the other hand, expanded their scandal coverage as it became evident that a Democratic landslide victory in the elections was apparent.

The analysis showed that blogs used traditional news media as sources when (a) they provided exclusive information, (b) they provided interviews with opinion sources, (c) they provided visuals to illustrate an issue, and (d) they provided controversial opinions themselves. However, there were differences among blogs on when they cited traditional news media content. Some of the filter blogs cited traditional news media with a delay of one or two days, following the leads of other blogs. This was especially apparent in the posts of the liberal blogs Talking Points Memo, Eschaton, and Think Progress as well as the conservative blog Captain’s Quarters. Several times, these blogs posted links to traditional news media story with a day’s delay. This could be an indication that intermedia agenda-setting effects also occur among filter blogs with some filter blogs following the lead of others.

Foremost, blogs cited traditional news media when they provided exclusive or new information on the development of the scandal. ABC News, which broke the scandal to the American public and advanced much of the traditional news media’s investigation of the scandal, was by far the most-cited source of the blogs. The Washington Post, which also provided exclusive stories on the developments, was also cited widely. Blogs especially cited both of these sources during the first days after the scandal broke. Seven
blogs, for instance, cited the initial ABC News story during the first two days of the scandal coverage. The five liberal blogs also cited a *Washington Post* story with an interview with House Majority Leader John Boehner contradicting Speaker Dennis Hastert. This exclusive coverage of traditional news media created buzz in the blogosphere.

Traditional news media sources in general provided much of the content that was published in the blog posts. Blogs cited traditional news media on every important aspect of the scandal and its effects. While ABC News dominated this source relationship with its exclusive reporting, blogs also cited many other traditional news media that provided advances to the story. This is especially true for regional traditional news media that conducted interviews with politicians commenting on the scandal. This led to a second layer of citations in the source relationship of traditional news media and blogs. Many blogs cited traditional news media as factual sources that provided information without interjecting their opinions. However, included in these traditional news media reports were opinions of their sources, which the blogs then specifically linked to. The analysis showed many blog links to partisan reactions reported by traditional news media. This included comments, for instance, of Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi criticizing Hastert or Vice President Dick Cheney defending him. Blogs cited traditional news media sources such as White House spokespersons, party strategists, lobbyists as well as many representatives and senators, such as Democrat Joe Lieberman, who defended Republicans, and Republican John McCain, who called for an investigation.

Interestingly, blogs increasingly linked to videos of the television networks when they referenced these opinions. These visual elements became an important part of the
scandal coverage in the blogs. These video links were used to display the opinions of the sources, but also to highlight comments made on camera, which the blogs then criticized. This happened, for instance, when Fox News anchor Brit Hume put the Foley scandal into a context with previous Democratic sex scandals or when Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, blamed the scandal on the diversity of American society. Moreover, visual elements were also used by liberal bloggers to attack Republican leaders. These blogs repeatedly posted Reuters photos that showed President Bush with Foley as well as Hastert holding a press conference in front of a cemetery. Both of these uses of visual elements show that blogs moved beyond solely posting texts in this election and embraced multimedia sources to advance their own coverage.

Blogs also linked to pointed commentaries in traditional news media as the scandal unfolded. Most notably, blogs created a buzz about the conservative *Washington Times* asking Hastert to resign on the fifth day of the scandal coverage. Most blogs immediately cited this editorial directly or linked to other traditional news media stories that reported on calls for Hastert’s resignation. This editorial also became a major topic for conservative bloggers, who overall only provided limited scandal coverage because it showed a rift within the conservative establishment during the election campaign, and would have further dampened Republican chances in the elections. In the following days, the blogs cited more editorials asking for Hastert’s resignation as well as conservative commentaries that criticized liberal politicians who turned the scandal into a campaign topic.

While the above analysis of this study shows that blogs and traditional news media developed a broad source relationship in their coverage of the Foley scandal, it
also shows only few indications of the development of a source cycle, in which content is passed back and forth between both formats by continuously using each other as sources (Leskovec et al., 2009; Messner & DiStaso, 2008). One such instance occurred on September 29 and 30, when *The Washington Post* reported that Majority Leader Boehner indicated in an interview that he had informed Hastert about Foley’s behavior a long time before the scandal became public and that Hastert allegedly said to him that he would solve the issue. Blogs cited this story widely in their posts and created such a buzz that CNN was citing their reaction to the newspaper’s story. Blogs then went on to cite reporting updates by *The Washington Post*. However, there was no direct interaction with the newspaper itself. Another indication for a source cycle occurred on October 6 when a regional blogger in Utah interviewed a Republican congressman who belittled the scandal. This story was then picked up by CNN several times throughout the day as well as by the *Salt Lake Tribune*, which then in turn was cited by the liberal blog *Daily Kos*.

While some indications for the existence of a source cycle were found, they were rather weak in the case of the Foley scandal. Blogs and traditional news media regularly cited each other as the scandal unfolded. Blogs referred to the breaking news coverage of the traditional news media, which in turn repeatedly acknowledged the *Stop Sex Predators* blog that first published Foley’s e-mails. However, no indication was found that a certain traditional news media outlet engaged with the blogs in such a cycle or that a certain blog did so with traditional news media. The *Stop Sex Predators* blog, which was most cited by the traditional news media, was created only for the purpose of publishing the e-mails and was discontinued soon afterwards. The minor cycles found in the case study of the Foley scandal showed only an interaction, in which one traditional
news media outlet provided exclusive reporting that was cited by the blogs, which then were cited by another traditional news media outlet. The second interaction occurred when a blog provided exclusive coverage that was cited by traditional news media, which then were quoted by another blog.

These two occurrences underline that a direct source relationship exist among traditional news media and blogs at times. Nevertheless, these relationships were very rare during the 40-day period, in which traditional news media and blogs used each other as sources to cover the Foley scandal.

Towards a Process Model for the Source Interaction

While this study only found two instances in which content was passed back and forth between traditional news media and blogs through the use of each other as sources, the strong source interaction overall during the two-month election period allows for an analysis of the source relationship in more general terms. Figure 5.1 shows such a general source cycle model that explains the process through which traditional news media and blogs engage in their source interaction.

The results of this study made it evident that the source relationship between traditional news media and blogs is most often started by the reporting of traditional news media. Rarely does a blog such as Stop Sex Predators start a new source cycle with its exclusive reporting. Generally, a traditional news media outlet reports exclusive news, which is then referenced and editorialized on by blogs.

The strong opinions of political blogs and the accumulation of buzz in the blogosphere on the topic then become newsworthy for traditional news media – not
necessarily the one that initially broke news – for the second day of coverage on this news topic. Traditional news media also often use blog sources at this stage in their editorials to show opinions, often controversial ones, of political pundits. The blogs then reference the second day coverage of the traditional news media again and editorialize on it once more, leading the sourcing process into a cycle that goes on as long as the topic remains in the news and as long as traditional news media and blogs contribute new information or opinions. As the study has shown at this stage of the cycle, bloggers are also often interviewed as expert or pundit sources by traditional news media, which also leads to a strengthening of the cycle. In an election, as also shown by this study, the time period of the overall cycle can last for several days or even weeks.

As mentioned above, a blog generally does not break news that then is cited in traditional news media reports. Most often, blogs cite traditional news media reports. However, when a blog is the first outlet to report a news topic, such as *Stop Sex*
Predators on the Foley scandal, the blog is not able to reach the general public. Figure 5.2 shows the limited exposure of such a breaking news blog in an overall source interaction model. Most of these breaking news blogs are only known to a limited public, an audience of several thousand readers, far from a majority of the news audience in society. An obscure blog, such as *Stop Sex Predators*, might not even attract the attention of a limited public during an initial time period, but might only be viewed by a filter blog or an individual traditional news media outlet. The exclusive information on a breaking news blog, therefore, can only reach the general public through the sourcing and breaking news reporting of a traditional news media outlet. In the case of the *Stop Sex Predators* blog, the information only reached the general public after ABC News reported it.

*Figure 5.2*
Source Interaction Model
A breaking news blog’s limited exposure can, however, extend to filter blogs, which then can influence the blogosphere as the news spreads from blog to blog. While the blogosphere also has only limited exposure to the public, the creation of buzz on the blogs can influence traditional news media to report on the issue and use blogs as sources. Once a traditional news media outlet uses a blog as a source, other elite traditional news media will follow that report on the same issue. This became evident in the study as more and more traditional news media reported on the Foley scandal and cited *Stop Sex Predators* even days after ABC News initially had broken the story.

Elite traditional news media also have a proven effect on regional and local news media, which for national news stories heavily rely on elite media reporting. In contrast to blogs, all traditional news media outlets have exposure to the general public. Exceptions to this process model exist when traditional news media – elite, regional and local – notice newsworthy topics through their routine monitoring of filter blogs. Filter blogs, on the other hand, also do not only regularly monitor elite news media, but also regional and local media if certain topics, for instance regional elections, are of interest to them.

The results of this study also indicated that a source sub-cycle might exist between conservative media and blogs. The source interaction during the Foley scandal revealed that conservative blogs rely heavily on conservative news media outlets. Figure 5.3 outlines a model that describes how this conservative sub-cycle and a possible liberal sub-cycle create a combined political buzz that in turn influences traditional news media, a limited public, and the political blogosphere as a whole. While the source analysis has shown that conservative and liberal blogs alike are using national news magazines, elite
newspapers, television networks, news agencies and internet news media as their sources, additional examinations found that especially conservative blogs rely on conservative publications and television shows as their news sources. While this study did not analyze the use of radio sources and politicians as sources, it can be assumed that conservative talk radio and conservative politicians are used as additional sources by conservative bloggers. A similar influence has developed in the liberal political sphere in recent years with the advent of liberal talk radio and liberal cable news shows, whose influence should be further explored by future research.

*Figure 5.3*
Source Sub-Cycle Model
While the national news organizations provide the news topics for discussion in this sub-cycle model, the conservative and liberal spheres provide the political discussions, which influence political filter blogs on both sides of the political spectrum as they use general and partisan media as their sources. The more filter blogs engage in a certain topic, the more political buzz is created, which in turn increases attention to the opinions in the overall political blogosphere. While, as pointed out above, filter blogs and the political blogosphere can only reach a limited public, the buzz created by them can gain the attention of traditional news media outlets, which then cite blogs’ opinions and thereby start the overall source cycle between traditional news media and blogs.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Source Interaction Between Traditional News Media and Blogs

McCombs (2005) pointed out the importance of studying the agenda-setting influence of blogs and researching the use of news sources as part of the different stages of the agenda-setting concept. Researchers have recently begun to apply the concept of intermedia agenda-setting to the study of relationships between traditional news media and new media formats (Cornfield et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2002). This study combined the concepts of intermedia agenda-setting and agenda-building to study the source relationships between traditional news media and blogs and the findings of this study have added to this growing body of literature in this area. It is apparent that traditional news media heavily influence the agenda of blogs by being their dominant sources. On the other hand, blogs are also gaining a growing influence on the agenda of traditional news media. In contrast, however, blogs are competing with many other sources in shaping the traditional media news agenda.

This study shows that using each other as factual and opinion sources has become very common for traditional news media and blogs. Blogs have the “outsider status” (Tremayne, 2007, p. xvi) that television had in the 1950s. They are seen as providers of unfiltered information and they have developed a collective influence that cannot be ignored by traditional news media journalists. Blogs have taken on the role of commentators and investigate reporters at the same time, a combination that violates traditional journalistic standards that separate facts and opinion.
Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that there is some hesitation among traditional journalists to trust blogs, which leads them to not fully attribute information to specific blogs. As this study has shown, many blog source uses are only attributed to generic blog terms and not specific blogs. Even in the case of a specific event in which a blog breaks a major news story, such as the Mark Foley scandal, traditional news media do not regularly attribute information to a specific blog. For instance, The Los Angeles Times refers to “a blogger” that posted the Foley e-mails, CNN to “the burning question on the blogs” and Fox News to “a gay activist blogger” without providing further identification for the specific blogs. This circumstance raises questions, whether newsroom attribution practices and guidelines have to be implemented or amended.

While CNN was the only traditional news media outlet that did not specifically attribute the majority of its blog sources, the analysis of other elite traditional news media showed similar trends, such as Fox News not naming 36.1% of them. However, this phenomenon cannot only be attributed to a possibly more relaxed attribution practice on cable news channels. The New York Times did not name 35.5% of its blog sources, The Washington Post 50%, and the Los Angeles Times 43.8%. Future research should investigate whether this is just a phenomenon in regard to blogs or whether the increase in Internet sources has led to a different attribution practice overall. This attribution issue has consequences for the quality of journalism in general.

According to Mencher (2008), the credibility of news in the public’s views is closely linked to upholding traditional journalistic standards such as accuracy and attribution of sources. The standards of accuracy and source attribution establish trust between traditional news media and their audiences and trustworthiness in this context.
has been shown to establish credibility (Ibelema & Powell, 2001). Television networks have generally been more trusted than newspapers due to their “visual realism” (p. 42). However, newspapers have ranked high on their “expertise.” While blogs do not rank high on credibility with journalists (Sweetser et al., 2008), they have higher rankings on credibility with their users and high rankings on depth of information with politically-interested Internet users (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Johnson et al., 2008). Lowrey and Mackay (2008) suggested traditional news media adjust their practices to meet the challenges posed by blogs. However, this would be the wrong move for already embattled traditional news media. If they lower their standards, there might not be a reason for audiences to consume their news. What has distinguished them from blogs and other new media formats in the past was an editorial process that guaranteed high quality news and information. Lowering the bar further seems to be a dangerous path for traditional news media to take. On the other hand, the low blog quotation rates found in this study for the three television networks as well as USA Today and The Christian Science Monitor also show that some news organizations seem to have high quality reporting and attribution guidelines in place. Maintaining these standards will be the challenge of the future.

The consequences for political filter bloggers from the findings of this study are two-fold. On the one hand, the increasing uses of them in traditional news media or their appearances as interview sources on television newscasts and talk shows legitimize some bloggers as credible news sources, not only for journalists, but also for the public. While bloggers might not have a strong agenda-setting effect on the public, they can influence public discourse by affecting the agenda of traditional news media, which in turn have a
proven effect on public opinion. The more blogs are used as sources in the future, the more credibility they will gain as journalists tend to choose sources that have proven to be trustworthy and newsworthy. On the other hand, the more blogs are utilized as trustworthy sources by traditional news media, the more they will also be trusted by the news media audiences, which can lead to an audience growth for blogs as well. While traditional news media still function as a blog filter for the general public, this can change as more and more newspaper readers and television viewers are directly accessing the blog coverage. Over time, this has the potential of developing direct agenda-setting effects on public opinion.

At times, the findings of this study show that traditional news media and blogs engage in a source cycle in which they continuously use each other as sources. While the occurrences of this cycle were found to be rare in the case study analysis of the Foley scandal, they show that the source relationship between the two formats is developing into more than just one using the other as a source. Blogs cite the coverage of the traditional news media so heavily that they have already become part of their own coverage. Many blog posts solely consist of quotes from traditional news media reporting, which they highlight and include in the broader political discussion. Blogs have shown that they can have an impact on the political discourse and on the careers of politicians. Therefore, traditional news media cannot ignore the buzz in the political blogosphere. Traditional news media follow the postings on blogs very closely and continuously cite blogs in their political coverage. The use of blogs in traditional news media, therefore, has moved far beyond the coverage of the blog phenomenon itself that dominated this relationship at the beginning.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As with all research, this study also has its limitations. The selection of the 10 elite traditional news media and 10 political filter blogs provided an adequate sample for the purposes of this study, but it limits generalizations to all traditional news media and the blogosphere. The findings of this study showed that the source relationship between the traditional news media and blogs includes many different aspects and media outlets, which go beyond national newspapers, television networks, and filter blogs and also include regional media, magazines, and niche publications. While this study is the first that tracks the source relationship between traditional news media and blogs in a news event, future research should further explore this relationship in additional case studies. They will help to establish a broader research base beyond the two cycles detected in this study to further develop the models for the interaction between traditional news media and blogs. Future studies should also broaden the sample of traditional news media and blogs to allow for even greater scope in the analysis of this relationship. This should also include the website content of traditional news media, which have expanded their exclusive coverage for the Web due to their changing business models.

This research also revealed that a niche source cycle might exist among conservative news media and conservative bloggers. While this study did not explore the sourcing in conservative traditional news media, due to their lower standing in audience reach, the strong orientation of conservative bloggers towards their counterparts in the traditional news media became apparent in this analysis. Future research should explore this relationship in more depth, which will help to further develop the source cycle model. One of today’s important issues for conservative Americans, such as the protests
against nationalized health care or against economic stimulus spending, would provide valuable content to examine the source relationship among conservative media formats.

The delayed source uses by some of the bloggers in this study also raise the question whether there are intermedia agenda-setting processes occurring among filter blogs. Leskovec et al. (2009) have also found indications for such a delay. In today’s new media environment, where all information is available instantly, especially when mainly focusing on traditional news media sources, it is not understandable why certain prominent blogs lag behind others. Therefore, this is also a research area well worth pursuing. The blogosphere has also seen an increase in traditional news media blogs, which could be included in this analysis as well.

In terms of journalistic attribution standards, the question arises whether there are certain newsroom guidelines in place at this point that guide reporting and online research practices and the citing of online sources at elite traditional news media. It would be interesting to analyze whether journalists are still predominantly citing blogs anonymously or whether these new sources have by now established their credibility to the point that they have become conventional sources in reporters’ newsgathering practices. This should also be compared to the treatment of other offline and online sources used by traditional news media journalists. It will also be important to analyze which criteria reporters use to determine the reliability of these sources.

The 2010 Congressional Midterm Elections will provide an opportunity to track this development and compare the findings to this study. It would also be interesting to see whether the change in the presidency as well as in the majorities of the House of Representatives and the Senate from one party to another has an impact on how engaged
 liberal and conservative bloggers are in their election coverage and willingness to cite traditional news media. With conservatives in the minority, another study could determine whether the few uses of traditional news media sources in conservative blogs were an isolated phenomenon of the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections or a characteristic of conservative blogs in general. Additional content analyses combined with statistical analysis should track this development next year. These future studies should also examine the increasing role of blogs for political campaigns as well as the combined effect of blogs and online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter on political coverage in traditional news media.

Beyond the content dimension of the relationship between traditional news media and blogs, future studies should also analyze possible changes to the economic media model. New research is needed to determine whether the oligopoly of a few international media corporations can be maintained in the environment of the Web 2.0. Future studies should analyze whether blogs and social networks change this media model fundamentally and increasingly compete with media corporations or whether these new media formats are slowly adopted by corporations, allowing them to maintain the economic status quo in the long run.
REFERENCES


Messner, M. (2005, November). *Blog-attacks: How weblogs change political reporting and set the agenda for the traditional media.* Presentation at the conference of the National Communication Association in Boston, MA.


Singer, J. B. (2003). Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism. *Journalism, 4*(2), 139-163.


APPENDIX A

Coding Protocol for Newspaper Articles

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study of the use of blogs as sources in national newspapers during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States. This content analysis examines how newspapers use blogs in their election coverage. Part of the coding process is to identify the election coverage that involved the use of blogs.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the coding process.

Procedure

All coding material is available in the LexisNexis Academic database. Access the LexisNexis Academic database through the website of the University of Miami library at http://www.library.miami.edu. Use the “Guided News Search” function in LexisNexis, select “General News” as the news category and “Major Papers” as the news source.

Through the “Source List” link select the following major newspapers, one at a time for each search: The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, and The Christian Science Monitor. Click “Paste to Search” after you made a newspaper selection. The newspaper name should appear under “Search this publication title(s).”

As “Search Terms” enter “blog,” or “blogger,” or “blogosphere” at the same time. Search in the full text of the articles. Search in the date range from “09/08/2006” to “11/07/2006.” Click on “Search” to start the search. The following page should show the
search results as a document list. Click on each article for the coding procedure. Exclude double entries from the analysis.

The unit of analysis for this content analysis is the news source. Therefore, each mention of “blog,” “blogger,” and “blogosphere,” which will be bold-faced in the articles, will be coded. Some articles, therefore, will have multiple entries on the coding sheet.
Coding Process

The following steps should be taken in the content analysis. Please read the explanations carefully before you start the coding:

v1. Media Category

1-Newspaper [Insert 1 for all]

v2. Newspaper [As shown in document list]

1-The New York Times
2-The Washington Post
3-Los Angeles Times
4-USA Today
5-The Christian Science Monitor

v3. Article number [As shown in document list]

1-XXX

v4. Month [As shown in document list]

1- September
2- October
3- November

v5. Day [As shown in document list]

1-31
v6. Position of Article in the Newspaper [As shown in document list]
   1-Front Page [A-1]
   2-A-section [excluding front page and editorial page]
   3-Editorial Page
   4-Local/Metropolitan
   5-Business/Finance/Money
   6-Other
   7-Cannot tell

v7. Type of Story [Click on article to determine]
   [News/feature stories are distinguished from news briefs by length. An interview has a Q&A-format and is not a flow text. An editorial is marked as such at the top of the article (opinion, editorial, column name).]
   1-News or Feature Story
   2-News brief [no longer than 5 sentences]
   3-Interview/Q&A
   4-Editorial/Opinion/Book Review/Essay
   5-Other [e.g. Corrections, Letter to the editor, Photo caption]
   6-Cannot tell

v8. Blog mention number [Check bold-faced search terms in text and assign numbers based on appearance in the text; Write “0,” if no search terms can be found”]
   1-XXX
v9. Position of blog mention [Check position of bold-faced search terms in text]

1-Headline
2-Lead [first paragraph]
3-Body of story
4-Other

v10. Blog Use [Check above definition]

[A source is defined as a direct or indirect quotation that attributes information to a blog. A factual source has an attribution to new facts and information written on a blog. An opinion source has an attribution to an opinion written on a blog. A simple mention only mentions a blog briefly in an overall context.]

1-Factual Source
2-Opinion Source
3-Simple Mention
4-Other
5-Cannot tell

v11. Is blog use related to 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections?

[Determine whether the overall context the search term is mentioned in has a relationship to the election]

1-Yes
2-No

ONLY CONTINUE IF PREVIOUS ANSWER WAS “1-Yes”
v12. Specific Blog [Check whether a blog name or website address is mentioned]

1- DailyKos (http://www.dailykos.com)

2- Talking Points Memo (http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com)

3- Eschaton (http://www.atrios.blogspot.com)

4- Crooks and Liars (http://www.crooksandliars.com)

5- Think Progress (http://thinkprogress.org)

6- Instapundit (http://www.instapundit.com)

7- Michelle Malkin (http://www.michellemalkin.com)

8- Little Green Footballs (http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com)

9- Powerline (http://www.powerlineblog.com)

10- Captain’s Quarters (http://www.captainsquartersblog.com)

11- Other [SPECIFY on code sheet under 12a.]

12- No name mentioned
APPENDIX B
Coding Protocol for Television News Transcripts

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study of the use of blogs as sources in national television networks and cable news channels during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States. This content analysis examines how television newscasts use blogs in their election coverage. Part of the coding process is to identify the election coverage that involved the use of blogs.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the coding process.

Procedure

All coding material is available in the LexisNexis Academic database. Access the LexisNexis Academic database through the website of the University of Miami library at http://www.library.miami.edu. Use the “Guided News Search” function in LexisNexis, select “News Transcripts” as the news category and the following categories one at a time as the news sources: “CNN Transcripts,” “Fox News Network Transcripts,” “ABC News Transcripts,” “CBS News Transcripts,” and “NBC News Transcripts.”

As “Search Terms” enter “blog,” or “blogger,” or “blogosphere” at the same time. Search in the full text of the articles. Search in the date range from “09/08/2006” to “11/07/2006.” Click on “Search” to start the search. The following page should show the search results as a document list. Click on each transcript for the coding procedure. Under
the CNN Transcripts, LexisNexis also list entries from CNN.com. These entries need to be excluded from the analysis. Also exclude double entries from the analysis.

The unit of analysis for this content analysis is the news source. Therefore, each mention of “blog,” “blogger,” and “blogosphere,” which will be bold-faced in the transcript, will be coded. Some transcripts, therefore, will have multiple entries on the coding sheet.
Coding Process

The following steps should be taken in the content analysis. Please read the explanations carefully before you start the coding:

v1. Media Category
   2-Television [Insert 2 for all]

v2. Television/Cable Network [As shown in document list]
   6-CNN [Do not code transcripts from CNN.com]
   7-Fox News
   8-ABC News
   9-CBS News
   10-NBC News

v3. Transcript number [As shown in document list]
   1-XXX

v4. Month [As shown in document list]
   1- September
   2- October
   3- November

v5. Day [As shown in document list]
   1-31
v6. Time [As shown in document list]
   1- 0:00 a.m. – 5:59 a.m.
   2- 6:00 a.m. – 11:59 a.m.
   3- 12:00 p.m. – 5:59 p.m.
   4- 6:00 p.m. – 11:59 p.m.

v7. Blog mention number [Check bold-faced search terms in text and assign numbers based on appearance in the text]
   1-XXX

v8. Type of news segment [Determine by context in the transcript]
   1-News/video segment
   2-Moderation (anchor, moderator talking alone or with guests)
   3-Other
   4-Cannot tell

v9. Position of blog mention [Check position of bold-faced search terms in text]
   1-beginning of show/transcript (first five paragraph)
   2-body of show/transcript
v10. Blog Use [Check above definition]

[A source is defined as a direct or indirect quotation that attributes information to a blog. A factual source has an attribution to new facts and information written on a blog. An opinion source has an attribution to an opinion written on a blog. A simple mention only mentions a blog briefly in an overall context.]

1-Factual Source
2-Opinion Source
3-Simple Mention
4-Other
5-Cannot tell

v11. Is blog use related to 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections?

[Determine whether the overall context the search term is mentioned in has a relationship to the election]

1-Yes
2-No

ONLY CONTINUE IF PREVIOUS ANSWER WAS “1-Yes”
v12. Specific Blog [Check whether a blog name or website address is mentioned]

1- DailyKos (http://www.dailykos.com)

2- Talking Points Memo (http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com)

3- Eschaton (http://www.atrios.blogspot.com)

4- Crooks and Liars (http://www.crooksandliars.com)

5- Think Progress (http://thinkprogress.org)

6- Instapundit (http://www.instapundit.com)

7- Michelle Malkin (http://www.michellemalkin.com)

8- Little Green Footballs (http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com)

9- Powerline (http://www.powerlineblog.com)

10- Captain’s Quarters (http://www.captainsquartersblog.com)

11- Other [SPECIFY on code sheet under v12a.]

12- No name mentioned
APPENDIX C

Coding Protocol for Blog Content

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study of the use of traditional news media sources in blogs during the 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections in the United States. This content analysis examines how blogs use traditional news media sources in their election coverage.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the coding process.

Procedure

All coding content is available on the World Wide Web in the archives of 10 selected blogs. All blog posts between September 8, 2006 and November 7, 2006 will be coded.

On each day there may be none, one or several posts on the blog. A post can only contain one word or can be several paragraphs long. The coder needs to identify sources within the posts. There will be multiple entries on the coding sheet for most dates.

The unit of analysis for this content analysis is the news source. Sources on a blog differ from traditional media sources, as they do not only appear as direct and indirect quotes, but also as hyperlinks and as boxed items. Hyperlinks are identified by being able to transfer the coder to another website or another page on the weblog. A source might also be a video link.
It is important that the coder identifies the direct news source for the blog. For instance, a blog can quote Senator John McCain, but can at the same time connect the quote with a hyperlink to CNN, which conducted the interview with McCain. In this case, the news source of the blogs would be CNN and not McCain. It is the goal to identify the traditional news media sources that blogs rely on. If the blogger had conducted the interview with McCain, then McCain would be considered the source of the blog and not a traditional news media outlet. In case of a video link, the source of the blog is the producer of the video, e.g. CNN or ABC News.

All coding material is available through the archives of the following blogs. Please follow the instructions on how to find the individual archives.

**DailyKos (http://www.dailykos.com)**

This blog does not have an archive that lets users search by specific dates. However, it is possible to find the coding material by changing the URL of the weblog. At the bottom of the website, the coder needs to click on “Next 15” to access older posts. That will change the URL to http://www.dailykos.com/main/2. By then increasing the last digit of the URL from “2” to three digits (e.g. “251”) will allow to retrieve older posts from the desired time frame. This might take a few minutes to do. Individual posts are dated. There are no large headers for dates.

**Talking Points Memo (http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com)**

The archive can be accessed on the top right hand corner of the website by clicking on “Archive.” Then the coding material can be retrieved by clicking on the
respective weeks (e.g. “September 10-September 16, 2006”). Individual posts are dated. There are no large headers for dates.

**Eschaton** ([http://www.atrios.blogspot.com](http://www.atrios.blogspot.com))

To access the archive, the coder needs to scroll down the website and access the pulldown menu on the left side. It is located below the contact information between the links “RSS Feeds” and “Amazon Wish List.” The coding material can be retrieved by clicking on the respective weeks (e.g. “09/10/06-09/17/06”). Individual posts are not dated. However, there are large headers within the archives that indicate a certain date for the posts below them.

**Crooks and Liars** ([http://www.crooksandliars.com](http://www.crooksandliars.com))

To access the archive, the coder needs to scroll down the website and access the calendar on the left side. It is located between the search field and the blogroll. The coding material can be retrieved by clicking on a specific date. Previous months can be accessed by using the link at the bottom of the calendar (e.g. “« Nov.”). Individual posts are dated and there are large headers within the archives that indicate a certain date for the posts below them.

**Think Progress** ([http://thinkprogress.org](http://thinkprogress.org))

To access the archive, the coder needs to scroll down the website and access the “Archives” link on the right side. The coding material can be then be retrieved by
clicking on the specific month. Individual posts are dated. There are no large headers for
dates.

Instapundit (http://www.instapundit.com)

The archive can be accessed on the menu at the top of the website. The coder
needs to click on “Archives.” Then the coder needs to access the specific weeks (e.g.
“September 10, 2006 - September 16, 2006”). Individual posts are not dated. However,
there are large headers within the archives that indicate a certain date for the posts below
them.

Michelle Malkin (http://www.michellemalkin.com)

The archive can be accessed on the menu at the top of the website. The coder
needs to click on “Archives.” Then the coder needs to access the specific months (e.g.
“September 2006”). Individual posts are dated. There are only large headers for the
month. The coder needs to click on the headlines of each post in order to be able to
access the entire post.

Little Green Footballs (http://www.littlegreenfootballs.com)

To access the archive, the coder needs to scroll down the website and access the
the “LGF Monthly Archives” link in the “tools/info” column on the left side. Then the
coder needs to access the specific months (e.g. “2006 -- September”). Individual posts are
dated and there are large headers within the archives that indicate a certain date for the
posts below them.
Powerline (http://www.powerlineblog.com)

To access the archive, the coder needs to scroll down the website and access the
the “Archives By Month” link on the right side. The coding material can be then be
retrieved by clicking on the specific months (e.g. “September 2006”). Individual posts are
not dated. However, there are large headers within the archives that indicate a certain date
for the posts below them.

Captain’s Quarters (http://www.captainsquartersblog.com)

To access the archive, the coder needs to access the the “Archives” link at the top
of the website and choose the “Weekly Archives.” The coding material can be then be
retrieved by clicking on the specific weeks (e.g. “September 10-September 16, 2006”).
Individual posts are not dated. However, there are large headers within the archives that
indicate a certain date for the posts below them.
Coding Process

The following steps should be taken in the content analysis. Please read the explanations carefully before you start the coding:

v1. Media Category

3-Weblog [Insert 3 for all]

v2. Blog

1- DailyKos
2- Talking Points Memo
3- Eschaton
4- Crooks and Liars
5- Think Progress
6- Instapundit
7- Michelle Malkin
8- Little Green Footballs
9- Powerline
10- Captain’s Quarters

v3. Political Orientation

1-liberal [DailyKos, Talking Points Memo, Eschaton, Crooks and Liars, Think Progress]

2-conservative [Instapundit, Michelle Malkin, Little Green Footballs, Powerline, Captain’s Quarters]
v4. Month [As shown in post or header]
   1- September
   2- October
   3- November

v5. Day [As shown in post or header]
   1-31

v6. Post number [count from top to bottom for each day]
   1-XXX

v7. Source number [count from top to bottom in each post]
   1-XXX

v8. Topic of Source Use
   1-Political
   2-Business/Finance
   3-Other
   9-Cannot tell

v9. Source Use
   [A factual source has an attribution to new facts and information. An opinion source has an attribution to an opinion]
   1-Factual Source
   2-Opinion Source
   3-Other
   9-Cannot tell
v10. Is source use related to 2006 Congressional Election?

[Determine whether the overall context the source is mentioned in has a relationship to the election]

1-Yes
2-No
9-Cannot tell

v11. Traditional media name

1-The New York Times
2-The Washington Post
3-Los Angeles Times
4-USA Today
5-The Christian Science Monitor
6-CNN
7-FoxNews
8-ABC News
9-CBS News
10-NBC News
11-Other [SPECIFY under v.12 on code sheet]
12-Cannot tell