

Canadian Political Blogs: Online Opinion Leaders or Opinionated Followers?

By

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Abstract: Self-published web diaries called blogs are one manifestation of the Internet's potential to create new discursive and dialogic spaces for citizens. Blogs are described by their authors and others in the news media (as well as some academic commentators) as a medium that potentially fosters political dialogue in the spirit of Habermas' conceptual "public sphere." Blogs also serve as potential competitors to mass media outlets in political debates in two distinct ways: first, by acting as agenda-setters and framers of issues, events and figures and second, by challenging journalistic norms such as the principles of fairness, neutrality and non-partisanship. In spite of these claims, however, very little empirical evidence exists to date on whether political blogs perform the roles of agenda-setters, gatekeepers or framers, or whether they are actually seen as a challenge or potential replacement to mass media outlets by themselves, by journalists or by those who could utilize blogs to transmit messages to the public. This thesis examines these questions as they pertain to Canadian politics, focusing on the interaction between journalists, partisan bloggers and political communications practitioners to assess whether blogs written by explicitly partisan authors actually: 1) create unique discursive spaces for discussion of Canadian political issues, 2) set agendas for political discussion and set issues and 3) serve as an occupational threat/potential replacement to media outlets for disseminating political information. Using surveys and content analysis, this thesis contends that partisan blogs largely mimic political discussion already occurring in media-produced content and are perceived as a potential, though not completely credible, replacement for shaping political agendas and disseminating information.

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John Donne wrote that “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” Obviously, no achievement is due to the solitary pursuit of one person: each and every accomplishment is the result of the efforts of several people which, aggregated together, contribute towards the final result. This M.A. Thesis is no exception, and I would like to thank those people whose collective efforts have made this possible.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Words and images link individuals to their government, to their culture and to each other. For the past two centuries, citizens have learned about their society through new forms of mass media – first newspapers, then radio and television – that make the written word or the graphic image immediate for all. Each of these media have evolved and adapted as new forms of technology allow information to be disseminated more quickly, with less mediation between the media source and various types of audiences. In the past decade, a new medium – the Internet – has accelerated these changes further, delivering all manner of information directly to individuals and forcing traditional media outlets to change how they communicate with their audiences. New technologies “have reduced the public’s dependence on traditional media” (Graber 2002: 388), allowing citizens both access to more information, more quickly, than ever before, as well as allowing them to publish their own views instantaneously and cheaply. The adage that “freedom of the press applies to those who own one” is hypothetically less relevant in a digital age, as new information technology allows anyone with access to an Internet connection to upload audio and video files, write opinions on a website and communicate with other citizens throughout the world. Rather than being passive consumers of news and information, citizens are said to be able to become “active participants in their culture” (Zuniga 2008: 9).

Blogs are one of the many technological manifestations that allow anyone with access to the Internet to create media content and share information with others. Blogs (a combined contraction of the words *web* and *log*) are regularly-updated, diary-like personal websites, with entries (called posts) appearing in reverse chronological order and typically containing links to other websites (Wallsten 2005: 2; McKenna and Pole 2004: 2; Drezner and Farrell 2005: 5). These websites require very little editing and allow individuals to transmit their opinions and

observations to anyone with Internet access. The network of blogs is collectively referred to as the “blogosphere” (Perlmutter 2008: 16) and it has grown to include more than 110 million blogs worldwide (Technorati 2008). While very few blogs attract large numbers of readers – and, in fact, many are abandoned by their creators after less than a month – some blogs attract broad audiences. So-called “filter blogs” (Herring et al. 2005: 147) that delve into an external topic of interest to the writer – as opposed to the vast majority of diary-like blogs that chronicle the personal lives of their authors – have been the focus of several academic studies into how this technology is changing political and journalistic processes (ie. McKenna and Pole 2004, Drezner and Farrell 2005, Harper 2007, Wallsten 2005, Wallsten 2008, Singer 2005). These blogs have been used to share and debate ideas, focus attention on specific issues, fact-check statements made by politicians and journalists, and mobilize support and raise money for particular candidates. They have been used by citizens for noble purposes, such as allowing those from countries ruled by authoritarian regimes that severely restrict press freedom to tell the outside world about their government’s heavy-handed attempts to quell dissent (Ehrlich 2007; Bronskill 2008: A6). They have also been used for less high-minded purposes, such as spreading false information and malicious lies about celebrities, athletes, politicians and other public and private figures (Dowd 2009; Wingrove 2009: A3). Like any other tool, blogs can be put to positive or negative uses, depending on the intentions of the person using this medium.

This thesis examines how blogs have been used as forums for political discussion in Canada, specifically focusing on how partisan individuals who write blogs influence how political issues are presented to the public. It places these actors among others, including journalists and communications practitioners, in seeking to understand what role partisan activists play in establishing the agenda for public debate and framing how political issues, events and actors

are discussed by journalists and citizens. Because blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, a limited amount of academic analysis has been conducted to measure their potential impact on the practice of Canadian politics. The rapid pace at which communications technology develops makes it necessary to analyze how new forms of communication affect political processes. Though some excellent analyses of Canadian political blogs have been produced in recent years, this research has either focused extensively on one particular subset of blogs or bloggers (Small 2008; Giasson et al., 2009), analyzed patterns of online political discourse (Jansen and Koop 2005; Jansen and Koop 2009); examined how web-based technologies are used by political campaigns (Small 2006; Smith and Chen 2009) and Members of Parliament (Small 2008), or relied heavily on qualitative methods to produce a narrative portrait of Canadian political bloggers and their motivations for blogging (Hunter 2007). Save for Chu's (2007) discussion of how blogs are utilized by journalists and how discussion online mirrors that found in newspaper articles, few insights exist into how partisan blogs might influence media discourse about Canadian politics within a framework that examines how blogs interact with other actors in what is referred to as the agenda-setting process.

Purpose and Overall Framework of Inquiry

This research project examines the relationship between blogs written by partisan individuals and the news media, including how journalists might be influenced by information found on these blogs. To do this, it is necessary to establish what is meant by the term "influence." Obviously, this thesis does not suggest that journalists are somehow coerced into repeating what individuals write on blogs – or indeed, that journalists or policy-makers can even be aware of the vast majority of opinions and arguments that are put forward on blogs. However, as this introduction and the accompanying literature review will explain in more detail, it suggests that

the ability of any individual to put an idea into the public domain potentially increases the likelihood that these opinions – which might otherwise be ignored or marginalized – might contribute to political discussion through the sharing of information and opinion among a wide range of participants. By drawing upon the conceptual idea of the Internet as a realized type of “public sphere” (Habermas 1989) in which individuals deliberate rationally in a forum where opinions are given relatively equal weight, it suggests that journalists and policy-makers might take stock of the ideas put forward by bloggers and potentially act upon them, either by repeating them in a news story or by making a political decision based on these preferences. As I will argue throughout this thesis, this idealized conception is largely not true in practice, but it provides an important starting point for understanding the way in which bloggers might influence political dialogue.

This research aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how political blogs may be used to present information directly to the public or indirectly through journalists who read them. With research from the U.S. showing that journalists are more likely to read blogs than the general public (Dautrich and Barnes 2005a: 9; Dautrich and Barnes 2005b: 10; Roth 2004: 13; Pew Internet and American Life Project 2005: 3) and qualitative evidence showing that Canadian political journalists do read blogs to learn things that will help them do their jobs (Chu 2007), it is necessary to analyze how journalists in Canada both access the information posted on blogs and how they communicate with these writers both publicly (ie. through what they write that is accessible in the public domain) and privately (via email, telephone calls, etc.). An added dimension to this is the extent to which partisan blogs might be used by political actors, such as communications practitioners working for particular politicians, to release information that casts a particular political figure or party in a positive light or alternatively, casts opponents in a

negative light. Tom Flanagan, University of Calgary political scientist and former Conservative Party campaign manager, has suggested that blogs have been used by campaign teams to put information into the public domain that is “not yet ready” for the mainstream media (Flanagan 2007: 232). Blogs are not generally subjected to the same ethical standards as journalists regarding accuracy, fairness, the verification of information and the use of anonymous sources (Singer 2005; Robinson 2006, Canadian Association of Journalists, n.d.). This raises the potential for the Internet to be used to spread “malicious cheap shots and outright deception” (Rosenberg 2008: 17) that, in turn, may pressure journalists to rush to report information that may not be verified simply because it is already in the public domain. This is especially true in an environment where, due to budgetary pressures, more traditional news outlets are reducing the number of reporters employed in their newsrooms and the remaining journalists are expected to take on additional duties (Downie and Schudson 2009). Thus, two areas that this research focuses on specifically are the media consumption habits of bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners as well as how these actors interact with one another in the course of conducting their professional duties.

Scope of Inquiry and Key Concepts

This thesis argues that bloggers act as potential agenda-setters by playing a role in determining which issues are discussed in the media as well as helping frame how the issues that are discussed and the politicians debating these issues are perceived by the public. It also draws upon the idea that partisan bloggers attempt to act as “opinion leaders” who use political information to influence how others – including fellow partisans but also journalists – perceive political figures and debates in a similar fashion to how Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) identified individuals who provide political orientation to others in their peer networks. The concepts of

agenda-setting and framing, along with theoretical models of how these processes take place, are presented in more detail in the literature review in Chapter 2. However, agenda-setting broadly describes how journalists influence “the salience of (public) attitudes towards political issues” (McCombs and Shaw 1972: 177) by highlighting certain topics and not discussing others. Through this process, media coverage may influence both what issues their audiences think about and how they think about these issues (McCombs and Shaw 1994; Cohen 1963; Wanta et al., 2004). There may be several different agendas – for example, a media agenda or a policy-making agenda – influencing one another, with certain actors better able to determine the contours of political debates and shape which issues are discussed within groups of journalists, policy-makers and citizens (Soroka 2002). Framing, meanwhile, refers to the way issues, events and figures are characterized and understood by the public (Popkin 1991). As with agenda-setting, different individuals and groups – including politicians and journalists – present a variety of frames that are accepted or rejected by other actors or the public (Entman 2004: 10; Cook 1998; Edelman 1985). Some researchers have analyzed whether bloggers are capable of setting agendas and framing issues for journalists and the broader public (Harper 2005), with one going so far as to argue that bloggers could perform both agenda setting and framing roles by “identifying emerging issues and diffusing them among members of the mass public but also, and more importantly influencing the issues that politicians and journalists choose to discuss” (Wallsten 2008: 6).

This research tests this hypothesis, as it applies to the discussion of political issues in Canada, in the following ways:

First, it utilizes manifest content analysis to determine the extent to which partisan authors of selected political blogs may *directly influence* what issues are discussed in newspapers, on radio and television networks and on their respective websites and how these topics are presented to readers/viewers. This will be done by analyzing the manifest content contained on blog posts and subsequent web links to “mainstream” forms of media, such as newspaper articles, media outlet-produced video and audio, and so on to assess whether the manner in which issues and individuals are discussed on these blogs is repeated by professional journalists. This includes coding blog posts and media items on the basis of which individuals are discussed in these posts and stories and how they are assessed (ie. positively or negatively). As well, this analysis will highlight the sequence in which these blog posts and media items are disseminated, which should allow initial judgements to be made about whether bloggers act as direct agenda-setters or opinion leaders for journalists, or vice versa. The methodology for this process is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and Appendices II and III. If it is indeed true that blogs are frequently read by journalists (Dautrich and Barnes 2005; Chu 2007) and that blogs can exert an “upward influence” on journalists and political elites by focusing attention on particular issues (Wallsten 2008: 19), then content analysis should be able to reveal whether prominent political blogs in Canada do influence news coverage of political issues and events in this country.

The potential shortcoming of this analysis is that it can only measure the direct influence bloggers might have on the media agenda, or vice versa. With the time and resources available, this study is unable to utilize complex logarithmic formulas and huge databases that track what Leskovec et al., (2009) call “memes,” which are certain phrases or characterizations of issues and individuals that evolve and gain currency over time as they are discussed by journalists and

bloggers. Therefore, the second research component of this study is a survey of journalists, bloggers and communications practitioners to discover how these individuals might be indirectly influenced by blogs in the course of discussing issues. Surveys of partisan bloggers, political journalists and communications practitioners are intended to reveal:

- *Media/blog utilization patterns*, including how often blogs are read by journalists and communications practitioners and which types of media are used by bloggers as a basis for writing their posts. These results should explain which types of media are more likely to produce agenda-setting and framing effects on blog posts and news stories.
- *Patterns of interaction* between bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners (press secretaries and/or communications directors)¹ employed by cabinet ministers and party leaders elected to the Canadian federal Parliament. This includes public communication, such as criticism of a news story or blog post, and its perceived effects. As well, this section discusses private communication among

¹ It is important to make a distinction between communications practitioners who work for political figures, such as cabinet ministers and party leaders, and communications practitioners employed by particular federal government departments and who are members of the Government of Canada's permanent civil service. The Canadian government's communications policy states: "Ministers are the principal spokespersons of the Government of Canada. They are supported in this role by appointed aides, including executive assistants, communication directors and press secretaries in ministers' offices, and by the senior management teams of government institutions, which include deputy heads, heads of communications and other officials. Ministers present and explain government policies, priorities and decisions to the public. Institutions, leaving political matters to the exclusive domain of ministers and their offices, focus their communication activities on issues and matters pertaining to the policies, programs, services and initiatives they administer." (Treasury Board Secretariat 2006). Thus, a distinction is made between political communications professionals who directly serve the minister and are considered "exempt staff" ie. not part of the permanent civil service, and departmental communications professionals who are an entrenched part of the federal bureaucracy. This paper focuses exclusively on exempt political staff who provide communications assistance to ministers and party leaders, and any subsequent reference to "communications professionals," "press secretaries" or "communications directors" refers only to these individuals and not to departmental communications professionals.

these three groups, focusing on how information might be shared among these political actors that is later utilized in blog posts.

- *General attitudinal perceptions* of blogging and its effect on political journalism in Canada, assessing how blogs are perceived and their acknowledged effects on journalistic and political practice.

The methodology used to develop these lines of inquiry and conduct this survey, as well as the presentation of survey results, can be found in Chapter 4.

On the basis of this broad discussion regarding political blogging, agenda-setting and influence, this project is guided by one general research question and two sub-questions which focus more specifically on the current Canadian political context. These questions are:

RQ1: How do Canadian partisan bloggers and journalists covering the federal government interact with and perceive one another? This admittedly broad question can be broken down into a number of specific sub-questions, such as: How frequently do bloggers and journalists interact? What are the dynamics of their relationship? What influence do members of one group feel they might have on what members of the other group write? How do they regard themselves and their respective places within Canadian politics and journalism? These questions have been put to a small number of Canadian journalists (Chu 2007) and bloggers (Hunter 2007), but no quantitative analysis of these perceptions has been conducted to date.

RQ2: What effect and/or influence have partisan bloggers had on the content produced by journalists covering the federal Conservative government in the period following its election (that is, after January 23, 2006)? To date, most analyses of Canadian blogs and the

impact of new technology on political communication (Smith and Chen 2009; Jansen and Koop 2009; Small 2006; Small 2008; Chu 2007) as well as journalistic commentary on blogs have focused on how they have influenced media coverage during elections. No Canadian analysis has been conducted on blog content during a non-election period, nor has there been any analysis of how blog discussions might affect what journalists cover in terms of the political and governing processes. This period immediately following the 2006 federal election is especially critical, as Canadian political blogs became more prominent due to their perceived role in focusing public attention on an alleged insider trading scandal that came to light during the election campaign which, it was argued, further damaged the credibility of the governing Liberals and shifted momentum to the Conservative Party (Chu 2007). Also, during the first six months of Stephen Harper's Conservative government, Harper and some of his senior advisors described blogs as a more favourable medium for party officials to use to communicate messages to the public (Libin 2006; Flanagan 2007) while the relationship between the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) experienced significant strains due to new rules imposed by the new government that limited the Parliamentary Press Gallery's access to cabinet meetings and press conferences (Vongdouangchanh 2006).

RQ3: How are partisan blogs used to transmit political messages on behalf of a particular political party, and to what extent is this information relayed to the public by journalists covering the governing and parliamentary processes at the national level in Canada?

Further to RQ2, how might blogs written by those who support a particular political party be used by those in that party to achieve particular ends? Not only is this an under-analyzed subject in all the blogging literature, save for a few exceptions (ie. Sroka 2006), but it raises a broader set of questions regarding whether blogs could be a means for political parties and governments to circumvent the traditional media and speak directly to their own supporters and

the broader electorate. This is especially important given the fear that the authors of blogs and other websites may not hold themselves to the same standards journalists are encouraged to follow regarding fairness, accuracy and clearly separating opinions from facts.² Though some would rightly point out that not all journalists adhere to these principles, an expectation exists that they should live up to these expectations, whereas bloggers are not bound by similar professional norms.

This research incorporates content analysis and a survey of partisan bloggers, Parliamentary journalists and communications practitioners working for the federal government to gain insights into how members of each of these three groups interact. Specific details of the methodology employed for the content analysis can be found in Chapter 3, which explains the process used to select the blogs that were subjected to content analysis and shows the results of this research. The specific methodology used to create the surveys and select members of the respondent groups can be found with the survey results in Chapter 4. These research results build upon an extensive review of the relevant literature on communications and media theory, Canadian political journalism and political blogging found in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by reviewing the research results as well as discussing future inquiries to be conducted in this area.

² The Canadian Association of Journalists Statement of Principles, adopted at that organization's annual meeting in 2002, states that journalists "will not allow our own biases to influence fair and accurate reporting" and "will clearly identify news and opinion so that readers, viewers and listeners know which is which" (CAJ, n.d.)

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents five bodies of literature which provided the theoretical foundations for this study. The first section explores the theoretical debates regarding democratic deliberation and the potential for the Internet and blogs to create a dialogic “public sphere” as described by German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1989). The Habermasian vision of rational deliberation between equals provoked a rich discussion on how the Internet might foster such citizen deliberation in a mass democracy. Building upon this theoretical perspective, the second section analyzes various theories related to how citizens learn about government and politics in a democratic society, specifically examining observations of how media outlets establish parameters for public debate, consciously and unconsciously determine what is presented to readers and viewers and frame how issues are presented and discussed. Thirdly, the chapter examines the specific history and role of the political news media in Canada, examining their evolution from both institutional and critical perspectives. Fourth, the chapter discusses blogging and how these websites act as both forums for unmediated, citizen-driven political discourse and allow their authors to act as “opinion leaders” for journalists and the wider public. Finally, the paper will present a brief summary of the limited academic literature written about political blogging in Canada. The available scholarly research suggests that blogs not only challenge media outlets’ ability to exclusively set parameters on political dialogue, but may also influence how journalists interpret political figures and events. While their collective ability to set agendas challenges the media’s monopoly on framing issues and setting agendas for political discussion, this raises important considerations – including the content, the source and the possible motivations behind blogs – that citizens and journalists must taken into account when judging information originating in the blogosphere. These issues will be explored in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

The Birth, Death and Resurrection of the Public Sphere

The classic notion of democracy, or “rule by the people,” can be traced back to ancient Athens, with the ideal Athenian democracy described as citizens gathering in the Acropolis to deliberate the issues facing their city-state. This public discussion – limited as it was to free male property owners residing in Athens – nonetheless established a demarcation between an individual’s “private sphere” in the home and the “public sphere” of the marketplace, or *agora*, where he would participate in political discussion and democratic decision-making among the community of his fellow citizens, or *polis* (Habermas 1989: 3-4). Though most of the European world was not ruled by this form of government throughout much of its history, the ideals of Athenian democracy would be partially reinvigorated in Europe during the 16th and 17th century as the expansion of trade created opportunities for more citizens to take part in economic and political activities. The expansion of commercial activity also led to the exchange of news, as merchants required more and more information about distant events in order to generate profit on the goods they bought and sold (Habermas 1989: 16). The invention of the printing press made it possible for economic information to spread quickly, but Habermas also argues that it allowed ideas to spread throughout Europe, especially among the educated and literate “bourgeois” classes that used the printed word to transmit ideas about matters such as law, medicine, philosophy, religion and education (Habermas 1989: 23-25). This process helped create an explicitly “public sphere of civil society” (Habermas 1989: 23) that would challenge those in power to “legitimate (themselves) before public opinion” (Habermas 1989: 25-26). The public sphere existed as a point between the private sphere of individuals and the state, with citizens participating in this “institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (Fraser 1997: 70) to articulate their opinions about how society ought to function, while the officials of the state

interacted with this public sphere to learn about the needs and demands of citizens (Habermas 1989: 30-31).

Habermas (1989: 33-34) contends that the public sphere manifested itself through printed forms of media such as newsletters and journals as well as in spaces such as coffee houses, salons, literary societies and so-called “table societies.” Most of these gatherings were private, male-dominated and elitist – indeed, these are but some of the criticisms several feminist and Marxist scholars make of the idealized public sphere model (for a summary, see Fraser 1997: 73) – but what marked these gatherings was a sense of equality between participants and their collective ability to identify and discuss common problems and concerns (Habermas 1989: 36). This dialogic function of the public sphere transferred itself well to political issues. In Britain, where there had already been violent conflict between the king and Parliament in the mid-17th century, newspapers played a critical role in activating public opinion among the competing political factions within Parliament and society (Habermas 1989: 58-59; Perlmutter 2008: 115). Though newspapers were initially subject to strict censorship laws and other restrictions, these were relaxed throughout the 18th century as political newspapers offering commentary and criticism on the actions of the Crown and Parliament proliferated (Habermas 1989: 60). Later, the related notions of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of the press” were enshrined in the American Constitution via the First Amendment.

As more people became literate and newspapers became accessible to wider audiences, Habermas (1989: 181-184) suggests that the line between the public sphere and the private sphere blurred as newspapers became less concerned with advancing a particular point of view and more focused on selling a commodity to a growing audience. Habermas (1989: 145-147)

also argues the line between public and private spheres was also being eroded as economic power became concentrated in private hands and the state expanded and intruded into areas once deemed private, such as social matters like education and health services. This trend, along with the inclusion of more citizens into the process of political decision-making as all adults won the right to vote, meant that the once-intimate world of the public sphere required someone to articulate and mediate the demands of large groups of citizens. As a result, the public sphere became a mass society shaped by institutions such as the state bureaucracy, the mass media (newspapers, radio and television stations), political parties and special interest groups (Habermas 1989: 196-197). Rather than allowing ideas to be resolved through the intimate process of deliberation inherent in the public sphere, actors within a mass society turned to “publicity” to resolve political conflict between competing institutions (Habermas 1989: 235).

C. Wright Mills uses a similar framework to contend that in a mass society, centralized methods of public manipulation through media outlets largely replaced “the old multitude of little opinion producers and consumers” that transmitted ideas between different public spheres (Mills 1956: 305). Mills used idealized types to dichotomize a deliberative public and a manipulated mass society, arguing that media outlets can shape public opinion when elites wield these instruments directly or influence them in some way. Indeed, Habermas (1992: 437) later argued that by influencing which topics are discussed publicly and how they are discussed, these actors fight a battle “not only over influence but over the control of communication flows that affect behaviour” while keeping their motivations and intentions hidden from the public.

As the public sphere “designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” (Fraser 1997: 70), it is held up as a starting point for building a more inclusive, more deliberative and ultimately more democratic society in which ordinary citizens have more opportunities to express their opinions and participate in public decision-making. Some hoped that the Internet’s arrival in the late 20th century would re-create the Habermasian vision of a public sphere in the 21st century by breaking up the entrenched power of elite media outlets, government and special interests and putting decision-making power in the hands of individuals (Sassi 2001: 91), ushering in an “era of dramatic democratization” (Zuniga 2008: 8). This emerging communications revolution created by the Internet would hypothetically allow citizens to procure important information online without interference from journalistic and bureaucratic elites as well as foster a more deliberative form of democracy among citizens (Barney 2001: 198), creating via communications technology a “framework of social and institutional conditions that facilitates free discussion among equal citizens” (J. Cohen 1997: 412). Other Internet optimists such as Howard Rheingold (2000: 376) hoped that citizens could use the Internet to create a worldwide “electronic agora” where they could deliberate in the same manner as the ancient Athenians. In this deliberative democracy, people would be able to make their own judgements about issues, events and institutions free from the influence and interpretations of intermediaries like media outlets (Moog and Sluyter-Berato 2001: 30). In the view of Benjamin Page (1996: 8) and others (ie. Grossman 1995), members of the public in a democratic society will make better decisions if “a vigorous competition among different ideas and interpretations” ensues. The Internet, it was hoped, would be a post-modern repository for competing claims, ideas and interpretations that would allow citizens to judge between several versions of the “truth” and no longer have events

subjected to a “dominant identity and meaning” provided by media outlets and other powerful actors (Robinson 2006: 78).

And yet, Rheingold (2000: 295) was quick to warn that the Internet could just as easily become a dystopia, offering citizens “an attractively packaged substitute for democratic discourse.” Early evidence of online deliberation suggested that this medium was not exactly creating some sort of utopian space for public discourse. Studies of the content of Internet-based discussion boards – which were the first real arenas for citizens to engage in online political deliberation – found that these discussions tended to be incredibly negative in tone and were dominated by a few individuals who largely mimicked discussion topics already featured in the mainstream media (Jansen and Koop 2005: 630; see also Hill and Hughes 1997). Pippa Norris (2001: 241-215) echoed this view, finding that rather than engaging one another in deliberative discussion, Internet users arrived online with deeply-held beliefs and balkanized themselves into online communities which “corresponded with and reinforced their own views.” Furthermore, she found that many of those who did participate in online deliberation were already politically engaged, meaning that those who were already apathetic or marginalized from political discussion in the real world remained disengaged within the medium (Norris 2001: 18). These schisms, one of many “digital” and “democratic” divides Norris identified in her research, challenge the idea that the Internet can create one or many deliberative and inclusive public spheres online, even if it has the acknowledged potential to do so.

In spite of this, citizens can use the Internet to participate in decision-making processes through the opportunities presented to them by government and other public sector institutions. The Canadian federal government and other provincial governments (most notably Ontario) have

offered limited opportunities for citizens to provide input into government initiatives and regulatory processes (Borins and Brown 2008: 179-190). However, the criticism that has been levelled against these efforts is that instead of engaging citizens in a rational and deliberative dialogue over issues of public policy, governments are merely consulting them about changes that may or may not go ahead regardless of their input. This, along with government's emphasis on using the Internet to provide efficient service delivery (see Borins 2002), has prompted some to suggest that governments are not effectively using the Internet to recreate the public sphere online (Barney 2005: 117). Internet optimists may be expecting too much if we believe that technology alone will bring about this change: as Paul Thomas (2000: 55) argues, progress towards stronger democracy "depends less on technology and more on social development, political changes, the structures of government institutions and the priorities of governments." He concludes that human rather than technological factors, such as a lack of political will to facilitate broad-based decision-making and a lack of interest on the part of citizens in political dialogue, are greater obstacles that must be overcome to bring about something closer to an idealized electronic commons (Thomas 2000: 107).

In his study of whether the Internet has enhanced democracy in Canada and created new public spheres, Darin Barney (2005: 181) concludes that has not been the case in this country. In his view, private business interests have been able to use the Internet to suit their purposes and have limited the potential of the Internet to serve as a truly democratic and dialogic medium. Dahlgren (2001: 52-53) makes a similar observation, noting that the areas for political discussion on the Internet are small and relatively homogenous compared to the online space occupied by business interests and other activities online. In order to fix this problem, Barney (2005: 186) argues that governments need to take a greater interest in the development of the

medium and ensure that it is not only accessible to all citizens, but that it offers more non-commercial spaces, such as community networks, which citizens can access to participate in political life online. Papacharissi reaches similar conclusions regarding what he calls the “virtual sphere.” He states:

A virtual sphere does exist in the tradition of, but radically different from, the public sphere. This virtual sphere is dominated by bourgeois computer holders, much like the one traced by Habermas consisting of bourgeois property holders. In this virtual sphere, several special interest publics coexist and flaunt their collective identities of dissent, thus reflecting the social dynamics of the real world ... This vision of the true virtual sphere consists of several spheres of counterpublics that have been excluded from mainstream political discourse, yet employ virtual communication to restructure the mainstream that ousted them. (Papacharissi 2002: 21)

As scholars in the United States (Adamic and Glance 2005) and Canada (Jansen and Koop 2009) have noted, individuals who deliberate online generally have organized themselves into segmented communities where those who share common interests and perspectives discuss issues among themselves and do not engage a great deal with those who share differing views.

One of the ironies of the Internet is that those who use it to access news and information do so from traditional media outlets which have extended their presence into cyberspace (Dahlgren 2001: 46). Chadwick (2006: 297) argues that the Internet has only accelerated rather than slowed a trend towards vertical and horizontal integration among mass media conglomerates that have expanded their empires online. This finding is supported by recent research showing that for some citizens in Canada, the Internet supplements rather than replaces consumption of information produced by mainstream media outlets, with the Internet “serving as a conduit for traditional media in both original and repurposed form” (Zamaria and Fletcher 2008: 289). While the potential exists for websites, including blogs, to both drive attention away from media outlets

and democratize the newsgathering process (Chadwick 2001: 315), it does not appear that the power of the mass media – or others who use the Internet to engage in “publicity” – will be permanently broken by the Internet. If anything, it may only enhance their ability to affect how citizens gather information about the world around them by amplifying and echoing messages produced by interests with unclear motivations or agendas. In order to explain this possibility, it is now necessary to explain how the media might affect how the public learns about the political process and examine the potential power journalists and media outlets can wield as they shape the contours of public dialogue.

Setting Agendas, Framing Issues: The Media's Role In A Mass Society

A free and independent media has long been considered an important component of a healthy Western democracy. Thomas Jefferson's well-known dictum about preferring "newspapers without government" over "a government without newspapers" speaks to the importance of the media in informing and educating the public about the workings of government. Media outlets link the governors of a democratic society to the governed and thus they play a critical role informing individuals in a large, democratic society. In addition, the media also play an important role in citizens' political socialization, helping individuals learn "the norms and rules, structures, and environmental factors that govern political life" (Graber 2002: 225). Unlike the ancient Athenian city-states, modern nations are far too large for most citizens to witness directly how their legislature functions or how the government operates. Even with technological innovations allowing citizens to actively and immediately participate in public decision-making along the lines of what Lawrence Grossman envisions in his "electronic republic" (1995: 205-210), most people do not have the knowledge or experience to make informed choices without a mediating influence supplying them with the information required to make these choices. Without the ability to experience things directly, the media creates "pictures inside our heads" (Lippmann, 1965: 18) about government and society that allows citizens to effectively participate within a democratic society and perform basic functions such as voting.

However, this raises important questions: What pictures do citizens see? How are they formed? Are some presented, and not others? Who works to create them? What are their motivations for doing so? Do they simply provide information, or do they "guide our very experiences" (Mills 1956: 311), establishing what we believe to be true and untrue? Even if citizens generally make rational decisions, as Benjamin Page (1996: 2) suggests, can they do so if the media or others

provide them with information that is “inaccurate, incomplete, misleading or full of outright lies?” While the media are not as influential in shaping citizens’ opinions or under the same degree of control in a liberal democracy as they might be in an autocratic state, they are a potentially powerful actor in the political process. Some have even gone so far as to describe the media as the “fourth branch of government” (Cater 1959: 7) that not only records what the executive, legislative and judicial branches say and do, but also plays its own part in the decision-making process. A media outlet may not tell people what to think, but it can be, as Bernard Cohen (1963: 13) observed of “the press” or print journalists in his day, “stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” This phenomenon emerges most clearly during election campaigns, when media outlets focus their audience’s attention on political issues articulated by the parties and candidates while citizens are more likely to be paying extra attention to politics and its associated issues. At first, however, this was not completely apparent. In one of the earliest studies of how the media shape political beliefs and attitudes, researchers from Columbia University interviewed one thousand citizens living in Erie County, Ohio, and analyzed how they chose which presidential candidate to vote for in the 1940 U.S. election. They concluded that while the media did not directly influence how most citizens voted, they played a role in shaping the choices of undecided voters. Their research uncovered a “two-step flow of communications” (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948: 151) through which people receive cues about politics and voting from “opinion leaders” – respected and knowledgeable peers – who are more likely than other citizens to acquire information from the mass media and, in turn, use that information to influence how others perceive candidates and issues.

Refining this thesis – which was limited by the small and relatively homogenous population studied in the Columbia research – Joseph Klapper (1965: 53) argued that the media exert

more influence on public perception when the public is learning about an issue for the first time. Like Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, Klapper (1965: 72) contended that personal influence wielded by “opinion leaders” is more likely than the media to change people’s minds. Yet he noted that: 1) mass communication can shape opinions in the absence of personal influence and; 2) as Lazarsfeld et al. noted, media reports provide information that opinion leaders use to influence others. Klapper also suggested that when people have preconceived opinions on a particular subject, they are not only less likely to change their minds on the basis of information provided by the mass media, but they will also tend to selectively expose themselves to information that already corresponds with their beliefs (Klapper 1965: 19-20). V.O. Key observed the same phenomenon, but suggested that while people will employ a “defensive skepticism” (1961: 355) to media information that does not correspond with previously held beliefs, this information may have a delayed effect if, over time, they forget the original source of the information or if they are repeatedly exposed to a particular message (Key 1961: 402-403). Key (1961: 403) also believed that people are more likely to be influenced by new information or repetitive messages outside of election periods because political defence mechanisms against media influence – adherence to past political behaviour, identification with a particular social group, the influence of opinion leaders within that group, etc. – tends to be enhanced during the campaign period.

While citizens may be less susceptible to media influence during election contests, many of the studies of “media effects” focus upon campaign periods to test how the media influences the weight voters place on particular issues as they make their choices. For example, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972: 177) argued that media outlets “set the agenda” of a political campaign by “influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues.” To test

their hypothesis, McCombs and Shaw interviewed undecided voters in Chapel Hill, N.C. regarding what they felt were the key issues in the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign and compared their responses with the content of newspaper articles they read as well as television and radio programs they watched and heard. Their evidence did not prove conclusively that the mass media consciously decide to cover certain issues and ignore others during a campaign, but they found that there is a correlation between what people think the important issues are and the issues media outlets focus attention on (McCombs and Shaw 1972: 184). Research by McCombs and Shaw (1972: 182) demonstrated that the media has an agenda-setting effect during elections and found that voters tend to be influenced by everything they read or see rather than stories that focus on the issues highlighted by their chosen candidate. Subsequent studies would show that this phenomenon has a greater influence on individuals who exhibit a “high need for (political) orientation” (Weaver et al., 1975: 461); that is, voters who pay attention to political issues yet do not have strongly-held pre-existing political beliefs.

Another way in which media outlets are said to set the agenda for public debate is by acting as gatekeepers, presenting some information on its pages or within its broadcasts while excluding other material. In his classic study of “Mr. Gates,” the anonymous editor who decides which items will fill the pages of his newspaper and which ones will be edited down or left out altogether, David Manning White (1950: 383) describes a system in which the editor largely determines what his newspaper’s readers will see. White notes that several gatekeepers work within the editorial process to produce the news that the public will read, yet he focuses specifically on the judgements made by a single editor who filters out approximately 90 percent of the stories crossing his desk while utilizing just 10 percent of the content coming to him via the news wire. He notes that this process is both “highly subjective” and reliant on the editor’s

value judgements (White 1950: 384-385). Others have also observed that certain elite media outlets, such as the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, perform an agenda-setting role for smaller newspapers and television stations by focusing attention on certain stories and not others. This process of “inter-media agenda-setting” helps determine the types of stories that readers of smaller newspapers will see on their pages and, in effect, determines for them which issues are important and which ones are not (Soroka 2002: 8; Key 1961: 405; Entman 2004: 10)

As Wallsten (2008: 6) notes, previous research on opinion formation and agenda-setting concludes this is a “fundamentally top-down and elite-driven process”, echoing C. Wright Mills’ (1956: 304) well-known observation that in a democracy, “far fewer people express opinions than receive them”. Others, such as Stuart Soroka, note that public agendas are not entirely set by journalists or other actors, but are rather the product of a dynamic process in which several different actors – including citizens – can influence what they read, see and hear in the media. In his empirical examination of issue salience within the Canadian media, public and government, Soroka (2002: 117) concluded that agenda-setting is “often multidirectional” as “in some circumstances, the public will affect the media agenda, and models of agenda-setting effects will often need to take this possibility into account.”

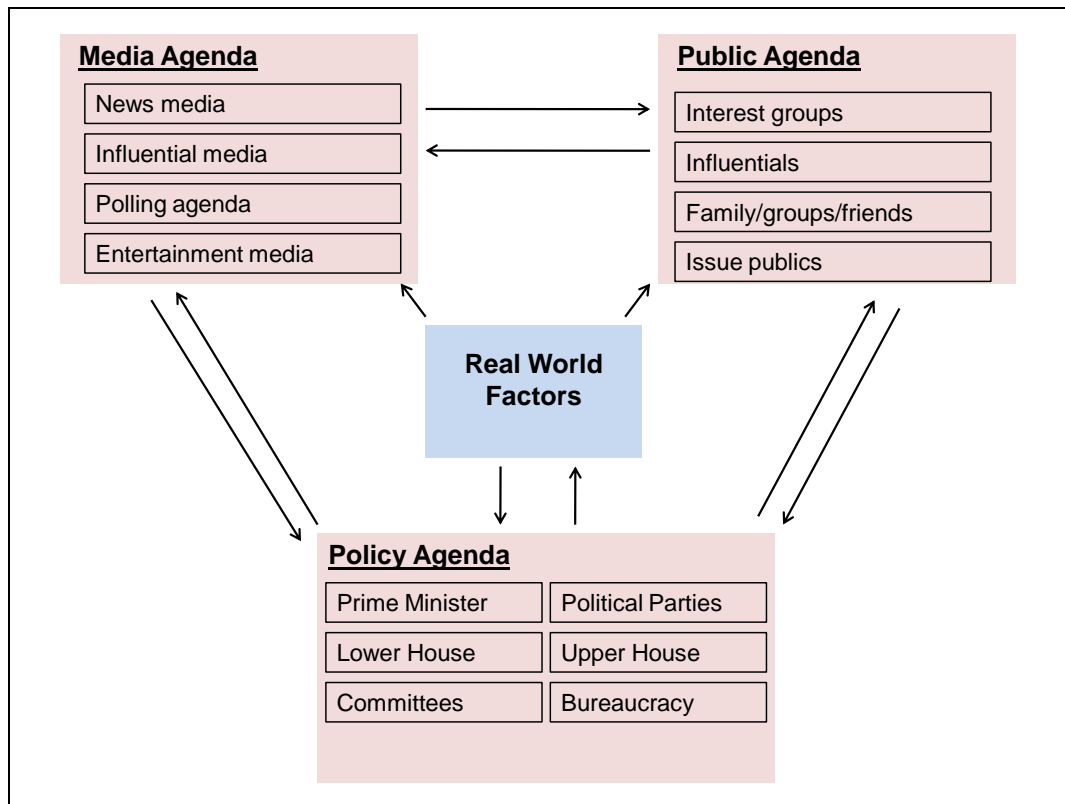
Soroka's agenda-setting model, reproduced in Figure 1, illustrates how issues might influence the agenda of different societal actors, both within and across certain sectors. For example, Soroka distinguishes between prominent issues, in which something happening in the real world that significantly affects a number of people conditions a response from the media, the public and policy-makers; and sensational issues, in which the media leads public and policy debate on an issue that may have “little observable impact on the vast majority of individuals” (Soroka

2002: 20-21). Governmental issues – the third type of issue Soroka distinguishes in his typology – are driven by policy-makers, with journalists largely ignoring these issues until they eventually transmit the substance of government discussions and decision-making to the wider public (Soroka 2002: 21-22). Soroka's analysis examined the agenda-setting dynamics of six issues falling into these three issue categories: debt/deficit and national unity (governmental); AIDS and the environment (sensational) and inflation and unemployment (prominent). He found that despite regional differences throughout Canada, increased salience of an issue among citizens is driven by the degree to which journalists cover a particular issue, but also that the media agenda may be affected later by the public response to journalists' coverage of a specific topic (Soroka 2002: 117).

To offer a contemporary example of this effect, newspaper articles about an impending recession may send a cue to the public that tough economic times are ahead, which may increase the number of people who indicate in opinion polls that they are concerned and/or pessimistic about the economy, which in turn generates more media coverage about these samplings of public opinion, which show that public confidence in the economy has declined. This example shows the dynamic interrelationship between the media and public on a given issue, yet it can be taken further by arguing (as the model below suggests) that particular actors within each section may influence others as part of the process of establishing a particular agenda. National newspapers (as well as wire services), for example, are considered agenda-setters for regional and local newspapers (Trimble and Sampert 2004: 52). Thus, if *The Globe and Mail's* Report on Business section reports to its readers that Canada is about to enter a recession, it may send a signal to the editors of the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* or the *Brandon Sun* that economic difficulties lie ahead, which may lead journalists at these newspapers to write

stories about how a possible recession may affect their own regions. In turn, this may act as a cue to their respective audiences that economic hardship will follow.

Figure 2.1 - Soroka's expanded model of the agenda setting process (Soroka 2002: 9)



Some have argued that the issues these media outlets address and how they are presented is not determined by either personal preference or an organic process of input, but are rather heavily influenced by the preferences of the media outlets which own these companies. One of the best-known articulations of this argument is made in Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent*. According to Herman and Chomsky's (1988: xiv-xv) "propaganda model," media outlets emphasize certain facts and suppress others in order to advance the interests of the government and other "major power groups," including the companies that own the outlets, within society. According to them, news "filters" set the parameters for what information media outlets will ultimately present to the public. These include the "size, concentrated ownership, profit orientation of particular mass media firms" as well as "advertising as the primary income source of the mass media" and "the reliance of the

media on information provided by the government, business and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power” (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 2; Herman 1999: 23). Ultimately, Herman and Chomsky (1988: 31) contended that the filters placed on the media make it easier for journalists to cover some issues and not others as well as determine which topics will become major public issues and what will remain overlooked. While one could credibly make this case as it relates to political figures focusing attention on certain issues and not others, Herman and Chomsky’s contention that media attention to issues is linked to the composition of media ownership or major advertisers is less clear. Instead, their analysis breaks down into generalizations about the close connections between owners of media outlets and major corporations (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 13-14), which – presumably – means that journalists will cover these stories in ways that keep their employers happy.

Parenti (1993: 1) makes very similar arguments to Herman and Chomsky related to media ownership, suggesting that distortions and omissions in the news are the result of both “deliberate manipulation” and also the “ideological and economic conditions under which the media operate.” Large media companies owned by wealthy individuals represent a “narrow class of interest” (Herman and McChesney 1997: 6) that becomes narrower as corporate concentration increases. Parenti argues that wealthy owners and major advertisers wield a discretionary veto power over the news which leads to self-censorship among journalists producing content and editors determining which stories will run (Parenti 1993: 38-40). While journalists in this system are nominally autonomous, their autonomy is conditional as they are “free to report what they like as long as their superiors like what they report” (Parenti 1993: 40). Some have argued this commercial aspect of modern media outlets has been made worse in recent years by cutbacks, which has made it more prohibitive for journalists to gather news and

has forced them to rely increasingly on material prepared by corporate and government public relations professionals (McChesney 2004: 83). In addition, Parenti argues that the relationship between journalists and government figures is often too close, as reporters are beholden to government figures as official sources and share common values and interests with the people they cover (Parenti 1993: 52-53). As a result, the mass media are “drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest” (Herman 1999: 25). All of this creates a system with a dominant “cultural hegemony” (Parenti 1993: 226) that results in shared, but not democratically derived, values being transmitted throughout society. This problem is exacerbated as media outlets become global in size and scope, and as they emphasize a commercial and corporate paradigm in several different countries. As Herman and McChesney (1997: 9) argue, the power of the “global commercial media” increases in sovereign states as a result of “... their growing command over information flows, political influence and ability to set the media-political agenda (which comports well with that of advertisers and the corporate community at large.” These authors cite several examples of how media outlets in many countries, including Canada, have been negatively influenced in their view by a profit-driven, corporate model of media ownership, and how these global media outlets have a tendency to treat their audiences as consumers rather than citizens (Herman and McChesney 1997: 156-188).

While those who examine media effects on how information is presented to citizens tend to do so using class analysis or Marxian perspectives focusing on corporate power and media ownership, focus attention on the motivations and attitudes of individual journalists. Lichter, Rothman and Lichter’s survey analysis of 238 American journalists working for 10 major print and broadcast media outlets showed that in the early 1980s, more than three-quarters of these

reporters (more than 75 percent) were white, male university graduates earning wages that would place them in an income bracket among upper-middle class professionals (Lichter et al., 1986: 21-22). They found that the majority (54%) of these journalists considered themselves politically “liberal,” while fewer than one in five (17%) classified themselves as “conservative” (Lichter et al., 1986: 21). Furthermore, they found that not only did the vast majority of these journalists vote for Democratic Party candidates in presidential elections, but that many of them also held what would be considered “liberal” beliefs on social issues such as abortion, affirmative action and homosexual rights just as they tended to support capitalist economic policies (Lichter et al., 1986: 29-30). Furthermore, these findings lead the authors to conclude that elite journalists in the United States are a “homogenous and cosmopolitan group” that is “politically liberal and alienated from traditional norms and institutions,” including the values of “small-town middle America” (Lichter et al., 1986: 294).

This caricature of an elitist “liberal” media found popular expression in the late 1960s and early 1970s after then-vice president Spiro Agnew publicly attacked Washington-based journalists – whom he described as a “tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one” (Perlstein 2008: 439) – for peddling a largely liberal narrative in print and on television. This line of attack focused a great deal of attention on an alleged liberal media bias (Hofstetter 1976: 3). Hofstetter’s (1976: 203-205) analysis of the 1972 presidential election concluded that coverage of the candidates was not politically biased, though he acknowledged that the potential for bias exists even if it did not manifest itself in a particular campaign. As he suggested, a particular bias is difficult to measure if all the media outlets studied cover an issue from the same viewpoint (Hofstetter 1976: 204). This is the point that Marxists and others with a hegemonic view of the media make when refuting claims of a pervasive liberal media bias (Herman 1999:

260-261). As Gitlin (1980: 264) argues, hegemony in the practice of journalism consists of “imposing standardized assumptions over events and conditions that must be covered by the dictates of the prevailing news standards.” Gitlin argued that journalists use these assumptions to develop how certain individuals and groups are described to audiences. Through the selective use of words, images and symbols, journalists create “frames” that allow them to process information quickly and package it into something that their audiences will understand (Gitlin 1980: 7). While Lichter et al. (1986: 296) contended that the personal opinions of liberal-minded journalists subconsciously structure the frames that are created in their articles and broadcasts, Gitlin (1980: 268-269), like Herman and Chomsky, Parenti and others, argued that these frames are created on the basis of the dominant ideology within a society and that they ignore or downplay the concerns of marginalized groups.

Both of these articulations of a framing effect in the news contend that a dominant ideological paradigm pervades media discourse and shapes how journalists present information to the public. Others who have contributed to this theory do not explicitly attempt to draw a link between a particular media frame and a particular ideology or set of cultural norms. Instead of arguing that liberal-minded journalists, corporate advertisers or multimillionaire media conglomerate owners influence how the news is presented, Robert Entman suggests that the news is given a particular “slant” that depends on how journalists evaluate a particular episode relative to other, similar events (Entman 1989: 41). How a story is slanted – and whether it is a positive or negative slant – depends upon the importance given to the story, the perspective and degree of criticism offered by those commenting within it and how it links the subject of the report to other events or issues tangentially related to the primary news story (Entman 1989: 42-43). A news story can also be slanted through the use of symbols or images, or by omitting

certain information that may cause audiences to reach a particular conclusion different from their pre-existing opinions on a subject or based upon the subject emphasized by the media report (Entman 1989: 84-85). Samuel Popkin (1991: 82) argues these “framing effects” occur when these interpretations regarding how the public may view a particular subject are put forward by media outlets and accepted by citizens. By doing this, media outlets are not explicitly telling people what to think about, but they are leading people to reach particular conclusions based on incomplete or overemphasized information. Murray Edelman, who largely identifies political actors rather than journalists as the creators of these “frames,” argues that they serve as a straitjacket on political discourse. He contends:

For every political problem and ideological dilemma there is a set of statements and expressions constantly in use. In accepting one or another of these a person becomes a particular kind of subject with a particular ideology, role, and self conception: a liberal or a conservative, a victim of authority or a supporter of authority, an activist or a spectator, and so on. But the choice among available language forms is itself constrained rather than free (Edelman 1985: 15).

Others take a less critical view of frames and how they are used by journalists to construct political meaning. Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992: 60) describe frames as “conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information.” A number of studies suggest that the media utilize several different types of frames when presenting stories to viewers, with some frames utilized more than others. Linda Trimble and Shannon Sampert (2004: 53) distinguished between what they termed “issue frames” (stories that focused on issues) and “game frames” (stories that focus on the “horse-race” aspects of a campaign, including polling trends, the personalities of party leaders and campaign strategies). They found that reporters with Canada’s two national newspapers favoured presenting readers with stories that fit the game frame rather than the issue frame when presenting information about the 2000 federal election campaign to their respective audiences. In their research on a number of media

stories, Neuman, Just and Crigler found that journalists were more likely to frame stories in a way that emphasized conflicts (what the authors refer to as a “conflict frame”) or powerlessness and were less likely to use “moral values” to frame the issues they presented to their audiences (Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992: 74-75).

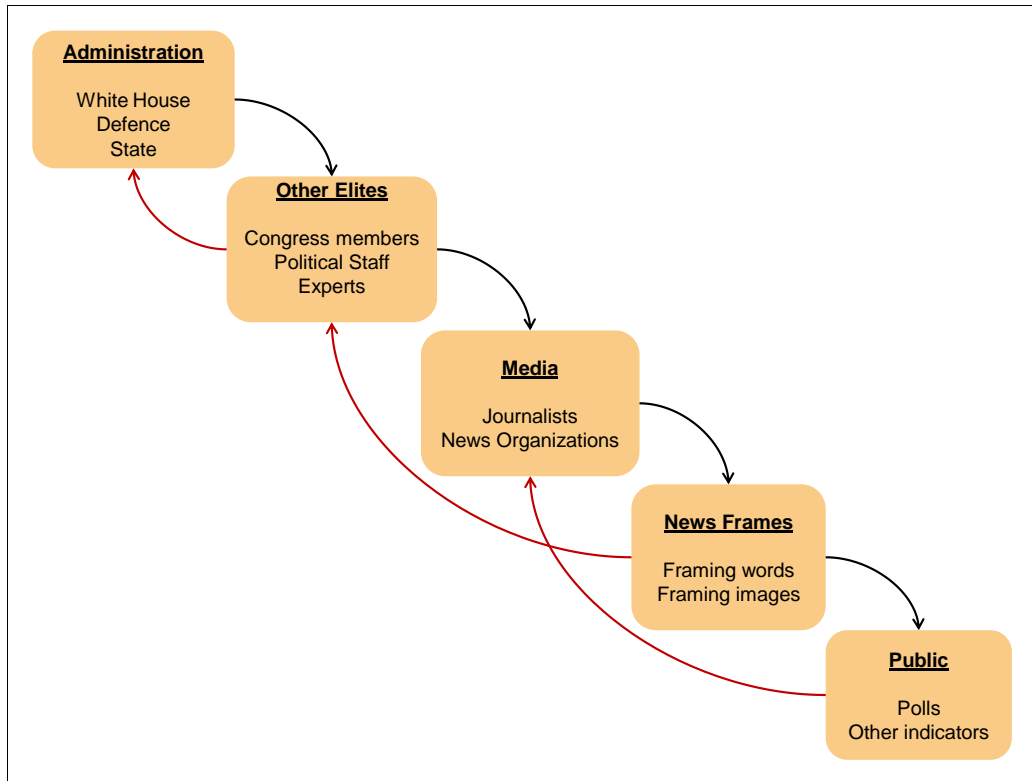
Interestingly, these authors found an incongruence between how journalists presented issues and how audiences interpreted them, arguing that “individuals do not slavishly follow the framing of issues presented in the mass media” (Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992: 76-77). However, other authors have observed that frames guide how those who consume political information from the media reach particular conclusions about political issues. Studies of how voters process media information show that citizens whittle down the amount of information they take in by either excluding news stories or only taking away key facts from them that are incorporated into how they already think about events and issues (Graber 1984: 202). Other media “cues,” such as where a story is placed in a newspaper, whether it is accompanied by a photograph, or the size of the headline can also affect what people remember, if anything, about news stories and whether they consider them important (Graber 1984: 82). How the issue addressed a story is framed can also affect how the public perceives the individuals involved in the story. This process, called “priming,” can be defined as “the process by which activated mental constructs ... influence how individuals evaluate other concepts and ideas” (Domke et al., 1998: 51). Framing political issues in a particular way is likely to trigger priming effects as readers and viewers are likely to place more emphasis on those issues when determining how they feel about another, related political matter (Domke et al., 1998: 52).

Domke and his colleagues (1998: 56) tested how news stories that addressed a social or moral issue such as abortion affected how observers evaluated the integrity of political candidates dealing with these issues, and compared this to how observers perceived the actors involved in a story addressing a non-moral issue, such as the economy. They observed a priming effect, but concluded that it was largely contingent on the specific aspects of each issue, the manner in which the media presented it and the priorities of the audience – which, they argued, would affect whether a priming effect followed media coverage of a particular issue (Domke et al., 1998: 68-69). Iyengar (1991: 133) uses a similar framework to explain priming, arguing that news coverage of a specific issue will affect the relative weight viewers place on that issue when judging the performance of politicians. For example, American viewers watching television news stories on increased military budgets during the 1980s were likely not only to cite the arms race as an important national issue – thus demonstrating an example of framing by the media – but also to base a greater degree of their evaluations of the president's work on arms control when expressing their overall assessment of the president's job performance (Iyengar 1991: 133; see also Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Priming and framing are closely related, but priming is a specific manifestation of how particular interpretative frames may affect public opinion regarding political decisions while framing issues tend to lead to more general and less observable outcomes.

It should be pointed out, however, that journalists do not necessarily create frames that lead to priming effects on their own. Most organized actors in a democratic society – presidents, prime ministers, elected representatives, businesses, unions, special interest groups and so on – articulate messages to the media that they hope will create political leverage and influence public opinion. Edelman (1985: 10) writes that the “critical element” for those seeking political

advantage "... is the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about the significance of events, of problems, of crises, of policy changes, and of leaders." Entman (2004: 4-5) argues that the media's potential political power rests on its ability to "frame the news in ways that favour one side over another." Framing not only incorporates the agenda-setting process of picking which issues and events to highlight, but also involves "making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution" (Entman 2004: 5). Timothy Cook (1998: 12) calls this interactive process between political actors and journalists the "negotiation of newsworthiness" and says that it determines "who controls the agenda, what can be asked, where and how, and what a suitable answer will be." While the process is interactive and fluid, journalists and media organizations are potentially influential figures in this system because they can accept, modify or reject particular interpretations as they carry information from politicians to the public.

Figure 2.2: Cascading Network Activation (Entman 2004: 10)



Entman's "cascading network activation" model outlined in Figure 2.2 provides a conceptual vision of how this specific framing process works in the American political system. Those at the apex of this communications model, such as the president or his staff in the White House, use words and images to frame events in a particular way and pass these ideas along to other elected officials, or journalists, who discuss these frames and use language to make their own contributions to these ideas. At each stage, these words and images are discussed until they travel along the activation network to the public. Those at the bottom can potentially recalibrate these frames, as citizens can have an impact through the reporting of public opinion polls and as politicians remain cognizant of citizens' expected and actual reactions to ideas, all of which is amplified by media coverage (Entman and Herbst 2001: 218-219). If the frames put forward by the administration mesh easily with the public's understanding of those issues, they are said to be congruent and it is likely that they will be accepted by the public (Entman 2004: 14). If the

frames are not congruent with public opinion, they may be ignored or be blocked by “counterframes” which fit more comfortably with pre-existing norms and assumptions (Entman 2004: 15). Also, if the words or images cascade through this knowledge network with little to no dissonance from political opponents or other individuals offering differing interpretations of the issue or events, it is likely that a dominant frame will prevail. If there are greater numbers of dissenting interpretations, it is more likely that multiple frames will compete with another in their attempt to sway public opinion (Entman 2004: 9-10).

Doris Graber (2002: 174) concurs with this line of reasoning when she argues that “frames that are repeated more often in news stories than their competing frames seem most reasonable or most authoritative.” She also notes that frames are more likely to take hold in unexpected or unplanned situations where emerging issue frames are less likely to compete with previously-established frames. Thus, specific ways of framing the September 11, 2001 attacks were more likely to take hold than the frames related to the passage of a routine piece of legislation or some other ordinary event. Another example Entman used to illustrate this is the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which was assumed at first to have been carried out by Middle Eastern terrorists (which was a familiar frame for thinking about terrorism) but later turned out to have been the product of homegrown terrorism. Once the facts emerged, a new schema was created that “knitted together ideas and feelings about domestic terrorists” (Entman 2004: 17) and influenced future thinking about terrorist activity among citizens and the media.

As a visual medium, television makes the framing process more acute because powerful images can be equally if not more effective than the printed word for framing political actors and events. In addition to setting the political agenda by highlighting certain issues, Shanto Iyengar

(1991: 2) argued that television news can frame issues in either an “episodic” or “thematic” manner. Episodic frames highlight a particular event or specific individuals, while thematic frames deal with broader issues and place them in a larger context. Iyengar contends that most television news stories rely on episodic rather than thematic frames, and that this process causes viewers to personalize responsibility for problems identified in news stories rather than placing the issue in a broader social context (Iyengar 1991: 14-16). For example, Iyengar (1991: 67-68) found that stories about poverty that focused on the plight of an individual poor person rather than a societal trend like unemployment led viewers to place blame with the individual for his or her situation rather than focus it on greater societal forces. He argues that television’s use of images and its focus on individual cases and events rather than broader contexts create a superficial environment for political discussion. As a result, he contended that this phenomenon reduces the accountability of political actors for dealing with societal problems (Iyengar 1991: 140-141). Furthermore, it allows politicians and their media “handlers” to create smokescreens by using dramatic images and symbols to convey through the media the idea that they are doing something to deal with public problems when, in fact, they are dealing only in vague generalities (Iyengar 1991: 142-143).

While Iyengar chided politicians for avoiding responsibility by creating elaborate news events that project images to the public, one could argue that journalists are equally guilty for focusing on these symbols rather than dealing with substantive issues in the course of providing their audiences with political information. Samuel Popkin (1991: 1-4) illustrates this by showing how something as trivial as what kind of food a presidential candidate eats on the campaign trail and how he or she eats it can communicate information to voters on whether this person understands the concerns of a particular constituency (Popkin 1991: 1-4). Popkin describes the

process voters use to judge political information as “low-information rationality,” which draws upon “various information shortcuts and rules of thumb that voters use to obtain and evaluate information and to simplify the process of choosing between candidates” (Popkin 1991: 7). Many of these mental shortcuts are influenced by factors such as their own party preferences, past campaigns and experiences in their daily lives (Popkin 1991: 44). However, Popkin argues that media outlets play an important role in helping people make these choices, especially through their coverage of political campaigns. The media, Popkin conclude, “play a critical role in shaping voters’ limited information about the world” and can “influence the voter’s frame of reference, and can thereby change his or her vote.” By setting the agenda for public debate, framing issues and events in a particular way and emphasizing certain issues and not others, it can be legitimately argued that even if the media do not dictate political behaviour, they wield considerable influence over the types of decisions that citizens make. McCombs and Shaw (1993: 65) note that by telling us “what to think about ... and how to think about it,” the media indirectly tell us how to think. While this view dramatically downplays the political agency of individuals, it is certainly evident that the mass media must be considered a powerful institution that can shape political outcomes to a certain extent. This is true in any democratic country, including Canada, where a segment of the mass media is permanently devoted to covering its political institutions. Our attention now turns to the institutional character of political journalism in Canada and an analysis of how it shapes political discussion.

Political Journalism In Canada

In Ottawa, the journalists who cover Parliament on a regular basis belong to an institution called the Parliamentary Press Gallery. The journalists working in the Parliamentary Press Gallery are important “not just for the dissemination of government information, but also for the very

operation of parliamentary democracy” (Fletcher 1981: 49). They help determine what political information will reach Canadians, offering not only the raw information, but also providing interpretations of the issues (Fletcher 1981: 50). This dual role fulfils an important democratic duty, as allowing the “governed to know what the governors are doing” (Seymour-Ure 1962: 35) potentially allows citizens to cast informed votes during elections. Media outlets generally do not have a direct hand in shaping government policy or affecting political outcomes; however, they are perceived to be important to policy-makers and increasingly influential due to the simple fact that “no other independent institution in Canada’s policy networks reaches as many citizens daily” (Murray 2007: 528). Journalists can determine whether political messages reach the public in either a pure or distorted form – or even at all, if they choose not to cover events or speeches that are important to politicians (Taras 1990: 41). As David Taras (1990: 41) notes, Canada’s journalistic elite are “one of the most important groups in the country, and one of the least studied.”

Throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th, Canadian newspapers and the reporters who wrote for them were unabashedly partisan. Political parties sponsored or supported their own newspapers, and it was not uncommon for reporters to supplement their incomes by working as a government clerk if their preferred party happened to be in power (Levine 1993: xix). Some, like Thomas White, the first Press Gallery president, would demonstrate the close links between reporters and parliamentarians by later serving as Members of Parliament (Seymour-Ure 1962: 36). While newspapers would retain partisan ties for some time to come, this began to change in the 1920s, as improvements to the printing process (and their associated costs) meant that newspapers became more reliant on advertising rather than party patronage. As a result, many party newspapers began going out of business or merging with their competitors (Levine 1993:

102-103). The creation of the Canadian Press wire service in 1917 to supply several newspapers of varying political stripes with content meant that its contributors had to write about Parliament in a non-partisan manner (Levine 1993: 94). Other technological developments brought about changes to the way Parliamentary reporters did their jobs. Starting in the late 1950s, the Gallery expanded as it admitted more broadcast journalists, and it has continued to grow as those working in the media of radio and television covered life on Parliament Hill (Taras 1990: 71). As well, the Press Gallery became more centralized as correspondents representing a single newspaper were replaced by growing “bureaus” of journalists from a single newspaper chain or wire service (Fletcher 1981: 51). Fletcher found that these bureaus tended to act as agenda-setters for other, smaller media outlets, with half of the nation’s daily newspapers relying on a single wire service, the Canadian Press, for coverage of Parliament (Fletcher 1981: 54-55). Furthermore, many newspapers became reliant on a “dwindling number of major columnists” (Fletcher 1981: 55) to provide analysis and interpretation of political events. Fletcher argued that these developments weakened regional diversity in political journalism and created a narrow view of Canadian politics that led to a loss of regional perspective on political affairs (Fletcher 1981: 56).

This lack of diversity among parliamentary journalists would be a common theme expressed in institutional studies of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, such as the Royal Commission on Newspapers (the Kent Commission), which reported in 1981. Fred Fletcher (1981: 53) also noted that by the 1980s Press Gallery members were becoming younger, less experienced, less knowledgeable about Canadian political history and more likely to be replaced by someone else within a few years. This generational shift is perceived to have fostered a more adversarial and less deferential relationship between the media and politicians on Parliament Hill. Veteran

Parliamentary correspondent Peter C. Newman (2005: 251) identified this epoch of “attack dog journalism” in the Press Gallery as its third distinct phase following an era of deferential coverage in the first half of the 20th century and an era of advocacy and investigative reporting in the 1960s and early 1970s. Levine (1993: xi) characterized the evolution of the Press Gallery in a similar way, noting that journalists went from being “much more respectful of the politicians they covered” early in the century and became more combative throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Levine also partially blamed this trend towards adversarial journalism on television, which he argued has dramatized and personalized political conflict as well as encouraged journalists to think of themselves as the unofficial opposition. Roy MacGregor, a print journalist, lamented the enhanced influence of television journalists and their superficial coverage of Parliament, though he argued that the print media continue to act as agenda-setters and framers of opinion (MacGregor 1980: 201-202). Comber and Mayne (1986: 30) also noted that the fast-paced approach of television journalism has fostered a “superficial ... and cynical style of political reporting” that leaves the reporter as an interpreter of the images passing quickly on the television screen.

Another image associated with print and television journalists is that of the “scrum,” which became a feature of political life starting in the 1960s as the Press Gallery, enlarged as it was by a number of broadcast journalists, would swarm cabinet ministers in an effort to solicit a comment from them (Levine 1993: ix). This vision of the “scrum” also reflects the perception of the Parliamentary Press Gallery as a single entity which acts in a co-ordinated way (Levine 1993: xii-xiii). One of the dynamics MacGregor (1980: 199-200) identified on Parliament Hill is “group journalism,” in which members of the Press Gallery collectively form an informal degree of consensus over the importance of a particular issue or event based on their conversations

with one another while waiting in the hallway for a politician to emerge for a scrum. This phenomenon, as well as the media's collective focus on events instead of processes, creates "a caricature of real political dialogue" rather than a true reflection of parliamentary discussion (Comber and Mayne 1986: 99). These are just some of the possible ways in which the Canadian news media, through their own actions, may be acting as agenda-setters and framing political discussion.

It is important here to highlight the fact that there are marked differences between the French-language and English-language political media in Canada. In the 19th century, most French language newspapers had historically close ties to the Catholic Church and the Conservative politicians who were supported by the clergy (Gagnon 1981: 25-26). Like their counterparts in English Canada, Quebec-based newspapers became less partisan and more independent during the 1930s and 1940s, as they gained more of their income from advertising and relied less on government contracts for income (Gagnon 1981: 27). And yet, differences existed and continue to exist between these two groups of journalists. Taras (1990: 77) noted that Quebec journalists tend to not only conduct a greater degree of analysis on the news than their counterparts in English Canada, but are also expected to play a more active role in political discussion. Taras (1990: 76-77) also notes that francophone journalists working in Ottawa tend to be more fixated on constitutional and language issues than their English-Canadian counterparts and that Quebec's National Assembly rather than Ottawa's Parliament Hill is seen as the centre of the francophone media's political universe, with francophone journalists placing greater emphasis on provincial (ie. Quebec) rather than federal political news (Taras 1990: 77).

Another trend that has emerged in Ottawa and elsewhere is the increasing presence of press secretaries, directors of communication and other professionals who manage the interaction between the media and government. These individuals may be thought of as the fulcrum of the journalist-politician relationship, acting as “the access point for reporters covering the head of state of government” and as “the government’s connection to the world of mass communication” (Fox 1999: 25). Besides acting as a point of contact for the media, they also distribute information on government announcements and handle the logistical requirements for journalists covering political campaigns or media events (Fox 1999: 25-26). Press secretaries “sanitize” (Fletcher 1981: 60) the relationship between the media and government, but have been perceived by Canadian journalists to offer more control to elected officials because they limit opportunities for access to ministers and officials. As well, Taras argues that this professionalization of politics through media handlers, spin doctors and other actors may be crowding out citizens from regularly participating in politics, save for the act of voting in elections and – if they belong to a political party – leadership conventions (Taras 1990: 238). Instead of an open, unmediated relationship between elected officials and journalists, governmental “pseudo-events” (Boorstein 1978: 37) such as photo opportunities and press conferences are staged, with journalists transmitting the content of these staged “news” events to their readers and viewers. While Fox (1999) argues that this form of media management will break down as new technology presents viewers with more options for accessing information, the jury remains out on whether this will come to pass. Press secretaries, communications directors and other “spin doctors” may have simply adapted to the new realities of political communication and adjusted their strategy to take advantage of these media. They may also help establish agendas and frames, but the extent to which they do this in Canada is not well understood and requires a greater degree of investigation.

While institutional analyses of the Parliamentary Press Gallery show, to some extent, how journalists might collectively shape public opinion, critical analyses of Canadian political journalism offer sharper arguments illustrating how the media influences political discourse. These analyses of political journalism and the overall structure of the Canadian media industry can be characterized by two different approaches which echo critical theories found elsewhere. The first school of thought echoes Lichter et al.'s framework of a "media elite," which is also prominent in studies of the backgrounds of Canadian journalists (Desbarats 1990: 140-142). Like the study conducted by Lichter and his colleagues, Barry Cooper and Linda Miljan's (2003: 10) analysis of Canadian journalists attempted to establish that individual reporters colour news coverage with their ideological leanings. By surveying journalists on their attitudes towards public policy issues and comparing their responses to those of the general population, Cooper and Miljan (2003: 48) tried to establish that journalists are likely to see themselves as "agents for social change" who use their position to influence public attitudes on key issues. Specifically, their analysis suggests that journalists are more likely than the general population to endorse and promote "postmaterialist" values and, in the process of promoting these values, abandon the notion of objectivity (Cooper and Miljan 2003: 59-60). While some of their areas of inquiry appear spurious – for example, they compare the alcohol consumption of journalists with that of the general population (Cooper and Miljan 2003: 85) – their survey evidence uncovered some evidence of so-called "postmaterialist" attitudes and adherence to what they describe as a strong left-of-centre ideology on economic issues among some journalists, especially employees of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Cooper and Miljan 2003: 170-171). Their findings echo earlier research by Cooper (1994: 219) which examined the CBC's coverage of foreign regimes, specifically the former Soviet Union and Marxist regimes in Africa. Cooper

(1994: 226) argued that the CBC was guilty of “sins of omission” by glossing over negative aspects of these communist regimes while highlighting problems with both U.S. foreign policy and the former South African regime which practiced racial apartheid. Without providing a specific reason for these omissions except to argue that the CBC “and all modern media” may also be guilty of “direct(ing) its energies towards the production of a specific configuration of opinion” (Cooper 1994: 221), he suggested that TV news is more concerned with entertainment than ascertaining truth (Cooper 1994: 224-225). These critical, ideologically-driven analyses of Canadian political journalists, especially those employed by the CBC, are frequently echoed in media commentary and among some Canadian politicians (Diebel 2008: A1; Kerr 2006: A14; Hoy 2005: A10).

However, other critical analyses of Canadian political journalism focus on the proprietary aspects of the Canadian media, especially the concentrated degree of corporate ownership in the industry. Echoing Herman and Chomsky’s analysis of corporate-owned media in the United States, these criticisms bemoan a Canadian public sphere that is “being choked by powerful commercial forces and monolithic trends” (Taras 2001: 23). Editorial concentration in the newspaper industry was raised more than 30 years ago, when the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media (the Davey Commission) noted in 1970 that the country’s three largest newspaper chains controlled nearly half of the circulation of daily newspapers (Winter 1997: 3). It recommended that a Press Ownership Review Board be created to review mergers and acquisitions of print publications, examining transactions on the basis any increased concentration in media ownership “are undesirable and contrary to the public interest – unless shown to be otherwise” (Davey 1970: 71; Shaw and Thomas 1994: 4). This issue was further scrutinized by the the Kent Commission, which was struck after the Winnipeg *Tribune* and

Ottawa *Journal* closed almost simultaneously and federal competition watchdogs charged these newspapers' parent chains, Southam and Thomson, with collusion (Hackett et al., 2000:11). The Kent Commission raised concerns about the market position of a few newspaper chains and what that meant as far as their ability to influence public opinion and the public agenda (Fletcher 1981: 1). While the commission did not find evidence that newspaper chains were actively influencing public opinion through their media properties, it suggested that journalists would practice self-censorship by being hesitant to investigate issues involving their parent companies (Fletcher 1981: 1-2). The Kent Commission made a number of recommendations to provide more public input into the newspaper industry, including the establishment of public editorial advisory boards, but the idea was soundly resisted by newspapers in editorials and the federal government did not act upon these ideas (Comber and Mayne 1986: 26). The most recent government inquiry into the state of Canada's media outlets, conducted by a Senate subcommittee in 2006, reflected similar concerns related to corporate ownership, arguing that "excessive levels of concentration and the domination of particular markets by one media group engender distrust in the very institutions that Canadians rely upon for their news and information" (Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006). However, its recommendations were largely ignored and were not implemented by the federal government.

Greater corporate control of newspapers followed in the 1980s and 1990s as Conrad Black's Hollinger firm bought up the Southam chain of newspapers and later sold these – as well as a new national newspaper, the *National Post* – to the Asper family's Canwest company, which also owns the Global Television Network. This degree of corporate control has been attacked by several critics (ie. Edge 2007), who worried that Black and the Aspers would use their media

platforms to promote particular political viewpoints. As well, the reality of convergence – the practice of owning a television station and a newspaper in the same market and using these media platforms to promote each other – raised alarm that this would stifle some voices of public dialogue. In a study that cites numerous examples of media outlets not covering or ignoring certain viewpoints, Hackett et al. (2000: 27) argued that Canada’s media outlets produce a number of “blind spots” – notable omissions of issues and views that are filtered out because of a conflict with the media organization’s interests. They argued that the Canadian media underreport poverty and labour issues, and gloss over issues of corporate control and neo-liberal market agendas (Hackett et al., 2000: 221). James Winter (1997: xv) goes further, borrowing Herman and Chomsky’s views of a propaganda model and media-manufactured “consent” to claim that corporate-owned news media “legitimize a fundamentally undemocratic system” that fosters support for public policies favoured by wealthy media owners. Like Hackett et al., Winter (1997: 139-140) focused on the degree of corporate ownership in the news media and suggests that a combination of powerful media owners – many of whom, Winter notes, enjoy close personal and professional ties to political decision-makers – and an acute sense of self-censorship within the management structure of these media outlets turns the news into a “management product” that is “overwhelmingly narrow in its range and focus.” These authors point to further evidence of this ideological conformity as being reinforced by an increased reliance on pundits providing opinions and “think tanks” espousing particular ideological views that happen to be in sync with those of the media owners (Winter 1997: 78; Taras 2001: 201-202). When combined with what David Taras (2001: 23) described a “failing journalistic culture” that stifles independent voices, these phenomena create an extensive level of ideological conformity that “dominates much of our public debate” (Taras 2001: 218). Overwhelmingly, the consensus among these authors is that the concentrated Canadian news media are espousing

a “free market theology ... which is threatening to make us forget what democracy really means” (Gasher 2000: 599).

For both neo-Marxian critics like Winter and Hackett et al. who bemoan corporate control over media discourse and the neo-conservative criticisms related to a predominant “bias” among individual journalists, the Internet may be regarded as potential salvation from these failings in the news media. Conservatives frustrated by a perceived liberal bias in the Canadian media may gather around blogs “for warmth in a cold and hostile media environment” (Taylor 2005, cited in Brown 2009: 178), while the Internet creates new opportunities, with relatively little cost, for individuals to create websites where they can deliberate, share information, and discuss ideas free from mediation. Despite this potential, however, a standing committee of the Canadian Senate recently concluded that “few online services provide the quantity and quality of original reporting that is generated by the traditional news media,” noting that many websites cannot generate sufficient revenue to conduct in-depth journalism and that these online sources are challenged to “establish levels of credibility similar to traditional media sources” (Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, 2006). Thus, can the Internet – and blogs specifically – supplant, or at least adequately supplement, the traditional media when it comes to informing citizens and facilitating public debate about political issues?

Bloggers: Barbarians At The Media’s Gate?

As noted earlier, blogs, a contraction of the word “weblog,” are regularly updated personal websites written by one or more people featuring entries or “posts” appearing in reverse chronological order (Wallsten 2005: 2; McKenna and Pole 2004: 2). They are subject to a minimal degree of external editing and typically link to other blogs and web pages (Drezner and

Farrell 2005: 5). These links can be included on a web page's sidebar, or "blogroll" (McKenna and Pole 2004: 2), or they can be contained within the entries to the blog, which are called "posts" (Perlmutter 2008: 16). The linking characteristic of blogs creates a virtual community for political expression (Perlmutter 2008: 16) that is often referred to as the "blogosphere," which is also defined as "the intellectual space shared by writers and readers of blogs" (McKenna and Pole 2008: 100). This ability to link to other websites allows bloggers to inform their readers by "synthesizing and analyzing information found in diverse sources" (McKenna and Pole 2008: 102). As well, bloggers typically invite comments on their work (Harper 2005: 4), which enhances the communitarian aspect of this medium. This facet of blogging not only illustrates the potential capacity of blogs to stimulate debate, but they can also be used to mobilize individuals into self-organizing networks that "accrete their common knowledge, focus their activism, recruit others and march, virtually, towards a goal" (Perlmutter 2008: 20).

For some, blogs are nothing short of revolutionary. Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, founder of the Daily Kos blog in the United States, argues that those going online today "are the first generation that can bypass the old-world gatekeepers to communicate to the masses – that is, with each other:"

We have the technology and the collaborative spirit to find each other, pool our talents and press for real systemic change. No longer content with being spectators, we are becoming players. No longer content to merely receive messages, we now send them as well. No longer content to be media consumers, we are now creating ... We are seizing the tools, finding our voice, exploring mediums, building communities, engaging in conversations, connecting with new friends, discovering that we are not alone. We are challenging ourselves to organize, collaborate, respond, and innovate (Zuniga 2008: 9).

Others go further, channelling Habermas by arguing that blogs "re-establish the public sphere much in the same way that the coffeehouses, salons, broadsheets and pamphlets (and more)

first established it three hundred years ago” (Barlow 2008: 5). Yet at the same time, some evidence suggests that blogs and the Internet may not live up to their hype as a highly interconnected form of social media. Susan Herring and her colleagues (2005: 163) found that the vast majority of blogs are “individualistic, even intimate, forms of self-expression.” This finding demonstrates how important it is to properly categorize blogs: while the majority of the millions of blogs are essentially personal diaries shared publicly, the blogs that have generated so much public and academic attention are “filter” blogs that largely feature “observations and evaluations of external, typically public, events” (Herring et al. 2005: 147). These types of blog – specifically those that focus on politics – are estimated to constitute only about 20 per cent of blogs and blog traffic (Perlmutter 2008: 26).

There are many examples of how networks of these filter blogs have influenced politics. One of the first and most celebrated examples of their impact came after a number of bloggers drew attention to controversial remarks made by then-U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in December 2002. Speaking at a birthday party for Strom Thurmond, a fellow U.S. senator and one-time presidential candidate who ran for president in 1948 on a pro-segregation platform, Lott remarked on December 5, 2002 that voters in his home state of Mississippi voted for Thurmond and that “if the rest of the country had of followed our lead we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either” (Bloom 2003: 2). Though the remarks were made with members of the media in the room and the event was broadcast live on C-SPAN, Lott's words received scant attention from journalists – only one network, ABC, mentioned it in the network's daily online column, *The Note* (Bloom 2003: 2-3). However, bloggers had taken notice of these pro-segregation remarks and commented on them as the story spread from blog to blog the following day. It was not until two days later, however, that two mainstream media

outlets – the Washington Post and CNN – reported the substance of what Lott said (Bloom 2003: 6). In the coming days, more mainstream media outlets began to report on these remarks as well as quote Lott’s political allies and adversaries, some of whom called on the Senate Majority Leader to resign. Lott initially apologized on December 9 and issued subsequent statements of apology on December 12 and 13, but by this point “the feeding frenzy was on” (Bloom 2003: 9). On December 20, 2002, Lott resigned his post as Senate majority leader, but did not give up his Senate seat.

A great deal of journalistic commentary about the story credited bloggers for keeping the story alive and bringing it to the attention of media outlets in the days following the controversial speech (Bloom 2003: 10-11). Daniel Drezner and Henry Farrell (2004), however, argued that bloggers played a supporting role in bringing about Lott’s resignation, but they were not the prime difference-maker as far as whether or not he resigned. As they put it, blogs “were not a causal variable, but they were an important intervening variable” (Drezner and Farrell 2004: 3) in Lott’s downfall. While they highlighted plenty of evidence suggesting blogs can influence what journalists focus attention on, they concluded that blogs can only play a limited role in shaping opinion because they do not have the resources to compete with mainstream media outlets (Drezner and Farrell 2004: 20), who ultimately drew attention to the issue and placed pressure on Lott to resign as Senate majority leader. Ironically, the scarcity of resources does not prevent bloggers from focusing attention on issues set aside by the mainstream media due to space or time constraints. For example, both Joel Bloom (2003: 9-10) and Edward Ashbee (2003: 362) suggested that the reason bloggers were the first to report on Lott’s comments was because mainstream outlets were focused on two other big political stories taking place at the same time: the resignation of Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill and a Senate runoff election in Louisiana.

Ashbee (2003: 366-367) placed the issues in a greater context, noting that many members of Lott's Republican Party had worked hard towards a "softening" of the party's racial image and that it was their condemnation of Lott's remarks, not the fact that they were flagged by bloggers, that really led to Lott's downfall. The novelty of blogs, then, is that they stand more chance of creating alternative agendas only if mainstream media outlets find time to focus on them, and if other political actors will echo their viewpoints.

The interaction between bloggers and journalists/media outlets tends to be the central focus of academic studies mapping the influence and impact of blogs. Even prior to the emergence of blogs, the Internet had already demonstrated that it could have an influence on what issues or events show up on the public agenda. In January 1998, the first news of then-President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky was reported on the Drudge Report, a low-budget website that aggregated news headlines from other media outlets. The website's creator, Matt Drudge, had been given information about the president and Lewinsky's relationship just as the magazine *Newsweek* prepared to go to print with a story about the affair (Perlmutter 2008: 59; Kinsella 2007: 257). For the first time, the Internet had allowed an "outsider ... literally someone webbing from his apartment" (Perlmutter 2008: 59) to publish a major story before other mainstream media outlets. Drudge's website (www.drudgereport.com), which typically links to a variety of stories published by media outlets, is not considered a blog by the definition used by most scholars and media analysts. However, the precedent he set would later be replicated by other non-journalistic voices, as the Lott incident showed. In addition to having the ability to report information before media outlets can, bloggers also see themselves as performing a "watchdog" function, acting as "a check on traditional news sources" (McKenna and Pole 2008: 102). Indeed, McKenna and Pole found that bloggers generally assign this role to themselves

due to the fact that many blog authors “maintain a high level of distrust of mainstream news sources,” though they also found that these bloggers tend to rely heavily on these same sources to provide information to their readers.

Blogs and the blogosphere directly challenge journalists and media outlets in many ways. First, blogs abandon traditional norms of journalistic practice, including the need to be “objective,” accurate and non-partisan (Robinson 2006: 65-66). While many will take issue with the idea that journalists – or anyone, for that matter – can be truly objective, Jane Singer (2005: 177) argued that objectivity mostly refers to a professionalized and dispassionate “newsgathering” method journalists use to create content. In any event, the blogosphere eschews these traditional journalistic conventions as it “privileges rather than sublimates individual perspectives and opinions” (Singer 2005: 177). Some scholars have argued that blogs make up for their lack of balance and objectivity by encouraging comments and frequently revising posts (Harper 2005: 23), thus creating a more “dialogic” form of journalism by holding themselves more accountable to readers than mainstream journalists (Singer 2005: 177). Others have described blogging as a specifically “postmodern” activity that allows individuals to offer competing narratives on the same issue or event (Robinson 2006: 68). In response to what Wilson Lowrey (2006: 482) described as blogging’s “challenge to the jurisdictional claim of journalists,” many media outlets have created blogs on their company websites and have encouraged journalists to post to them. This is a way of “normalizing” (Singer 2005: 192) or “reclaiming” (Robinson 2006: 79) journalism online.

Using a sociologically-grounded systems framework, Lowrey (2006: 491) argued that journalists – through their superior access to resources, deeper division of labour and perceived legal and

professional legitimacy – are better equipped than bloggers to control the production of information, even as bloggers encroach upon the traditional authority and practices of journalists. The decision made by many media outlets to offer their own blogs is a way to address the occupational threat presented by bloggers, as they can adopt the style of blogging while maintaining their historic institutional advantages. The adoption of blogging by mainstream media outlets may be corroding their efforts to strive for objectivity and remain non-partisan by “blurring the lines of independence, verification, the definition of news and truth” (Robinson 2006: 79). At the same time, evidence suggests that blogging journalists have been hesitant to fully embrace this new format in its unbalanced, unfiltered form, as journalists have demonstrated a tendency to predominantly link to items on parent media company websites or blogs written by other journalists rather than explicitly partisan bloggers (Singer 2005: 192). As well, some evidence suggests print journalists who write blogs are not using them to fully engage their readers, as they write posts infrequently and generate very little discussion with and among their readers (Dailey et al., 2008: 61). As such, rather than assume that journalists use blogs solely to stimulate dialogue with new audiences, it is also important to note journalists use blogs and web links to show the origins of their stories or stated opinions – which, in the process, provides readers with more insight into how they do their work (Robinson 2006: 80). Robinson suggested that this fosters an interactive process which allows readers, through comments, to craft alternative frames to those offered by journalists.

Many Canadian and American political journalists have admitted in selected survey (Dautrich and Barnes 2005: 10) and qualitative research (Chu 2007: 7-8) that they read political blogs; in the case of U.S. journalists, they are significantly more likely to read them than members of the public (Woodly 2008: 118). Deva Woodly (2008: 119) contends that bloggers may have a

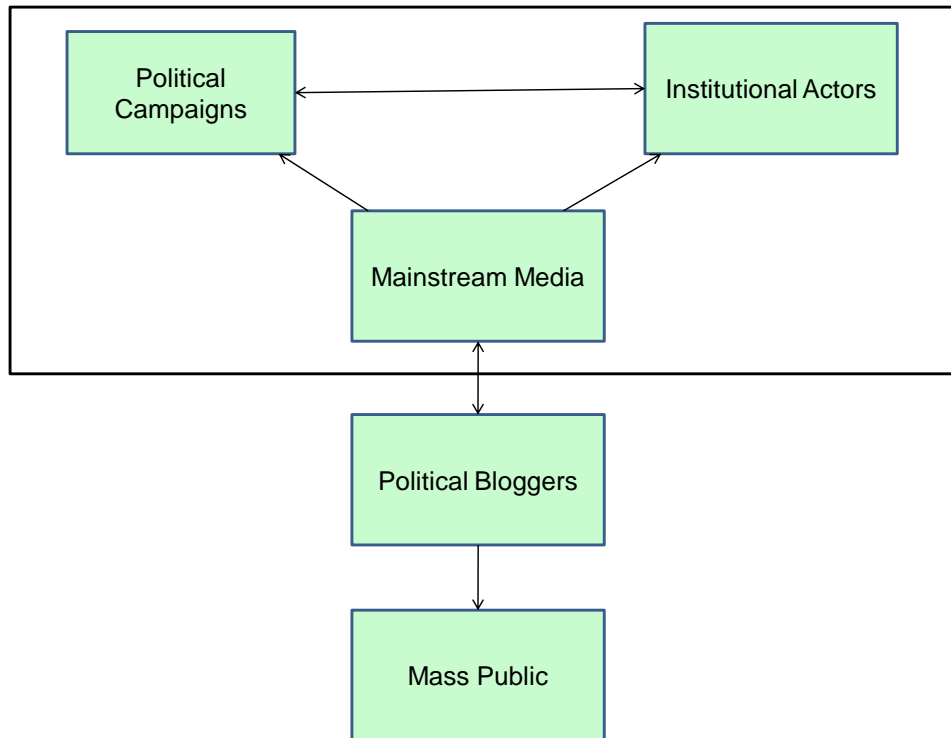
disproportionate degree of influence simply because they are frequently read by “elites” in newsrooms and political circles, further arguing that this makes “intuitive sense” because blogs give elites a sense – though an admittedly skewed one – of public opinion. In other words, bloggers enjoy “first-mover advantages” (Drezner and Farrell 2008: 25) and can act as early interpreters of public opinion (Rose and Kiss 2007: 340) by being able to influence public opinion due to the fact they can publish opinion quickly and cheaply, as well as create a “snowball effect” by reacting to other bloggers’ opinions before mainstream media outlets can respond to a particular event or issue. Echoing Lazarsfeld et al.’s analysis of the “two-step” flow of communications, Wallsten argues that:

[P]olitical bloggers are acting as “opinion leaders” who play an important role in not only identifying emerging issues and diffusing them among members of the mass public but also, and more importantly, in influencing the issues that politicians and journalists choose to discuss. Political bloggers, in other words, are emerging as central figures in the two-step flow of communications between elite actors and the mass public (Wallsten 2008: 6).

However, Wallsten argues that bloggers are different than the “opinion leaders” identified in the Columbia election studies in that they can influence debates in several directions. As he puts it, “blogs have the potential to influence political discourse ... by exerting an upward influence on political elites and mainstream media, a downward influence on members of the mass public and horizontal influence on other bloggers” (Wallsten 2008: 19-20). This framework, which echoes Entman’s cascading network activation model (see Figure 2.2) and differs slightly from Soroka’s framework for understanding agenda setting (see Figure 2.1), is reproduced in Figure 2.3 on the following page. It shows that bloggers act as a conduit between political elites, journalists and the public by acting as “central figures in a multi-directional, two-step flow of communication” (Wallsten 2008: 22). While Wallsten uncovered extensive evidence that the mainstream media drives discussion on blogs when it comes to certain issues, he also found

that blogs tend to influence one another in terms of what they write and how much they write about a particular topic (Wallsten 2008: 89-90). However, in assessing whether bloggers can influence the public, this model does not distinguish between citizens. Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) distinguished between “opinion leaders” and citizens who receive and act upon political information from these individuals. It is possible to conceive of bloggers acting as new sources of information for opinion leaders within the broader society as part of a narrow model of democracy that Thomas describes as a small number of citizens “pay(ing) close attention to events and sound(ing) the alarm if something is seriously wrong in the country” (Thomas 2000: 104). However, Wallsten’s model described here does not fully analyze this possibility.

Figure 2.3: Political Bloggers, Elite Discourse and Public Opinion (Wallsten 2008: 21)



However, one of the strengths of Wallsten's model is that it distinguishes between blogs in terms of their readership and their ability to influence policy-makers, journalists and the public. Many analysts of the blogosphere have demonstrated that there is a relatively disproportionate amount of attention focused on a few elite or "A-list" blogs that act as agenda-setters for other lesser-read bloggers and, perhaps, mainstream journalists. Political blogs follow a "power law distribution" in which websites that already receive a high proportion of links and traffic are more likely to receive links from new blogs that have few ties to other websites, thus generating a disproportionate number of links and mentions within the blogosphere (Drezner and Farrell 2008: 18). This phenomenon creates what David Perlmutter (2008: 27) called "kings and queens of the bloglands" – individuals who maintain popular blogs that continue to grow in size and influence over time. Drezner and Farrell (2008: 26-27) also found that while new or lesser-read bloggers tended to link to these well-read blogs, the journalists they surveyed were far

more likely to frequent these “A-list” (Adamic and Glance 2005: 2) blogs more than others. As Munger (2008: 129) notes, “elite blogs” that are widely read by both bloggers, journalists and political decision-makers “serve an aggregative function, distilling from the great mass of content certain central tendencies, and they also serve as portals or conduits for this information, attracting the attention of reporters and political leaders.” A similar conclusion has also been made in regard to the Canadian blogosphere, though Jansen and Koop (2006: 7) made this assertion on the basis of the frequency of blog posts and comments rather than the web traffic and number of links to each blog.

To what extent, then, do blogs influence what journalists write about? Christopher Harper (2005: 22) argued that blogs do establish agendas for reporters, and that they play a “central role” in framing issues and events for them. However, some of Harper’s research weakens this dramatic conclusion. He notes that many of the blogs he studied rely on the mainstream media for content (Harper 2005: 14) and that these media outlets tend to create the agenda for bloggers rather than the other way around (Harper 2005: 15). If bloggers cannot set the agenda, he argued, they can establish frames for “making sense of relevant events and providing context for that information” (Harper 2005: 15). Furthermore, Harper argued that the Internet allows individuals to “assert more control over what they read, what is said, and how that information is interpreted in the public sphere” (Harper 2005: 23). While this assertion may be made on the basis of the low levels of technological skill and financial commitment required to blog, it is not immediately obvious how this is the case if a small number of voices actually dominate discussion online.

Other analyses of the structure and relationships between bloggers focus on the “divided” (Adamic and Glance 2005: 1) nature of the blogosphere. According to this view, the blogosphere is split along ideological lines, with individuals self-identifying as “liberals” or “conservatives” and exclusively reading and linking to the blogs of like-minded individuals. This may be due in part to the fact that many political bloggers, unlike mainstream journalists, are openly partisan and support a particular political party or candidate. Lada Adamic and Natalie Glance’s (2005: 8) study of 40 highly-read conservative and liberal blogs during the 2004 U.S. presidential election highlighted this divide: they found that blogs “cross cited” – that is, linked to – someone across the partisan divide in just 15 per cent of their posts. Furthermore, they found that many bloggers on both sides tended to link to the websites of mainstream media outlets or media figures that offered opinion corresponding to their worldview – for example, conservative bloggers were more likely to link to Fox News or Rush Limbaugh’s website, while liberals were more likely to link to Salon or Michael Moore (Adamic and Glance 2005: 13-14). This phenomenon is also present in Canada, where (English-speaking) political bloggers tend to be aligned in specific partisan communities that support either the right of centre Conservative Party, the centrist Liberal Party or the left-of-centre New Democratic Party (Jansen and Koop 2009: 159). The Blogging Tories, the oldest and most developed group, contains Conservative Party supporters, while the members of LibLogs support the Liberal Party and the Blogging Dippers (later rebranded as New Democrats Online) support the New Democratic Party. These blogrolls “... play an important role in organizing and (to a certain extent) dividing the Canadian blogosphere along partisan lines” (Jansen and Koop 2009: 159).

Harold Jansen and Royce Koop (2009: 170) also found that while some cross-party engagement exists within the Canadian political blogosphere, bloggers are more likely to link to

members of their own community than to link to blogs produced by members of another partisan camp. Furthermore, political bloggers are more likely to mention and criticize leaders and members of other parties than the politicians they support (Jansen and Koop 2009: 166; Adamic and Glance 2005: 12-13). In this process, bloggers engage in polarized discussions, with the blogosphere featuring a “complete division into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ good and evil, with little communication of any kind and what communication there is more likely to be vituperation instead of argument” (Munger 2008: 130). This echoes the observation that the blogosphere and the Internet in general tends to foster criticism and a negative tone of discussion (Harper 2007: 19; see also Jansen and Koop, 2005). It exemplifies what Michael Keren (2004: 21) described as the “politics of melancholy” acted out online – vicious, extremist and ultimately useless discussion that is the polar opposite of the Habermasian ideal of rational, informed dialogue between engaged citizens. If this is true, it suggests that blogs are not exactly bringing about a return to an idealized public sphere, but are rather a demonstration of Darin Barney’s prediction that the political discussion via the Internet may facilitate “a degenerate technique for the registration of privately-formed and self-interested opinions” (Barney 2000: 267). This may be a harsh view, but it represents the possibility that blogs, despite their potential to foster an open and deliberative dialogue online, may be used simply to attack, criticize and misinform readers.

Bloggging in Canada: The Literature To Date

In Canada, as in the United States, it took a major political incident for the mainstream media and the public to really take notice of blogs. In early 2005, during the judicial inquiry into the sponsorship program, inquiry commissioner Justice John Gomery placed a publication ban on testimony provided by Jean Brault, one of the key witnesses to take the stand. Thus, Canadian

media outlets could not report on what Brault, the president of one of the companies alleged to receive a substantial amount of money from the sponsorship program, had told the commission. However, details of his testimony were sent to a U.S.-based conservative blogger who posted this on his website (Brown 2009: 176-177). Thanks to the fact the blog's American author could not be prosecuted for violating a Canadian judge's publication ban, Canadians learned the details of Brault's testimony long before they could be informed about them by the country's newspapers and television broadcasters.

While some Canadian media and political figures were blogging before this happened, it was around this same period – early 2005 – that the first of several explicitly partisan blog communities or “blogrolls” was formed. The Blogging Tories, modelled on the pro-Republican blogs active during the 2004 U.S. presidential election (Jansen and Koop 2009: 159), was created as a forum for online enthusiasts who were active in the newly-formed Conservative Party of Canada³ and touted by one of its creators as a right-wing alternative to the perceived liberal/left-wing bias of Canada's mainstream political journalists (Taylor, 2005; cited in Brown 2009: 178). During the 2005-2006 federal election, bloggers would play an important role exposing allegations of insider trading related to the Liberal government's previous decision not to tax income trusts (Chu 2007: 9). As Conservative Party campaign manager and University of Calgary political scientist Tom Flanagan later described it, the Conservative campaign collaborated with friendly blogs to release information “not yet ready” to be taken directly to the mainstream media (Flanagan 2007: 232). Thus, blogs – which are read by some Canadian political journalists (Chu 2007: 8) – may have been used as an indirect method to deliver information to journalists and, by extension, the public. During the 2008 federal election, the

³ The Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative Parties formally merged into the Conservative Party of Canada in early 2004.

New Democratic Party did this in an explicit way, urging bloggers who supported the party to act as “Rapid Responders” by spreading the party’s key messages through blog posts (Smith and Chen 2009: 30).

In addition to highlighting through executive interviews with prominent Ottawa-based political reporters how Canadian journalists perceive political blogs, Wayne Chu also found evidence that “A-list” Canadian political blogs may have an agenda-setting effect on mainstream media outlets. Chu’s (2007: 11-12) examination of the income trust allegation story from December 2005 to January 2006 shows that a spike in the number of blog posts on the income trust allegations preceded an increase in the number of stories about this issue in six Canadian newspapers examined for this study. Chu (2007: 12) also observed that the number of blog posts increased following additional newspaper stories about this issue, leading him to conclude that media coverage of something first highlighted in the blogosphere can create a reinforcing effect online. While this effect was observed at some points in the campaign, in some instances a flurry of blog posts on the issue did not precipitate a subsequent increase in media coverage. Chu (2007: 12-14) suggested that rather than driving an immediate increase in coverage, blogs may keep the issue alive in journalists’ minds over a sustained period of time or – if the issue has been reported in a significant way already – media coverage may be self-sustaining and no longer require a “push” from the blogosphere. Chu concluded that a relationship exists between blogs and newspapers that suggests blogs play a role in the newsgathering process but noted there is not – nor can there be – a perfect correlation between an increased number of blog posts on a particular subject and a corresponding increase in mainstream media coverage of that issue. This is a reasonable hypothesis, but it is limited in that it is only based on an examination of the agenda-setting effects of blogs and not their ability to create issue frames for

journalists. A more thorough content analysis of both blog posts and media coverage (including items produced by radio and television stations, which Chu did not study) may reveal some correlation between not only *what* blogs and media outlets focus on, but also on *how* they portray them.

As well, Chu's analysis – like the vast majority of popular and academic analysis on the blogosphere's role in politics and media coverage – examined blogs during campaign periods (in this case, the 2006 federal election and the subsequent Liberal leadership race). It would be useful to know how blogs are used to transmit information that is – in Flanagan's words, "not yet ready" for the mainstream media – while a party is in power. This is especially significant in light of the conflict between the Conservative government and the Parliamentary Press Gallery over how political journalists cover the government, as well as Prime Minister Stephen Harper's comment that if blogs can erode the power of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, it will be "helpful for democracy" (Libin 2006: 15). Given some of the enmity between this institution and the Conservative government, it is entirely plausible that blogs – especially those written by the party's supporters – represent a potential avenue for the government to reach supporters and the public without having to contend with professional journalists challenging, criticizing or omitting these messages. Similarly, parties in opposition might use friendly blogs for a similar purpose.

Canadian political bloggers are motivated to blog for a variety of reasons. Harvey (2007: 92-94) found in her interviews with some Canadian political bloggers that besides being motivated to "express their opinions about current events and politics in a public venue," these individuals wish to challenge the information and opinions offered by mainstream media outlets or search for information not reported in news stories and share it with their readers. She characterized

the bloggers that she interviewed as “opinion makers” who comment on what is reported in the news, as well as periodically conduct their own research and report original material on their blogs (Harvey 2007: 102-103). Harvey contended that despite criticism that these bloggers do not engage in “original journalism,” these bloggers act as sources for professional journalists as well as generate more journalistic attention to stories already in the media by repeatedly discussing them on their blogs (Harvey 2007: 115-116). It is not entirely clear whether this is actually the case, as Harvey’s interviews with a small number of bloggers and the fact that she did not conduct an in-depth analysis of these authors’ blogs over a specific period of time leaves these claims open to dispute.

Surveys of Quebec-based political bloggers conducted by Giasson et al. (2009: 14-15) revealed that these bloggers – who express themselves online primarily in French – rely heavily on information presented by traditional media outlets as a source for what they write. These individuals, who tended to express support for both left-of-centre political parties and the idea of Quebec sovereignty (Giasson et al., 2009: 13) also noted that they spend a great deal of time promoting a particular partisan point of view and criticizing rival positions. Furthermore, these bloggers also tended to actively participate in many offline political activities, including voting, contributing money to political campaigns, participating in demonstrations and other forms of community activism, etc. (Giasson et al., 2009: 17). In short, these bloggers are described as “hyper-citizens” who participate in many forms of political and civic engagement, both online and offline (Giasson et al., 2009: 17).

In addition to giving partisan activists a space to engage in discussion and debate, new communications technologies are also significant in how they allow elected officials to connect

with voters without relying on the mediating effects of newspapers and broadcast outlets. While most Canadian parliamentarians and political parties use websites to communicate, the way they do so is not particularly interactive. In her study of the federal parties' websites during the 2004 election, Tamara Small (2007: 654) found that party websites are "mainly used to amplify traditional methods of campaigning" and mostly facilitate a top-down and one-way flow of information between parties and voters. More recent research conducted by Smith and Chen (2009: 11-12) reveals that greater numbers of individual candidates use websites to communicate with voters during Canadian federal elections; however, many of those use so-called "mini sites" that are essentially templates provided by their respective parties and can only be partially customized to include information about individual candidates and the electoral districts where they are seeking office. Furthermore, the dynamics of party and candidate websites, as well as the target audience, is changing: Smith and Chen (2009: 24) found that rather than using websites primarily to persuade undecided voters, Canadian parties provide information to supporters and media professionals and as a result use a variety of digital mechanisms (video, audio, fundraising tools, etc.) to maintain the "core branding of the party and leader." Overall, parties are using the online environment – including blogs but also social networking sites such as Facebook, Flickr and YouTube – as "a useful surveillance system" that is part of their "marketing-orientation focused on message control, the minimization of risk and branding" (Smith and Chen 2009: 32).

Expanding her focus to websites and blogs maintained by Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons, Small (2008: 107-108) found that even though the vast majority (249 of 308, or 81%) of MPs in the 39th Parliament had websites, only 11 had blogs. Of those, Small only described three of these as true blogs rather than simply MPs' online diaries on the basis of

their interactivity (both by offering links to other blogs and accepting readers' comments) and self-expression (Small 2008: 110). One of these was the blog operated by former MP Garth Turner, who was ejected from the Conservative Party for publicizing private discussions from party caucus meetings on his blog. Turner's blog served many functions: it allowed him to communicate directly with constituents, it was used to communicate information to journalists in the Parliamentary Press Gallery and it connected him with other Canadians interested in what he had to say (Small 2008: 111). Small's research mirrors studies done on the websites and blogs maintained by members of the U.S. Congress (Perlmutter 2008: 170-178; Sroka 2006: 22-23). A comparison of the two, however, suggests that Canadian MPs are less likely to blog than their American counterparts. This may be due to many factors, but rigid party discipline in the Canadian parliamentary system appears to be a central issue. Turner's expulsion from the Conservative caucus for blogging highlights this, showing that blogging "cannot be said to have rejuvenated practices of representative democracy in the Canadian parliament" (Small 2008: 117), though it should be noted that Turner's decision to breach caucus confidentiality – not the fact that he used his blog to share the content of what was intended to be a private discussion – had more to do with his dismissal from the Conservative Party. Small's analysis shines a light on the Internet's strengths and limitations when it comes to allowing elected officials to use blogs to communicate directly with voters. However, it also shows that a technology which allows direct contact between politicians and citizens may also be used to influence the media more than citizens. In this way, bloggers may be the first step in a two-step process as they are used to influence a smaller group rather than the masses, serving as potential "opinion leaders" for journalists, who in turn communicate these ideas and arguments to much broader audiences.

Conclusion

The idea that the Internet has rejuvenated the idea of a Habermasian “public sphere” – indeed, if such a thing truly existed – is hotly contested. The Internet has provided many additional opportunities for citizens to access and produce information that would have been inaccessible if citizens were forced to rely solely on traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television. As discussed, the Internet and blogs have created a potential point of entry for citizens into communications processes. Online tools potentially challenge the oligopolistic power of traditional media outlets and political actors to exclusively set the agenda for political discussion and frame issues and events in a particular way, even as media outlets attempt to normalize or reclaim this function (Singer 2005: 192; Robinson 2006: 79) by legitimizing certain well-read bloggers and adopting the blogging form themselves.

Looking again at Soroka’s model of multi-directional agenda setting, Entman’s cascading network activation model for framing issues and Wallsten’s model for understanding how blogs fit into these dialogic processes, it is important to consider how blogs fit into the structure of political communication in Canada and elsewhere. Are bloggers media? Are they the public? Can they be considered political actors who create frames for the media? Or do they belong in a separate category, linked to but not of all three groups, making their own contributions to the creation of new schemas that influence how the public perceives issues and political actors? The answer to these questions remains uncertain without more research examining how journalists utilize blogs and how bloggers and journalists interact with one another and other political actors. In Canada, where the effects of the political media are not well understood to begin with (Taras 1990: 41; Murray 2005: 525), the need for this research is especially acute as instances emerge where blogs have affected media coverage of election campaigns and

political debates. By using a research approach that combines content analysis of the Canadian blogs most likely to be “agenda-setters” for Canadian journalists and survey research of Canadian bloggers, journalists and communications professionals, we can begin to draw some conclusions – or at least make some informed observations – about how the political blogosphere in this country might affect how Canadians learn about their political system. The first part of this, which measures how some bloggers might directly influence political dialogue in this country, is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 – CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CANADIAN BLOGS

This thesis clarifies the potential agenda-setting and framing functions of partisan political bloggers in Canada. Partisan blogs, rather than blogs written by journalists or citizens without a specific allegiance to a particular national Canadian political party, have been chosen because these blogs are potential mechanisms that allow political parties to deliver messages without contending with the “filter” of journalists establishing their own agendas or imposing their own interpretations. To study how partisan bloggers contribute to framing and agenda-setting, it is essential to consider four potential ways in which bloggers might influence public discussion.

These are:

1. Does the content on blogs influence (directly or indirectly) what journalists discuss?
2. Does the content produced by journalists influence what bloggers write about?
3. Do bloggers influence public opinion and discussion directly due to what they write?
4. Do bloggers indirectly influence public opinion, through a two-step flow of communications where journalists take opinions expressed on blogs and transfer that information to a broader audience via articles, op-eds and other items they produce?

Several U.S.-based scholars (Wallsten 2005; Adamic and Glance 2005; Woodly 2008) have tried to answer these questions. Wallsten (2005: 7) describes the blogosphere as an “echo chamber” for debates being carried out in the political arena and in the mainstream media. Though his research concludes that blogs do not always mimic exactly what appears in the media, his hypothesis suggests discussion on blogs is driven largely by discussion of the same issues in the media, with bloggers of a similar political persuasion both repeating similar arguments and justifications offered by fellow members of the same political camp (Wallsten 2005: 7-8). Even if blogs do not act directly as agenda-setters, however, there is a possibility that they may “be able to influence what is newsworthy” and “can sometimes expand the range of political knowledge that is available to journalists, political elites and interested citizens” (Woodly 2008: 122). While this can be expressed in a normative sense, this is a difficult

statement to prove empirically, not just in the short term, but especially indirectly, over the longer term.

This chapter analyzes the potential for bloggers to act as agenda-setters in the Canadian context and explores what differences exist in their attempts to frame political figures and subjects. It presents the results of content analysis on a select number of partisan blogs that, based on a number of measures, may be considered “A-list” or “influential” blogs within Canada. It seeks to discover possible links between blog material and content produced by mainstream media outlets. It also assesses how blogs portray political figures such as the prime minister, opposition leaders, Members of Parliament, and so on.

In order to analyze what linkages may exist between content produced by Canadian political bloggers and content produced for the country’s major media outlets by Parliamentary reporters, this study includes a content analysis of blogs featuring relatively high levels of readership. However, this presents the obvious and difficult challenge of determining which blogs have sufficiently large audiences to wield any influence and which blogs are largely ignored by journalists, government decision-makers and the general public. As noted earlier, the political blogosphere – at least in the United States – is largely divided between a small number of so-called “A-list” blogs that are widely read by those who follow politics and a much larger number of blogs that feed into these A-list blogs, but are largely unread efforts by individuals toiling in obscurity (Perlmutter 2008; Drezner and Farrell 2007b; Wallsten 2008). As Dailey et al. (2008: 54) note: “If a weblog is sent out into the vast Internet forest but no one reads it or comments on it, has that blog made any sound in the greater public discourse?”

If the Canadian political blogosphere mirrors its American counterpart, it would stand to reason that the Canadian political blogging community would be structured along similar lines, with a small group of influential writers surrounded by a network of little-known, little-read bloggers. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is the case – political bloggers in this country have developed their own subjective ranking and awards systems that recognize particular authors for writing the best or “most influential” blogs (Canadian Blog Awards 2009; Jago 2009). However, this thesis set out to measure objectively which Canadian political blogs carry the most weight in terms of their influence on the political agenda. For several reasons, this proved problematic. First, there is no well-accepted definition of what qualifies as a “political blog.” As Wallsten (2005: 11) notes:

One of the most serious obstacles to drawing valid conclusions about the content of ordinary political blogs stems from the fact that no single population list of political blogs exists and, as a result, there is no way to generate a truly representative sample of political blogs. Indeed, the very idea of a “political blog” is troubling because there is no consensus on what distinguishes political blogs from non-political blogs.

Authors who have previously examined bloggers’ influence on policy debates and the mainstream media agenda have devised measures using websites that rank blogs based on their readership (see Adamic and Glance 2005; McKenna and Pole 2004; Drezner and Farrell 2008), with some analyzing a random sample from a much-larger catalogue of political blogs (Wallsten 2005; Wallsten 2008). Some of these websites include Alexa, Truthlaidbear, Blogstreet, Blogrunner, BlogPulse and Technorati. As Karpf (2008) notes, many of these sites cannot be relied upon to provide an accurate measure of website traffic on blogs, because some measurement tools are defunct (Blogstreet, Blogrunner) or fail to include a number of sites (BlogPulse). Furthermore, sites like Alexa or Truthlaidbear require users to add tracking software to their blog, which means that some blogs will not be assessed if authors fail to

incorporate this feature into their blog. Technorati (www.technorati.com), meanwhile, has emerged as a more reputable site for tracking blogs (Karpf 2008: 35); however, rather than measure the potential reach of the tens of millions of websites it tracks, it now only publishes the top 100 results. There are no Canadian political blogs in this category, meaning that while Technorati may be a useful tool for studying American blogs that receive hundreds of thousands of visitors, it provides no help for analyzing political blogs north of the 49th parallel expected to draw significantly fewer visitors.

Second, and related to this, there is no single list of Canadian political bloggers that ranks either readership levels or their potential influence in a truly objective way. Canadian bloggers have devised their own methodology for tracking readership levels within their community. Robert Jago (2009) has been creating lists of Canada's "top 25 political blogs" every three months since October 2007 – one year later than the period that this study covers. Jago creates an index for each blog by adding together each blog's Google page rank with its rating on Alexa⁴, a tool used to measure website readership that is used by some, but not all bloggers. The aggregate Google/Alexa score is then used to rank each blog on an ongoing basis. Jago, who does not include results from blog aggregators (like the Blogging Tories or Liblogs) or from blogs written by journalists, nonetheless admits that his methodology may be problematic as it does not include some blogs hosted by the website Blogger (ie. blogs containing .blogspot in their URL/web address) that "may not show a correct Alexa rank" (Jago 2009). Another Canadian blogger, Werner Patels, has created an alternative Top 25 ranking based on

⁴ Alexa (www.alexa.com) tracks all publicly available websites and measures basic information on these sites such as their traffic, links, etc. However, it derives detailed information that is used to develop rankings from a toolbar that users must download onto their web browser and use to search for information. Bloggers who do not use this toolbar do not show up in the company's rankings of traffic, readership, etc.

tabulating the top results derived from searching “Canada + Political blogs” on Google (Patels 2009a), or by using Technorati; which, as noted earlier, has been used in a number of American studies (e.g. McKenna and Pole 2004; Harper 2007) but may not be the most accurate tool for measuring Canadian political blog readership.

Despite the flaws in Jago’s methodology, it was expected that his ongoing ranking of 25 Canadian political blogs could at least generate a lengthy list of blogs that could be analyzed using a variety of ranking tools, including Alexa and others. In order to generate a broader list of blogs beyond those analyzed in the most recent (April 2009) set of rankings, blogs that appeared on Jago’s earlier lists of the top 25 Canadian political blogs are also included here. The overall ranking of each blog was not important: the point of this exercise was to generate a broad and representative sample of well-read Canadian political blogs that could be analyzed using a variety of measures without going through the more time-consuming task of measuring hundreds or thousands of blogs about Canadian politics. From Jago’s rankings, a list of 48 blogs about Canadian politics was generated. After removing blogs affiliated with media organizations, journalists and elected politicians (who are not the focus of this study), 38 blogs remain to be analyzed. In addition to developing a list of blogs, the partisan affiliation – that is, whether these blogs correspond to the partisan communities identified in Jansen and Koop (2009), as well as to other communities⁵ – was observed for each blog. These are shown in Table 3.1:

⁵ These communities are the Blogging Tories (www.bloggingtories.ca), LibLogs (www.liblogs.ca) and the Blogging Dippers/New Democrats Online (www.newdemocratsonline.ca), as well as the Progressive Bloggers (www.progressivebloggers.ca), which Jansen and Koop did not study. This list also includes blogs that are not directly affiliated to a particular partisan community of bloggers, which is the focus of the content analysis and related survey in Chapter 4. For the purposes of comparison, these blogs are included in the initial list.

Table 3.1: Selected Canadian Blogs		
Blog Title*	URL	Partisan Orientation
Small Dead Animals	www.smalldeadanimals.com	Conservative
Matthew Good	http://www.matthewgood.org/	Unknown
Ghost of a Flea	http://www.ghostofaflea.com/	Conservative
David Eaves	http://eaves.ca/	Unknown
Mark Steyn - Steyn Online	http://www.steynonline.com/	Unknown
Calgary Grit	http://calgarygrit.blogspot.com	Liberal
Warren Kinsella	http://www.warrenkinsella.com	Liberal
Marginalized Action Dinosaur	http://marginalizedactiondinosaur.net/	Unknown
Ezra Levant	http://ezralevant.com/	Conservative
5 Feet of Fury	http://www.fivefeetoffury.com/	Unknown
No-Libs	http://no-libs.com/	Unknown
Quebec Politique	http://www.quebecpolitique.com/	Unknown
Abandoned Stuff	http://www.abandonedstuff.com/	Liberal
Red Tory	http://redtory.wordpress.com/	Liberal
Bene Diction Blogs On	http://www.benedictionblogson.com/	Unknown
Jay Currie	http://jaycurrie.info-syn.com/	Unknown
Buckdog	http://buckdogpolitics.blogspot.com/	New Democrat
Free Canuckistan!	http://steynian.wordpress.com/	Unknown
GenXat40	http://www.genx40.com/	Unknown
Mitchieville	http://mitchieville.com/	Unknown
Stephen Taylor	http://www.stephentaylor.ca	Conservative
Blazing Cat Fur	http://blazingcatfur.blogspot.com	Unknown
Daimnation!	http://www.damianpenny.com/	Conservative
Bow James Bow	http://bowjamesbow.ca/blog.shtml	Liberal
My Blahg	http://myblahg.com/	Liberal
Galloping Beaver	http://thegallopingbeaver.blogspot.com/	NDP
Canadian Cynic	http://canadiancynic.blogspot.com/	Progressive
Vive Le Canada	http://www.vivelecanada.ca/	Progressive
The Politic	http://www.thepolitic.com/	Conservative
Steve Janke	http://stevejanke.com/	Conservative
Jason Cherniak	http://jasoncherniak.blogspot.com/	Liberal
Dust My Broom	http://dustmybroom.com/	Unknown
Daveberta	http://daveberta.blogspot.com/	Progressive
Revue Gauche	http://plawiuk.blogspot.com/	NDP
Blue Blogging Soapbox	http://www.bluebloggingsoapbox.com/	Conservative
Scott's DiaTribes	http://scottdiatribes.canflag.com/	Liberal
Currents - James Narvey	http://jnarvey.com/	Unknown
Jordon Cooper	www.jordoncooper.com	Unknown
Source: Jago (2007-2009), Selected Sites		

After using Alexa to search for each blog and its relative rank on that web page, the top-10 Canadian political blogs were as follows:

Table 3.2: Top-Ranked Canadian Political Blogs on Alexa		
Blogger	Partisan Orientation	Alexa Rank
Mark Steyn - Steyn Online	Unknown	126,377
Small Dead Animals	Conservative	187,276
Ghost of a Flea	Conservative	236,211
5 Feet of Fury	Conservative	259,283
Ezra Levant	Conservative	268,542
Warren Kinsella	Liberal	270,653
Calgary Grit	Liberal	275,460
Matthew Good	Unknown	283,991
Marginalized Action Dinosaur	Unknown	395,728
David Eaves	Unknown	421,701
Source: Alexa (www.alexa.com) as of May 7, 2009		

Chu's (2007: 11) analysis of Canadian political blogs during the 2005-06 federal election and the Liberal party's 2006 leadership race relied on BlogPulse (<http://www.blogpulse.com/>), a ranking system produced by Nielsen Media Research. The URLs of the same group of 38 blogs were analyzed using this search engine. However, only 19 of the 38 blogs analyzed had a ranking on this website. Of those that were ranked using BlogPulse, the top-10 were as follows:

Table 3.3: Top-Ranked Canadian Political Blogs on BlogPulse		
Blogger	Affiliation	BlogPulse Rank
Ezra Levant	Conservative	517
Small Dead Animals	Conservative	570
Dust My Broom	Unknown	1241
Warren Kinsella	Liberal	1448
Blazing Cat Fur	Unknown	1707
Canadian Cynic	Progressive	1707
Daimnation!	Conservative	2246
Matthew Good	Unknown	2482
Stephen Taylor	Conservative	2794
Daveberta	Progressive	2794
Source: BlogPulse rankings as of May 8, 2009		

As Tables 3.2 and 3.3 show, there is a wide variation both in terms of the blogs that show up on each list as well as the relative rankings given to each blog when using two different ranking systems used by each site. Only three blogs – Small Dead Animals, Warren Kinsella and Ezra Levant – appear in the top-10 category for both search engines. Meanwhile, blogs with relatively high Alexa rankings, such as Steyn Online, Ghost of a Flea and 5 Feet of Fury, do not appear at all on the Nielsen BlogPulse directory. Others with relatively low Alexa rankings, such as Daveberta and Canadian Cynic, perform relatively well if BlogPulse is used to determine their readership. These findings demonstrate how some blogs might be missed if researchers rely solely on one set of rankings produced by one particular blog directory, which further validates Karpf's argument discussed earlier regarding flaws in the research methodology used to analyze blogs.

What is a more important point, however, is that none of the findings generated by these searches conclusively demonstrate whether or not these blogs are actually read by journalists or the wider public. It is possible to imagine that some of these blogs may generate relatively-high rankings due to their place within a particular network of bloggers –that is, they are read by fellow bloggers within their respective partisan community, which may drive up their overall rankings as measured by Alexa, Technorati or BlogPulse. Yet they may not be read by journalists, policy-makers or the wider public. In order to determine what potential degree of influence or popular attention these bloggers command, it is necessary to measure how often they are referred to by mainstream Canadian journalists. Chu (2007: 7-8) shows that blogs have been mentioned in the Canadian media with a growing degree of frequency in the past decade, with the word “blog” mentioned in newspapers just eight times in 2002 versus 3,216 mentions in Canadian newspaper articles in 2006. This is hardly surprising, as the federal election of 2005-

2006 is often thought of as the point when blogs truly emerged into the mainstream of Canadian politics (Brown 2009: 178; Chu 2007: 8). An important step to take, then, is to measure how often the political blogs analyzed in this study are mentioned in Canadian newspapers. Each of the 38 blogs listed in Table 1 were analyzed by typing the blog's title or author's name plus the word "blog" into the Canadian Newsstand⁶ search engine. To focus the search so it is somewhat analogous to the relevant time period (Feb. 1 – July 31, 2006) used for the content analysis, the timeframe was narrowed to January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006. The top-10 blogs/bloggers cited in newspaper articles from this extended period are as follows:

Table 3.4: Mentions of specific bloggers in Canadian newspapers, 2006		
Blogger	Partisan orientation	Newspaper mentions
Warren Kinsella	Liberal	67
Stephen Taylor	Conservative	7
Calgary Grit	Liberal	6
Small Dead Animals	Conservative	5
Jason Cherniak	Liberal	5
Steve Janke	Conservative	3
Matthew Good	Unknown	3
Ezra Levant	Conservative	2
The Politic	Conservative	2
Bow James Bow	Liberal	1
Jay Currie	Unknown	1
My Blahg	Unknown	1
Blue Blogging Soapbox	Conservative	1
Source: Canadian Newsstand as of May 8, 2009		

Kinsella and his blog were cited in newspapers on the most frequent basis, which is not surprising given that the one-time advisor to prime minister Jean Chretien was writing a weekly op-ed column for the *National Post* newspaper during this period. Even if Kinsella's columns are removed, Kinsella's blog is still mentioned in 14 other newspaper articles, which still makes him

⁶ Canadian Newsstand is a searchable archive of newspaper articles that is available online through the Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba.

the Canadian blogger most regularly cited by mainstream media outlets during the period under review. Other bloggers may enjoy a higher level of media attention due to their status as leaders within the Canadian blogosphere: second-ranked Stephen Taylor, for example, is the co-founder of the Blogging Tories website, while fifth-ranked Jason Cherniak is the co-founder of the rival LibLogs group.

These combined measures of readership and media attention provide a basis for identifying and subsequently analyzing those partisan blogs most likely to have some degree of influence on Canada's parliamentary journalists. Those that are expected to wield the most potential influence on how Canadian journalists perceive issues and events are listed in Table 5:

Table 3.5: Combined Rankings of Potentially Influential Canadian Political Bloggers				
Blog	Orientation	Alexa Rank	BlogPulse Rank	Canadian Newsstand Rank
Warren Kinsella	Liberal	6	4	1
Ezra Levant	Conservative	5	1	6
Calgary Grit	Liberal	7	11	3
Small Dead Animals	Conservative	2	2	T4
Jason Cherniak ⁷	Liberal	38	19	T4
Stephen Taylor	Conservative	21	9	2

The time period for this content analysis roughly corresponds to the first six months of the Conservative government, which was elected on January 23, 2006. As noted earlier, this time period is critical for this study because of the enhanced attention given to blogs during and after the 2006 election campaign and the first days of the Conservative government. If there was a point when blogs might have helped set agendas and frame coverage of political issues, it was during this period, as it was during this time there was an expressed sense that blogs could be

⁷ Jason Cherniak stopped blogging in October 2008 and removed his blog (<http://jasoncherniak.blogspot.com>) from public view in June 2009. As Alexa and BlogPulse rankings were taken in April-May 2009, it is conceivable that Cherniak's poor rating reflects the fact that his traffic would have likely dropped following his decision to stop blogging and as a result, would have been much higher during the period (Feb.-July 2006) that is included in this study. Unfortunately, there is no way to quantify this, as these measurement tools only provide a current snapshot of blog traffic. The author would also like to thank Mr. Cherniak for granting him access to the blog's archives.

an alternative means for the government to communicate with the Canadians (Libin 2006). Unfortunately, two of these blogs (Kinsella, Levant) could not be analyzed for this particular period, as their archives did not extend back to the first six months of 2006. Thus, the subsequent content analysis examines posts on the remaining four blogs in Table 5 include: Calgary Grit, Small Dead Animals, Jason Cherniak and Stephen Taylor, for the period inclusive of February 1 to July 31, 2006.

Methodology for Content Analysis:

All posts on these four blogs published between February 1, 2006 and July 31, 2006 were coded. In total, 1,476 entries were coded, with the following variables recorded (a copy of the codebook can be found in Appendix II and an audit trail, which explains in greater detail how some of the coding decisions were made, can be found in Appendix III):

- Date the blog was published
- Time the blog was published
- The issue addressed by the blog post ie. whether it dealt with a federal political issue, a provincial or local political issue, an American/international political issue or a non-political issue
- Whether the blog post contained a link to a web-based news story, commentary or other item published by a mainstream media outlet.⁸ Mainstream media outlets were defined as news organizations that produce another publication or have a broadcast network in addition to their website. Items were coded as linking or not linking to a media-produced item, with some links that no longer functioned coded separately.⁹

⁸ If the post contained several links to news stories and commentaries, the first working link was coded.

⁹ In cases where a link was no longer functioned, other variables (ie. publication/outlet, type of media-produced item) were coded according to whatever information was provided in the website URL that still

- The type of media organization, such as newspapers/magazines, television or radio.¹⁰
- The type of media-produced item, including news stories, unsigned newspaper editorials, signed op-ed commentaries, audio/video clip/interview, live audio/video, etc. Blog posts written by professional journalists were coded as “other,” as this type of entry does not fall within the traditional categories of media-produced items and is an example of journalists adapting to a new medium (Singer 2005).
- The publication date and time of the mainstream media outlet¹¹
- Using the dates and times recorded, it could be ascertained whether the media-produced item linked to in a blog post was written before or after the blog entry, or whether it was updated after the blog was posted. This approach was chosen to directly measure the extent to which items published by media outlets set agendas for bloggers. Alternatively, one could analyze the extent to which entries on blogs inform media reporting and commentary when updated versions of stories appear after a blog has been written, or if a blog post links to a story that the author claims echoes something he or she wrote earlier. It is expected that bloggers will be quick to point out when they have provided information that forms the basis of a news story or commentary.¹²
- The blogger’s evaluation, in his or her own words, of the media-produced item in question. This was assessed on whether the blogger wrote comments that were “positive,” “neutral,” or “negative” regarding the news story or commentary. For example,

appeared in the blog post (ie. a URL with www.ctv.ca would be coded as *television*, or a URL containing www.theglobeandmail.com would be coded as being from a *newspaper/magazine*).

¹⁰ In some cases where the URL for a newspaper’s website no longer functioned, the article or commentary was found with Canadian Newsstand, a searchable database of newspaper articles available through the University of Manitoba’s Elizabeth Dafoe library.

¹¹ If this item was published by a foreign-based publication, the time (and in a few cases) date was adjusted to Eastern Standard Time (EST).

¹² It is also important to remember that blog posts can also be updated after their original publication to include news stories that reference something first mentioned on a blog.

if a blogger wrote “This is a good article...” and linked to a story, it was coded as positive. Conversely, if the blogger criticized the article or its author in their own words, it was coded as “negative.” Stories that were linked to without any comment from the blogger were coded as “neutral.” This approach was taken to assess the extent to which Canadian political bloggers act as watchdogs or self-appointed critics of professional journalists, something that has been observed in the U.S. (see Bloom 2003; Harper 2005; Perlmutter 2008; Boehlert 2009; Zuniga 2008).

- Whether the blogger conducted original reporting (ie. conducting an interview, sharing an eyewitness account of an event, publishing documents or emails not found elsewhere), including if the blogger purported to offer “exclusive” information.
- Whether a mainstream media outlet linked to in the blog post repeated the same information provided in the “exclusive” post.

To assess bloggers’ attempts to frame political dialogue and perceptions of individuals, the following features of their posts were also coded:

- The office of the subject of the blog post. For a story about Canadian politics, the post would be coded to evaluate whether it mentioned the prime minister, a member of parliament, a premier or member of the provincial legislature, a political party (ie. “the NDP,” “the Conservatives,”), etc. For posts that mentioned multiple individuals, the first person/organization mentioned was analyzed.
- The partisan affiliation of the individual mentioned by the blogger. This included the major Canadian parties represented in Parliament, plus the Green Party. And because several posts dealt with American political actors, individuals could be identified as Republicans or Democrats. For posts dealing with international politicians – ie. then-British

prime minister Tony Blair, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, etc. – their partisan affiliation was categorized as “other.” For individuals whose political preferences were not explicitly stated (a category that included most journalists), these individuals were categorized as having an “unknown” partisan affiliation.

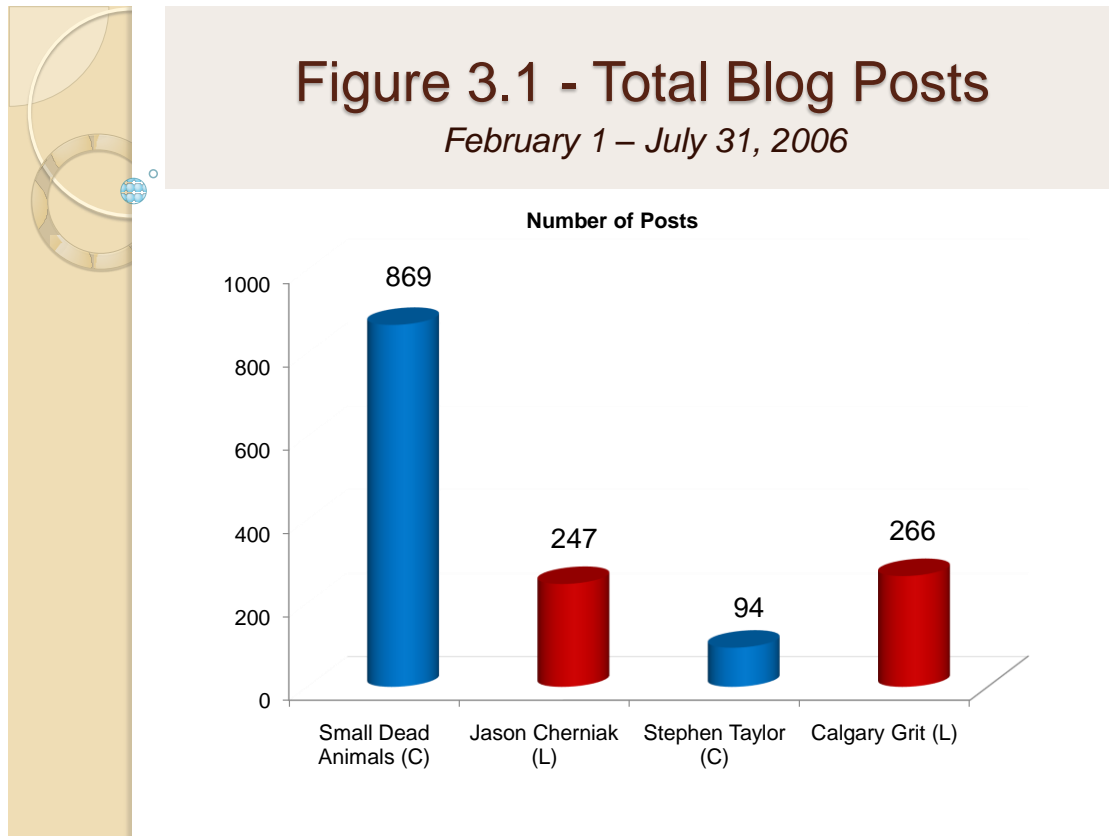
- Using the same criteria listed earlier, it was noted whether each figure was assessed in a positive, negative or neutral light by the blogger. It should be noted that individuals were only categorized as positive or negative if the blogger made a judgement of the individual in his or her own words. For example, if they directly criticized or praised the prime minister, this would be taken as a negative or positive assessment, respectively. If they linked to an article or other blog post that was critical of this individual, without offering further commentary of their own, then the blog post was coded as “neutral” in its evaluation of the individual.

As well, items produced by media outlets were coded using the exact same criteria, in order to draw comparisons between how bloggers and journalists respectively frame political figures.

Analysis of Blog Posts and Media Items

The exercise of coding these four blogs highlights how different they are not only as far as their partisan outlook, but also in terms of the focus they bring to bear on particular issues, their writing style and the frequency with which they write. For instance, the author of Small Dead Animals, Kate McMillan, tended to publish several posts each day and links to several different websites without adding much of her own commentary. Meanwhile, authors such as Stephen Taylor and Jason Cherniak tended to write longer, opinion-filled posts on a less frequent basis. As the chart below shows, Small Dead Animals featured approximately four times as many entries (869) as Calgary Grit (266) and Jason Cherniak (247) during the period under review

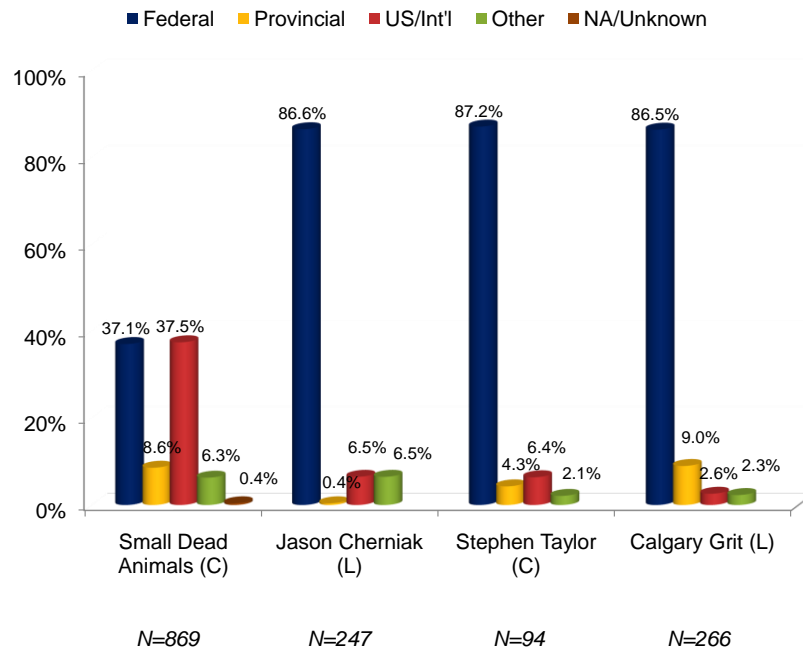
and generated more than eight times as many posts as Stephen Taylor (94) between Feb. 1 and July 31, 2006.



Subjects of Blog Posts

Understandably, all four bloggers devoted a large percentage of their posts to Canadian politics at the federal level. However, there were noticeable differences regarding how often they wrote about other topics, with three of these authors (Taylor, Cherniak, Calgary Grit) focusing to an overwhelming extent on federal issues, and the remaining blogger (Small Dead Animals) analyzing other international political issues more frequently.

Figure 3.2 - Blog Post Subjects



Stephen Taylor (87.2%), Jason Cherniak (86.6%) and Calgary Grit (86.1%) tended to write most frequently about *federal* political issues, with all three devoting nearly nine out of 10 blog posts to this area. Blog posts about *provincial or local* topics tended to account for the remainder of the posts written by Calgary Grit (9.0%) and Stephen Taylor (4.3%) but accounted for very little of what Jason Cherniak (0.4%) wrote during this six-month period. Among these three authors, Cherniak (6.5%) and Taylor (6.4%) also devoted some attention to *American and international* political issues, which was less the case with Calgary Grit (2.6% of blog posts about this topic).

Small Dead Animals, meanwhile, devoted just 37.1 percent of its blog posts to federal *Canadian issues* and was almost equally as likely (37.5%) to write about political happenings in the *United States and abroad*. A significant number of her blog entries (8.6%) also referenced political issues at the *provincial or local* level.

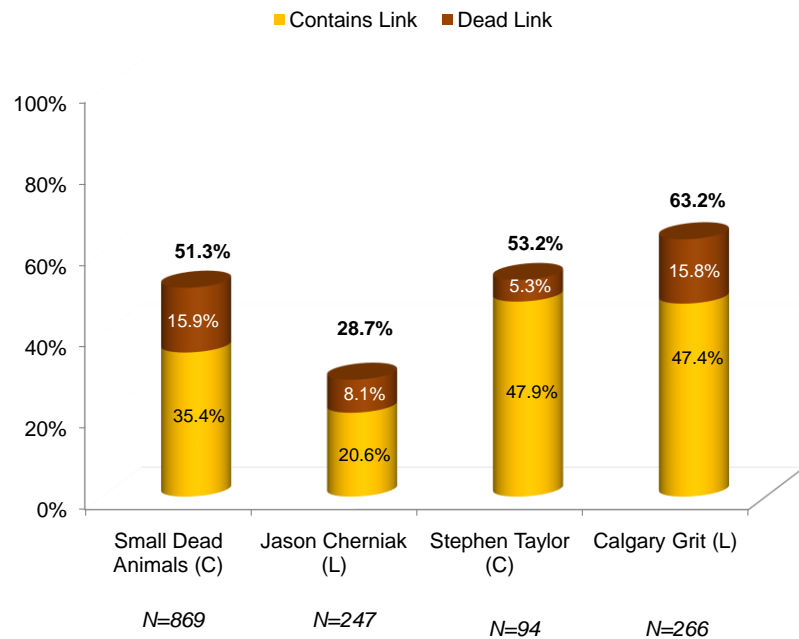
Finally, each of these authors tended to have different habits when it came to writing about other, non-political issues. Nearly one in five posts on Small Dead Animals (16.3%) did not directly reference political issues compared to 6.1 percent of Jason Cherniak's posts, 2.3 percent of Calgary Grit's posts and 2.1 percent of Stephen Taylor's posts.

Linking Behaviour

Three of the four bloggers referenced in this study linked to or referenced something produced by a mainstream media outlet in more than one-half of their posts. It was noted whether or not the blog post included a link to a mainstream media outlet¹³ and coded the post to note if it "contained a link" or if it contained a "dead link" in which the referenced item was no longer available on the media outlet's website. If the item was no longer available but produced by a particular newspaper – for instance, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star* or a Canwest-owned newspaper such as the *Calgary Herald* or *Montreal Gazette* – the news item in question would be found using Canadian Newsstand. If the post contained multiple links to mainstream-media produced items, the first link found in the post was coded

¹³ Mainstream media outlets – or in blogger shorthand, the "MSM" – are defined here as a media organization that produces a print (newspaper or magazine) publication, radio broadcast or television broadcast in addition to whatever it may produce for its website. To give an example, a blog written by a writer for *Maclean's* magazine or the *Wall Street Journal* or would be classified as a mainstream media-produced item, while an online news website such as The Tyee or Townhall.com would not be considered a mainstream media-produced item.

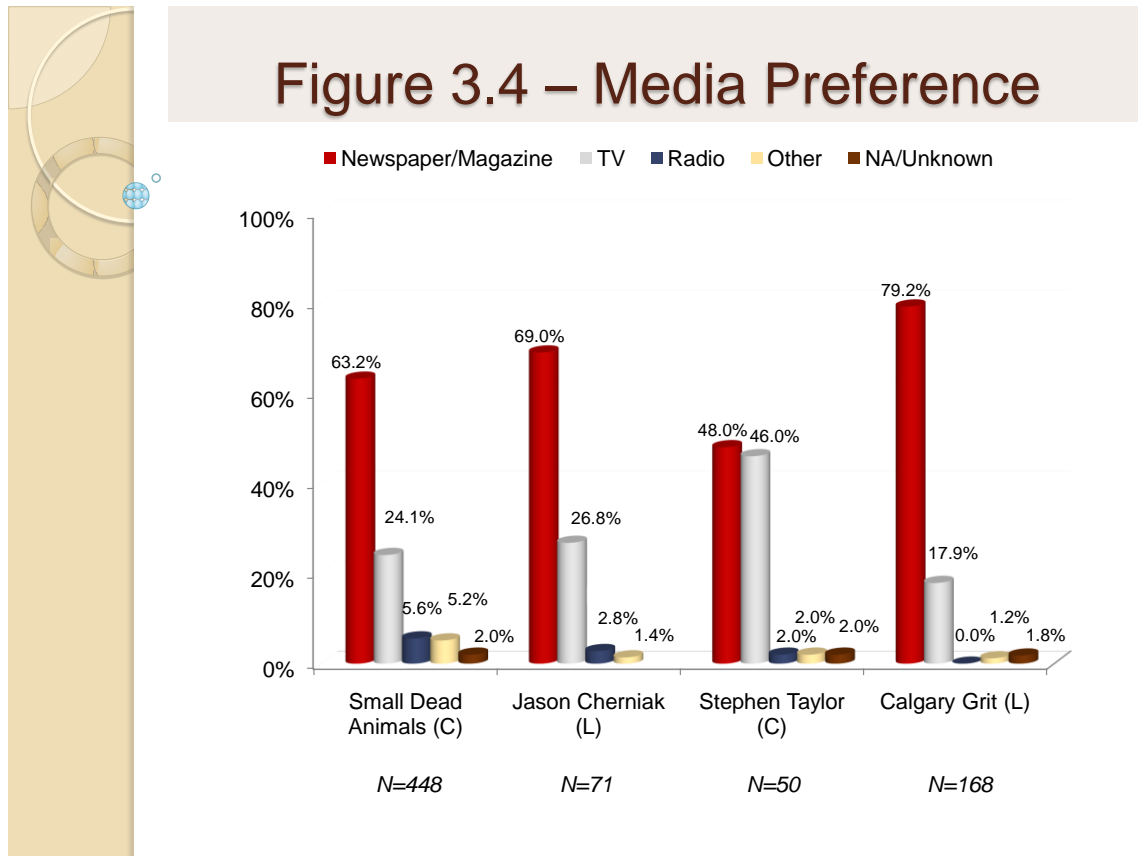
Figure 3.3 - Links to Media Items



Calgary Grit was most likely to link to a mainstream media news source, with six in ten posts (63.2%) linking to something produced by a media outlet. Of those, 15.8 percent of the posts contained links that can no longer be accessed because the URL no longer functions. Approximately one-half of the posts generated by Stephen Taylor (53.2%) and Small Dead Animals (51.3%) linked to a media outlet. Jason Cherniak, meanwhile, was the least likely among these bloggers to link to a media outlet, with less than three in ten posts (28.7%) containing a reference to a media outlet's story, commentary or broadcast (8.1% percent of this posts contained dead links).

Linking Preferences

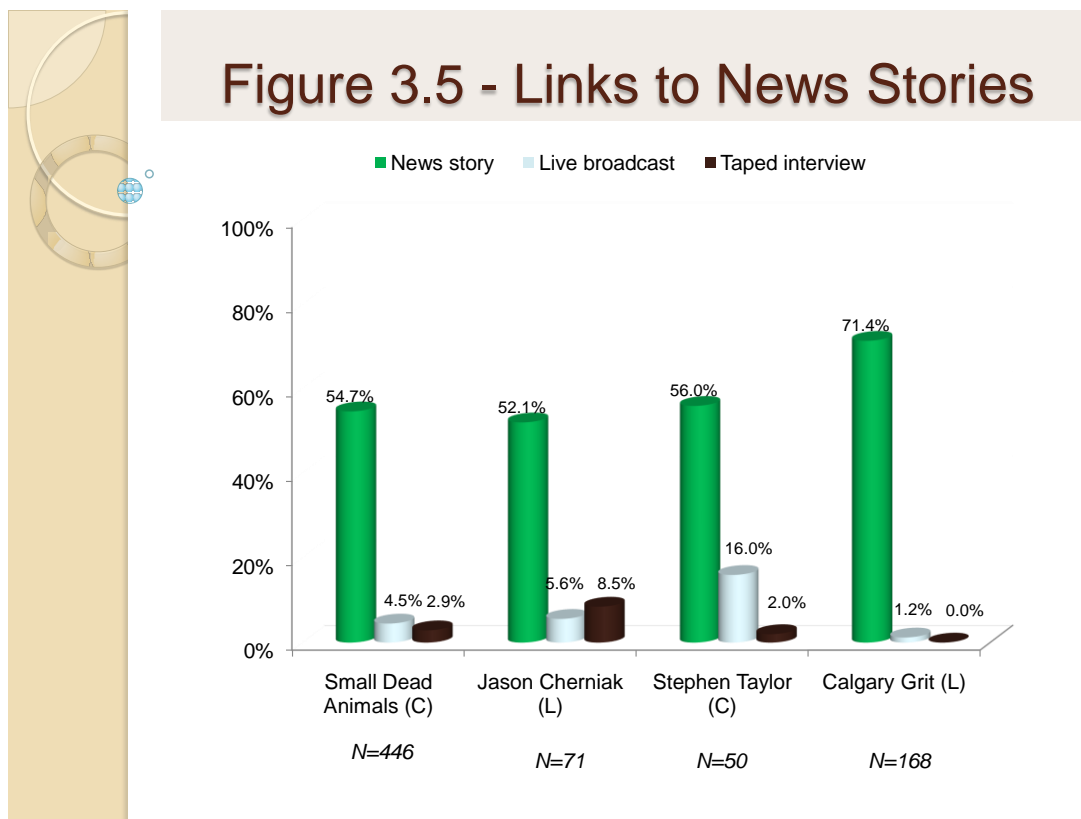
Focusing only on those blog posts where the author linked to something produced by a mainstream media outlet (n=737), we can see that newspapers and magazines were the most frequent source of material for bloggers. As the graph below indicates, Calgary Grit (79.2%) was the most likely blogger to link to newspaper articles published online, while Jason Cherniak (69.0%) and Small Dead Animals (63.2%) exhibited a preference for newspapers in the majority of their media-related posts. And while Stephen Taylor was less likely than the other bloggers to link to something produced by a print publication, this medium still constituted nearly one-half (48.0%) of his posts containing links to mainstream media outlets.



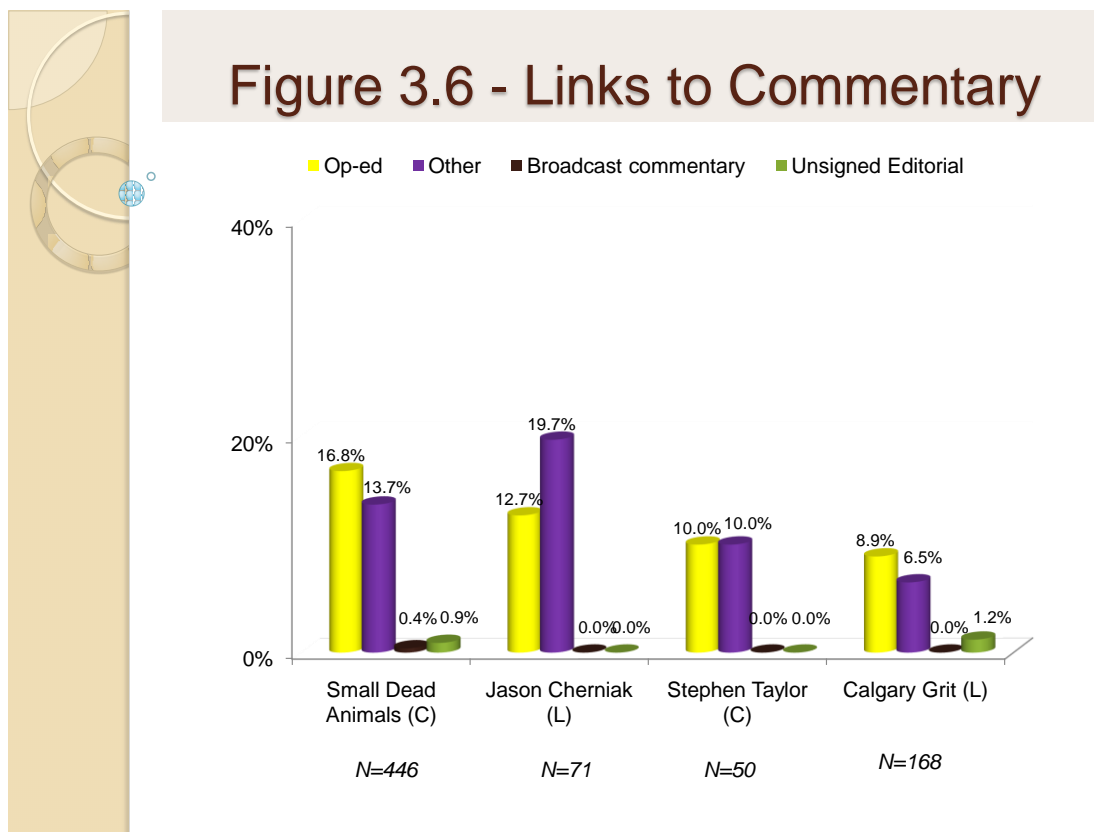
Taylor was more likely than other bloggers to connect to television networks, as nearly one in two of his posts (46.0%) linked to an item produced by outlets such as the CBC or CTV.

Nonetheless, items produced by television networks formed the basis for a number of blog posts, as approximately one in four linking posts produced by Jason Cherniak (26.8%) and Small Dead Animals (24.1%) and close to one in five posts written by Calgary Grit (17.9%) linked to or referenced something produced by a television network.

Radio, meanwhile, was not a significant source of material for these bloggers. Radio stations inspired a mere 5.8 percent of the linking posts on Small Dead Animals and fewer than three percent on the other three blogs. Journalistic content produced by sources other than radio, television and newspapers were also minor contributors to blog posts, with Small Dead Animals (5.1%) the most likely among these four bloggers to provide links to these other forms of media-produced content.



If we analyze the linking behaviour of bloggers by examining the type of mainstream media-produced item they linked to, we can see that bloggers were more likely to link to news-based rather than opinion-based items. The majority of posts that were examined here that connected to mainstream media outlets featured links to actual news stories, with Calgary Grit (71.4%) more likely than Stephen Taylor (56.0%), Small Dead Animals (54.7%) and Jason Cherniak (52.1%) to post such types of links or reference news items arising from newspaper and broadcast network websites. Live broadcasts on television or radio (a category that includes call-in shows or live interviews), as well as taped interviews or “clips,” also provided a notable amount of material for these bloggers, with nearly one in five of Stephen Taylor’s linking posts (16.0%) referencing items broadcast which were broadcast live on a television or radio network and nearly one in ten of Jason Cherniak’s media-related posts (8.5%) linked to a taped radio or television segment.



On those occasions when bloggers linked to commentaries, they were more likely to reference items produced by newspapers, especially “op-ed” pieces published by newspapers. Nearly one in five of the linking posts on Small Dead Animals (16.8%) connected to op-eds, while approximately one in ten media-related posts written by Jason Cherniak (12.7%), Stephen Taylor (10.0%) and Calgary Grit (8.9%) linked to these types of commentaries. As the graph below also shows, all of these bloggers rarely linked posts to unsigned newspaper editorials, radio commentaries or television commentaries, with these forms of opinion-based media items constituting less than two percent of the linking posts for each blogger. Generally, these findings suggest that while commentary by newspaper columnists or other journalists offering an opinion generates some subsequent discussion on partisan blogs, these bloggers are more likely to provide their own commentary on news stories rather than opinion-based media items.

Finally, all of these bloggers linked to a significant number of mainstream-media produced items that did not fall into these broad categories discussed so far, with one in five of Jason Cherniak’s posts (19.7%) and a slightly smaller proportion of other bloggers’ posts (13.7% for Small Dead Animals, 10.0% for Stephen Taylor and 6.5% for Calgary Grit) referencing media items not specifically categorized as news stories, interviews, op-eds, etc. This category¹⁴ includes blogs written by mainstream journalists, and thus it is not surprising that bloggers would comment on blog posts written by what Singer calls “j-bloggers” (2005: 174) who are conversant in this new medium.

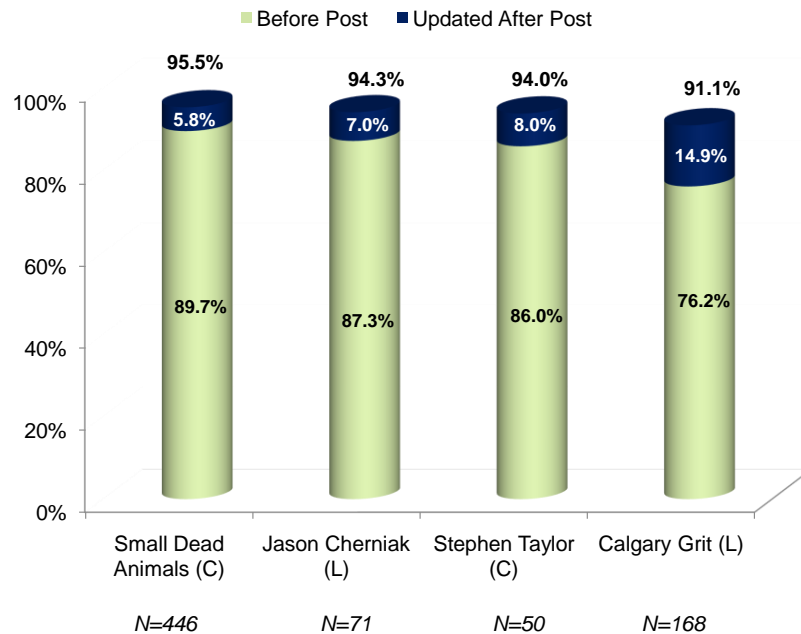
¹⁴ In addition to blogs, this category also includes such visual items as editorial cartoons and photographs that are more difficult to categorize and only make up a small proportion of these posts.

Timing of Posts

One of the key research questions raised here is whether or not bloggers potentially act as “agenda-setters” that inspire journalists to write about a particular subject or provide information that causes mainstream media outlets to follow their lead in discussing a particular issue or topic. One of the ways that this potential agenda-setting function could be measured is to note whether blog posts link to media items produced prior to the blogger writing the post, or whether these posts are updated to link to items produced after the initial blog post is written. Since bloggers can and do update their posts to include new information – for instance, linking to a news story or commentary that explicitly repeats the same information contained in a post or deals with the same subject matter – it makes sense to analyze whether something a blogger writes about leads to a news story or media commentary being produced that references the same subject material that a blogger originally put forward. And, to test the reverse of this hypothesis – that journalists, in fact, act as agenda-setters for bloggers – it is also necessary to assess whether the content produced by media outlets was produced prior to a blogger linking to this information. The fact that the majority of blog posts evaluated here link to something produced by a mainstream media outlet in the first place strengthens the argument that journalists are agenda-setters for bloggers and not the other way around. For this content analysis, the date and time posted on both the blog post was recorded and – if the post linked to a news story or other media-produced item – the date and time that item was published, if known.¹⁵

¹⁵ In some cases – for example, if the blogger linked to an item published by a European media outlet – the time and/or date would be converted to Eastern Standard Time and coded as being published “before” or “after” accordingly.

Figure 3.7 - Timing of Media Item



By and large, most blog posts that link to items produced by media outlets tend to be written *after* these items have already appeared in the public domain on a media outlet's website. For all four bloggers, practically all of their posts linking to newspaper articles, op-eds, etc. referenced items produced before the authors wrote their posts. This ranged from a high of 89.7 percent for Small Dead Animals to a low of 76.2 percent for Calgary Grit. In addition, several of these mainstream outlets produced items that might be first published before the blog entry was written and later updated. These constituted a significant share of entries, with Calgary Grit (14.9%) most likely to post links containing updated news stories.¹⁶ After combining all media

¹⁶ For instance, this category would include news stories that media outlets would have updated as new information became available. Since this study assessed blog posts and media items written in 2006, it would stand to reason that the timestamp on some of these media items would feature a date and/or time after that attached to the corresponding blog post. In this case, these items were coded as "updated" news stories if the date they were "last updated" came after the date and time recorded on the blog post, but where it was obvious that the blog's author was reacting to an earlier version of the story.

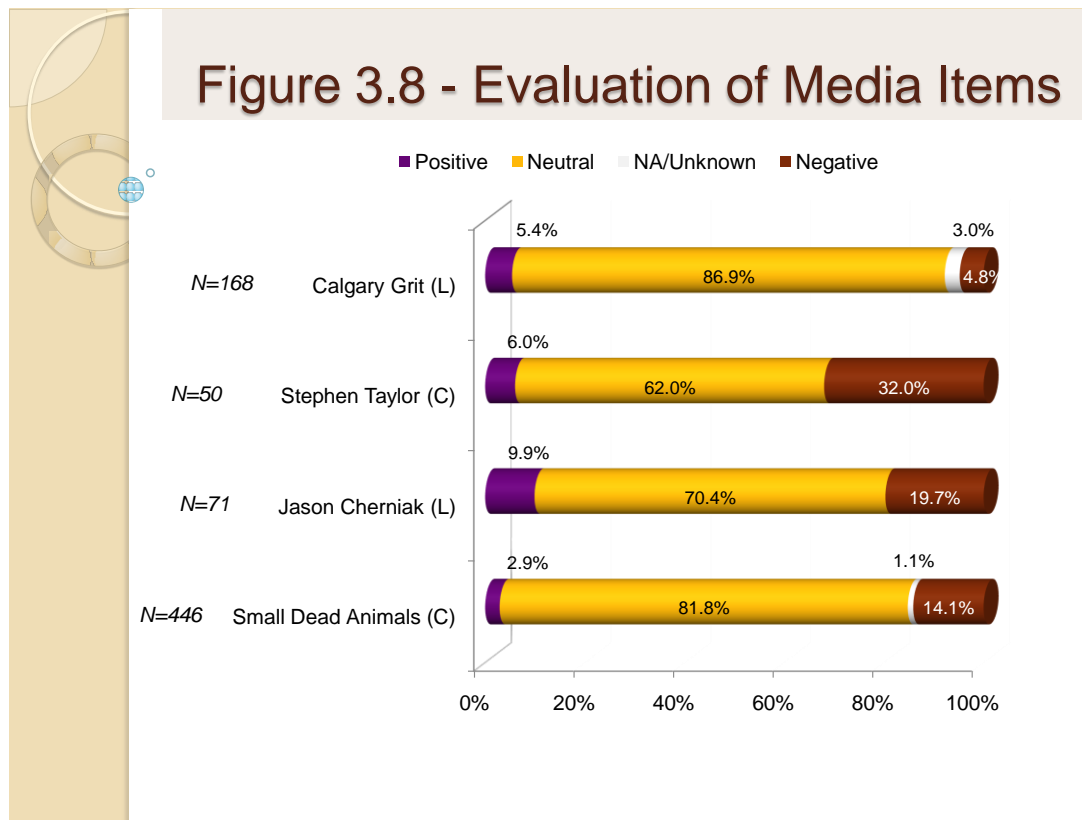
items written prior to the blog post (which include those items that were updated and those not updated), we can see that more than 90 percent of the media-produced items linked to by bloggers were first produced before the blogger authored an entry on his or her online journal, ranging from a high of 95.5 percent for Small Dead Animals to a low of 91.1 percent for Calgary Grit. This suggests that bloggers tend to follow the lead of mainstream media outlets, and only on rare occasions break news stories that are later covered in the mainstream media.

Evaluation of Media-Produced Items

Blog posts containing links to mainstream news stories and commentaries were also analyzed on the basis of how the blog's author regarded the item upon which he or she was commenting. Several authors have argued that the role the blogosphere acts as a critic or watchdog of mainstream media outlets and their work (McKenna and Pole 2004; Meraz 2007; Sroka 2006; Singer 2005). It was important to assess the extent to which Canadian political bloggers perform this role when evaluating the work of Canadian political journalists.

As the results demonstrate, most blog posts that linked to news stories and commentaries were neutral in their assessment of these items. In those cases where bloggers actually took a particular stand on the content of media produced items, the authors were more likely to be critical of this content rather than to praise it. Stephen Taylor was the blogger most critical of mainstream journalists' work, with nearly one-third (32.0%) of his posts negatively assessing items produced by media outlets and fewer than one in ten posts (6.0%) offering a positive evaluation of journalists' work. Jason Cherniak (19.7% negative, 9.9% positive) and Small Dead Animals (14.1% negative, 2.9% positive) also tended to be more critical of news stories and commentaries in those cases where they assessed journalists' work one way or the other.

Meanwhile, Calgary Grit (5.4% positive versus 4.8% negative) was almost equally as likely to rate news stories and commentaries in a positive rather than negative manner.

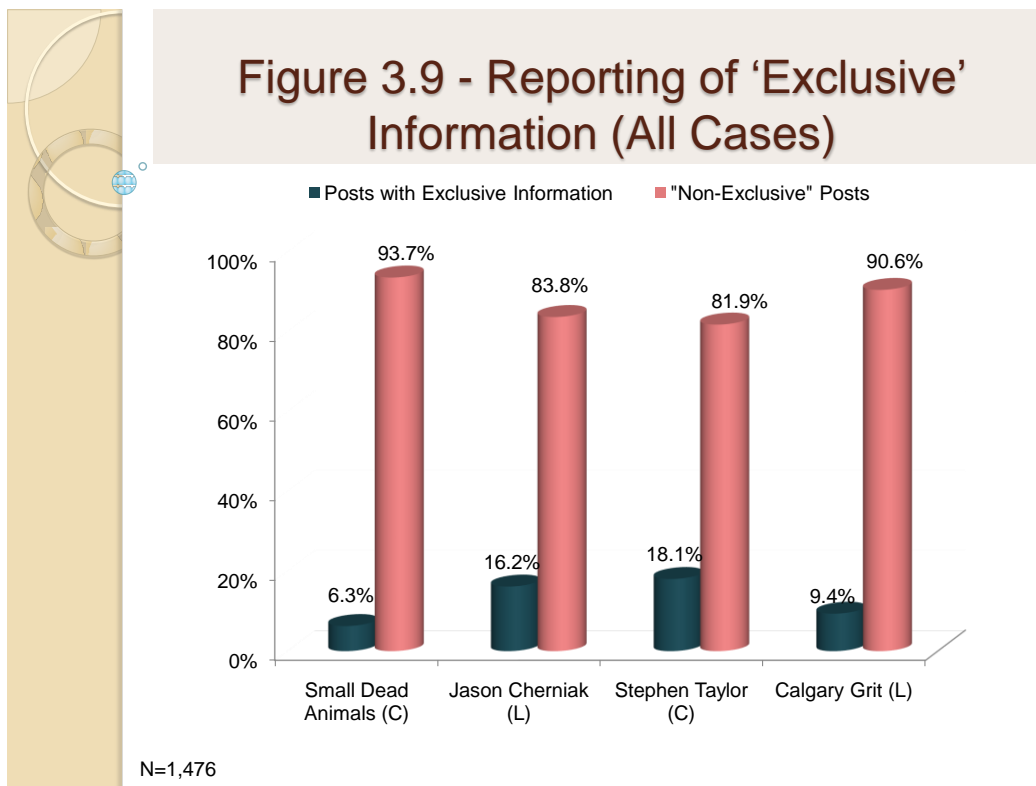


Exclusive Information

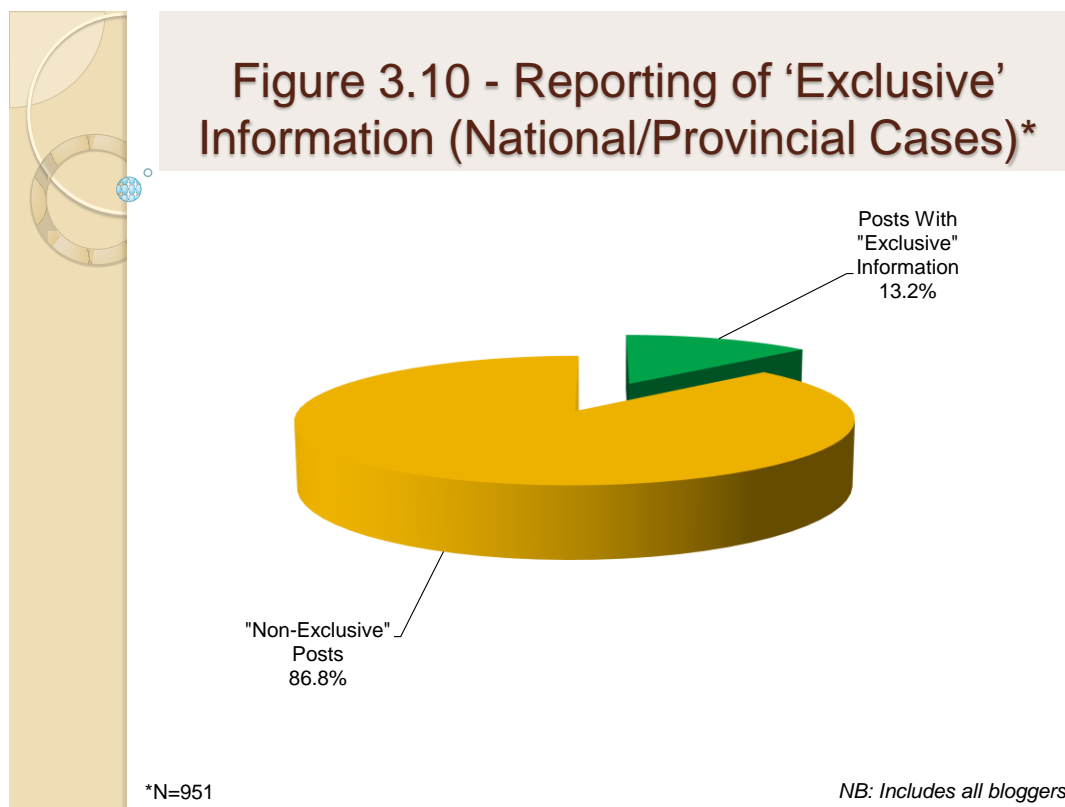
Another measure of the potential agenda-setting function of blogs is to evaluate whether they provide exclusive information or conduct original reporting on a subject. Given that the bloggers reviewed here actively support a particular political party, it is expected that they might be able to offer information and perspectives about their party not available to or ignored by mainstream journalists. Additionally, as the period being studied overlapped with the Liberal Party of Canada's 2006 leadership race, during which time leadership candidates were trying to persuade potential supporters, these blogs could potentially play a useful role by providing information about the candidates to their readers. Indeed, this seems to have been the case

with the two Liberal bloggers included in this content analysis, as they not only supported different candidates¹⁷ for the federal Liberal Party's leadership but they also conducted interviews with their favoured candidates and others who were in the running (Clark 2006: A8; Delacourt 2006; F3). Therefore, blog posts were coded according to whether or not they offered readers exclusive or new information by assessing cases where the blog's author deemed the information to be exclusive, as well as instances where the information being put forward in the blog post was perceived by the researcher to constitute original reporting: for example, in cases where a blogger interviewed a candidate or reported on what she or he saw or heard at a particular event. This method, while not offering complete assurance that the material is original and exclusive, provides a reasonable indication that it is offering something that may not be found in journalists' accounts of an issue or an event.

¹⁷ The author of *Calgary Grit*, Dan Arnold, backed former Ontario education minister Gerard Kennedy, while Jason Cherniak supported the eventual winner, Stéphane Dion.

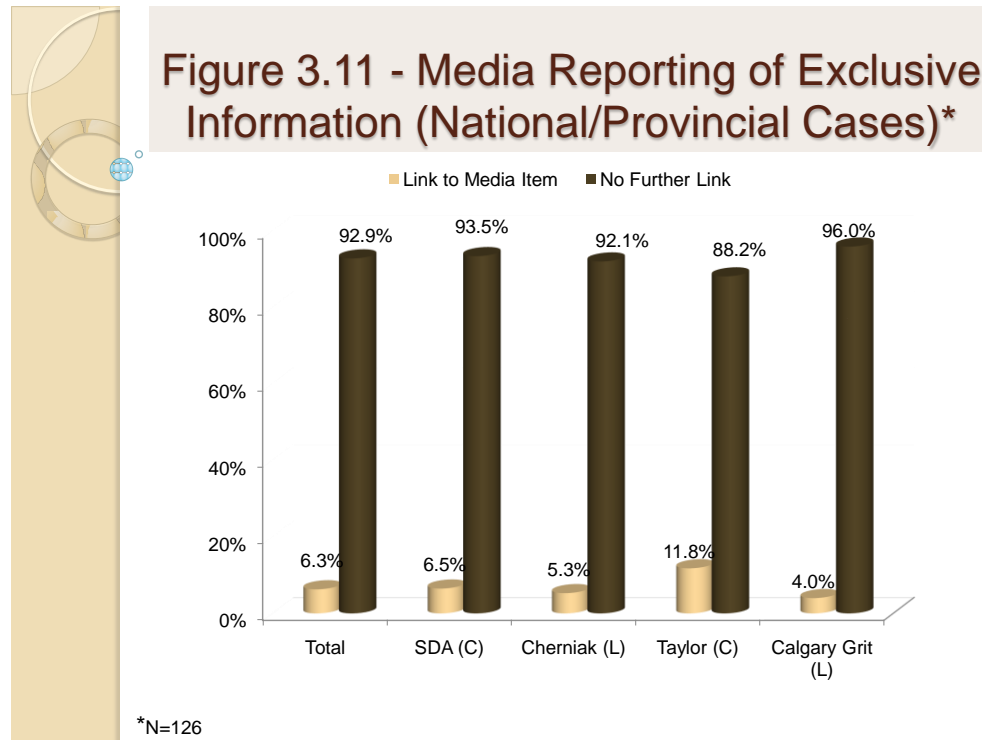


Most of the information posted by the four bloggers would not be considered original or exclusive: slightly less than one in five posts written by Stephen Taylor (18.1%) and Jason Cherniak (16.2%) contained original reporting, while fewer than one in ten posts written by Calgary Grit (9.4%) and Small Dead Animals (6.3%) provided original reporting not found in other mainstream media-produced accounts of events. Setting aside cases that are extraneous to the focus of this study – that is, blog posts about non-Canadian or non-political issues – the ratio of exclusive to non-exclusive information does not change very much. A similar percentage of Stephen Taylor's posts about national and provincial political issues (19.8%) contain unique content, compared to 17.7 percent (slightly up from 16.2% overall) for Jason Cherniak, 11.6 percent (slightly up from 6.3% overall) for Small Dead Animals and 9.9 percent (slightly up from 9.4% overall) for Calgary Grit.



While the share of posts offering “exclusive” information remains significant enough to leave open the possibility of an agenda-setting effect, this does not appear to be the case when we analyze whether mainstream media outlets actually repeated the same information or used it as the basis of a news item or commentary. Obviously, this analysis only applies to those media outlet-produced items that were published or broadcast *after* the blog post was written (n=126). By this measure – and once again, focusing only on issues with a political focus at the national or provincial level – we can see that a very small overall percentage of these posts (6.3%) linked to a media-produced item dealing with the same subject matter. In total, this amounted to only *eight posts* that resulted in further reporting and analysis by mainstream journalists. Stephen Taylor would seem to be the most influential blogger by this measure, but even then only 11.8 percent of his posts that contained exclusive information were later reported or

commented upon by a mainstream media outlet.¹⁸ For the other three bloggers, less than ten percent of their original material was repeated in the mainstream media.



It would appear that generally, the exclusive character of these blog posts begins and ends on the blog and commentary is not disseminated to a broader audience via mainstream media outlets repeating this information in their own stories. This finding goes against the hypothesis that Canada's partisan bloggers act as agenda-setters for the country's political journalists. But even if they do not directly set the agenda of media discourse, bloggers may help to create and/or to reinforce the impressions audiences are given about political figures and related issues.

¹⁸ Some of Taylor's scoops during this period included reporting that Prime Minister Stephen Harper would meet with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher during a visit to the United Kingdom (July 14, 2006). He was also the first to report that Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne was under criminal investigation by the RCMP for filing a false travel claim (June 1, 2006).

Blog ‘Framing’ and the Assessment of Subjects

To analyze how bloggers portray particular subjects, each blog post included in this content analysis was coded according to:

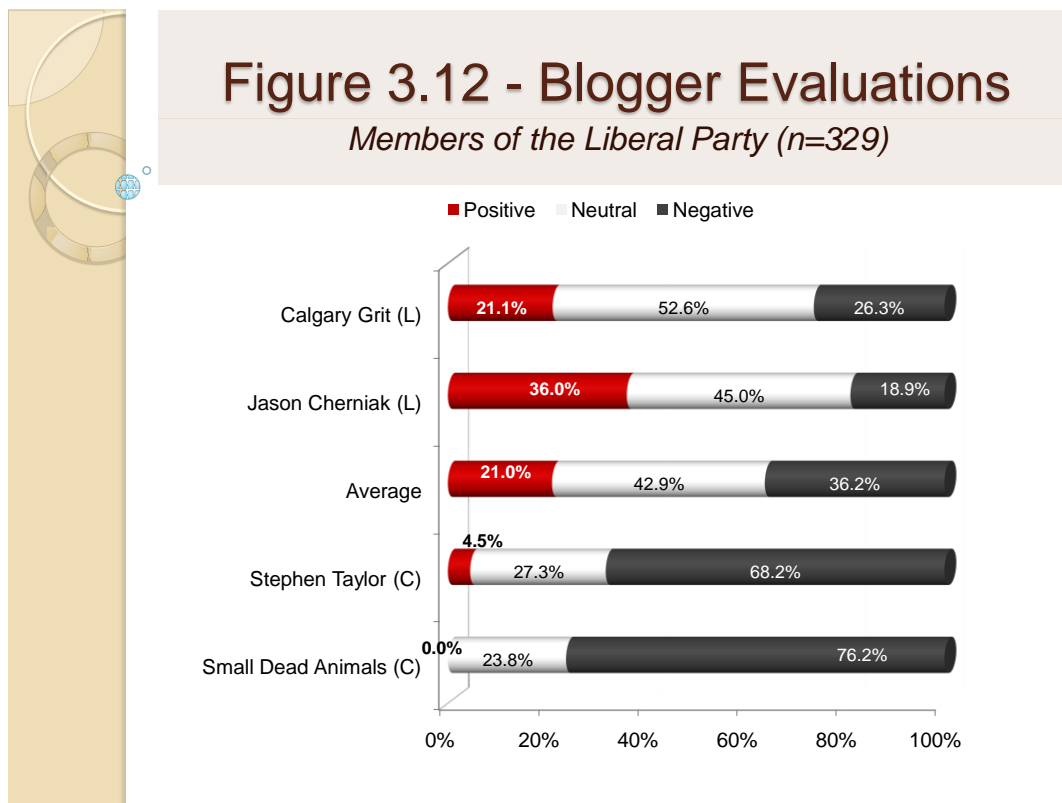
- The elected position held by the subject of the post ie. Prime Minister, Party Leader, Member of Parliament, Premier. If the post contained only a broad reference to a particular party (eg. “the Liberals,” “the Tories,” “the NDP”), this was coded in its own separate category. If the individual was not elected, they were categorized as “other.”
- The partisan affiliation of the subject ie. Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat. For blog posts mentioning journalists, bureaucrats or non-partisan individuals, the partisan affiliation was coded as “unknown.”
- The evaluation of the particular subject – positive, negative or neutral, using the same criteria described earlier.

This analysis was conducted to broadly determine how bloggers assess particular individuals and parties as well as what patterns may exist regarding how bloggers evaluate officials within their own party compared to how they evaluate political opponents. Because of the multiplicity of subject-partisan combinations and in some instances the relatively small number of applicable cases, only the assessments of each party, as well as assessments related to federal or provincial political issues, are presented here. Cases where these variables are unknown or not applicable have also been removed.

Blogger Evaluations of Liberals

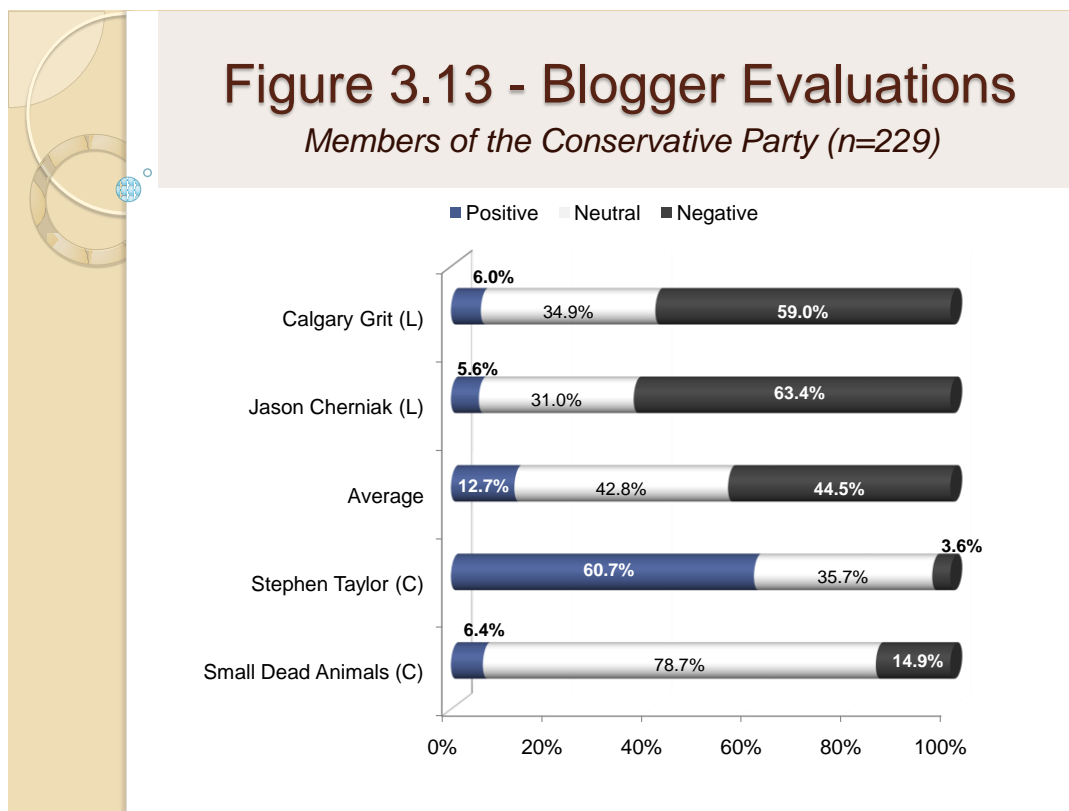
Members of the Liberal Party were the most discussed grouping of politicians during the six months covered in this content analysis, with the four bloggers assessing Liberal leadership candidates, MPs and the party itself in 329 of 918 applicable posts about national and provincial

issues. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two members of the Blogging Tories tended to express negative opinions about the Liberal Party and its members, with three-quarters of Small Dead Animals' posts about Liberals (76.2%) and two-thirds of Stephen Taylor's references to Liberals (68.2%) articulating negative sentiments about the Liberals. The Liberal bloggers, on the other hand, were most likely to be neutral when discussing their party, with 45.0 percent of Jason Cherniak's posts and 52.6 percent of Calgary Grit's posts about the party and its members not expressing either a positive or negative view. The difference between the two, however, was that Jason Cherniak was twice as likely to make comments supportive of Liberals (36.0% positive versus 18.9% negative) and Calgary Grit was slightly more likely to express negative sentiments about particular Liberal figures (26.3% negative versus 21.1% positive).



Blogger Assessments of Conservatives

Conservative politicians and their party – which were the subject of 229 of 918 posts about national and provincial issues – are subject to the same trend seen with blog posts about Liberals, only in reverse. The majority of posts by Liberal bloggers about Conservative members and their party tended to be negative (63.4% for Jason Cherniak and 59.0% for Calgary Grit). Stephen Taylor was most likely to make positive comments about the Conservative Party, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his MPs (60.7% positive versus 3.6% negative, with 35.7% neutral). On Small Dead Animals, meanwhile, author Kate McMillan tended to express ambivalence towards Conservative Party figures in the majority of her posts on this subject (78.7%) and was actually more likely to comment negatively rather than positively on Conservatives when she did offer commentary (14.9% negative versus 6.4% positive).



Blogger Assessments of the New Democrats

The New Democratic Party, its leader Jack Layton and its MPs and MLAs accounted for just 55 of the 918 posts about national and provincial politics. Of these, the majority of posts (n=37) were written on Small Dead Animals, who tended to be quite negative towards the NDP by criticizing the party or its figures in 91.9 percent of the posts referencing New Democrats.¹⁹ Though the reader is cautioned not to make any generalizations due to the small overall number of posts about New Democrats, all of these Conservative and Liberal bloggers were more inclined to criticize the NDP during this period.

Blogger Analysis of Other Canadian Parties

Bloggers' assessments of members of the Bloc Quebecois, Parti Quebecois, Green Party, U.S. Republican Party, U.S. Democratic Party and other parties were coded for this content analysis. However, as the emphasis here is on blogger discussion of Canadian political issues – and because only one blogger, Small Dead Animals, wrote extensively about American and international political issues while the others wrote almost exclusively about national and provincial issues - only those blog posts pertaining to Canadian political issues were coded.

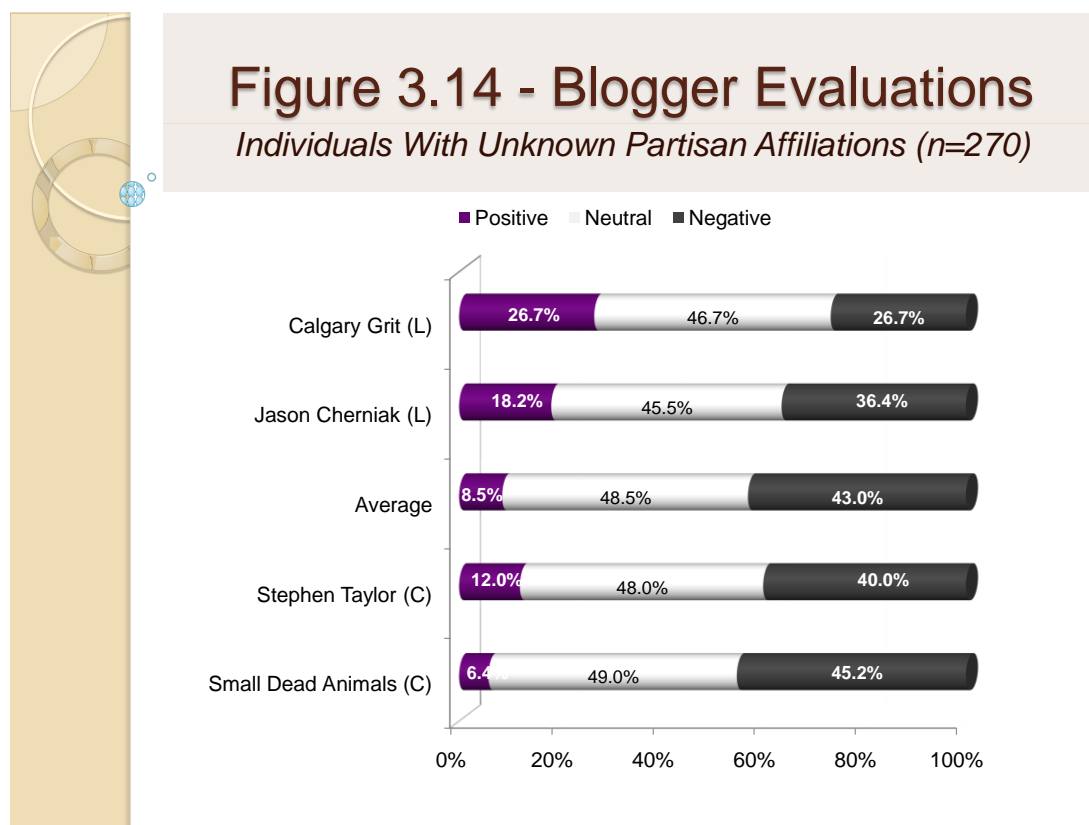
What is interesting is that these bloggers very rarely discuss other Canadian parties. The Bloc Quebecois and its provincial counterpart, the Parti Quebecois, were rarely mentioned by these four bloggers, so any analysis of the small number of cases (n=4) would not be statistically

¹⁹ Though this was not analyzed explicitly, most posts on Small Dead Animals regarding the NDP were about provincial rather than national issues. Given that the blog's author, Kate McMillan, is from Saskatchewan and because that province was governed by the NDP in early 2006, this may skew the overall pattern of posts by other partisan bloggers regarding the New Democrats.

valid. The same finding can also be reported for the Green Party, which was mentioned in even fewer posts (n=2).

Blogger Analysis of Those With Unknown Partisan Leanings

As this category includes assessments of journalists, bureaucrats, citizens and other figures whose partisan allegiances are either unknown or not specifically expressed, it accounts for a large share (n=270) of the 918 posts about national and provincial issues analyzed for this study. While nearly one-half of blog posts (48.5%) did not assess these individuals either positively or negatively, bloggers were much more likely to be negative rather than positive in their evaluations of non-affiliated figures, with 43.0 percent of posts assessing these individuals negatively versus 8.5 percent that framed them in a positive manner.



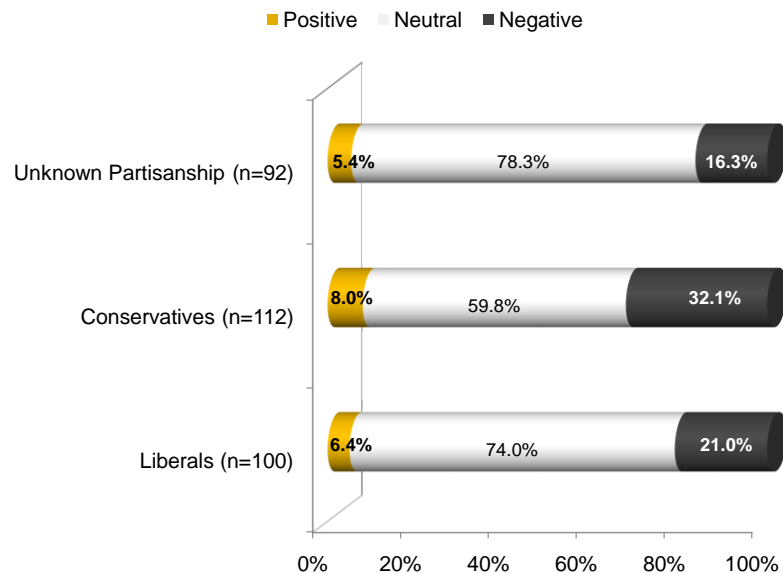
Among the four bloggers analyzed, Small Dead Animals was most likely to provide a negative assessment of non-affiliated individuals (45.2%), followed by Stephen Taylor (40.0%), Jason Cherniak (36.4%) and Calgary Grit (26.7%). Conversely, Calgary Grit was the blogger most likely to offer a positive assessment of non-partisan or non-affiliated figures (26.7%), followed by Jason Cherniak (18.2%), Stephen Taylor (12.0%) and Small Dead Animals (5.8%).

Evaluations By Journalists

As a point of comparison, the news stories and commentaries linked to by bloggers were coded using the same categories and analyzed the subject, their partisan affiliation and the way he or she or they are assessed in the media-produced item. After filtering out media items that are not about national or provincial political issues as well as removing cases where this information is unknown because the link to the article or commentary no longer functioned or could not be found, 333 cases can be analyzed.

Figure 3.15 - Journalists' Evaluations

Media Assessments of All Partisan Figures (n=333)



The Liberal Party, its leadership candidates, MPs and MLAs were discussed in 100 of the 333 valid items coded for this study. Three-quarters of these references to Liberals (74.0%) were neutral in their assessment of the party and its members, while 21 percent contained negative references and five percent contained positive references.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Conservative Party and its elected members were referenced in 112 articles and commentaries. While the majority of these references (59.8%) were neutral in tone, the party and its figures were more likely to be cast in a negative rather than positive light (32.1% versus 8.0% respectively) in related news items and editorial comments.

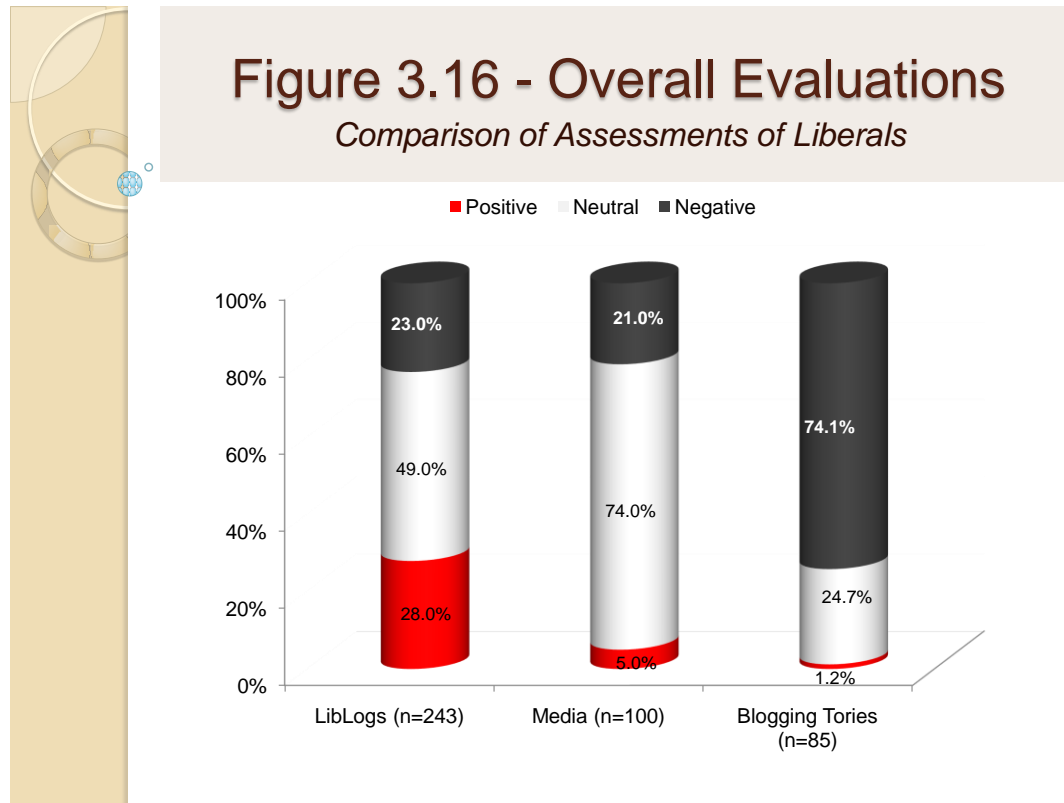
The New Democrats were mentioned first in just 13 articles coded for this study. Of these, nine, or 69.2 percent, were neutral in their assessment of the NDP and its members, with the remaining four cases casting New Democrats in a negative light.

Altogether, the BQ, PQ, Green Party, U.S. Republican Party, U.S. Democratic Party and other Canadian parties (for example, the Saskatchewan Party) altogether accounted for very few (n=16) mentions in media items. Assessments of these parties tended to be neutral, with 12 of the 16 items providing neutral judgements of their respective members.

The overall tone of media coverage of subjects who were not identifiably partisan tended to be neutral, with 78.3 percent of the 92 valid cases offering no evaluation one way or the other. For those cases where a judgement was offered by a journalist, the non-affiliated individual was more likely to be assessed in a negative rather than a positive light (16.3% versus 5.4% respectively).

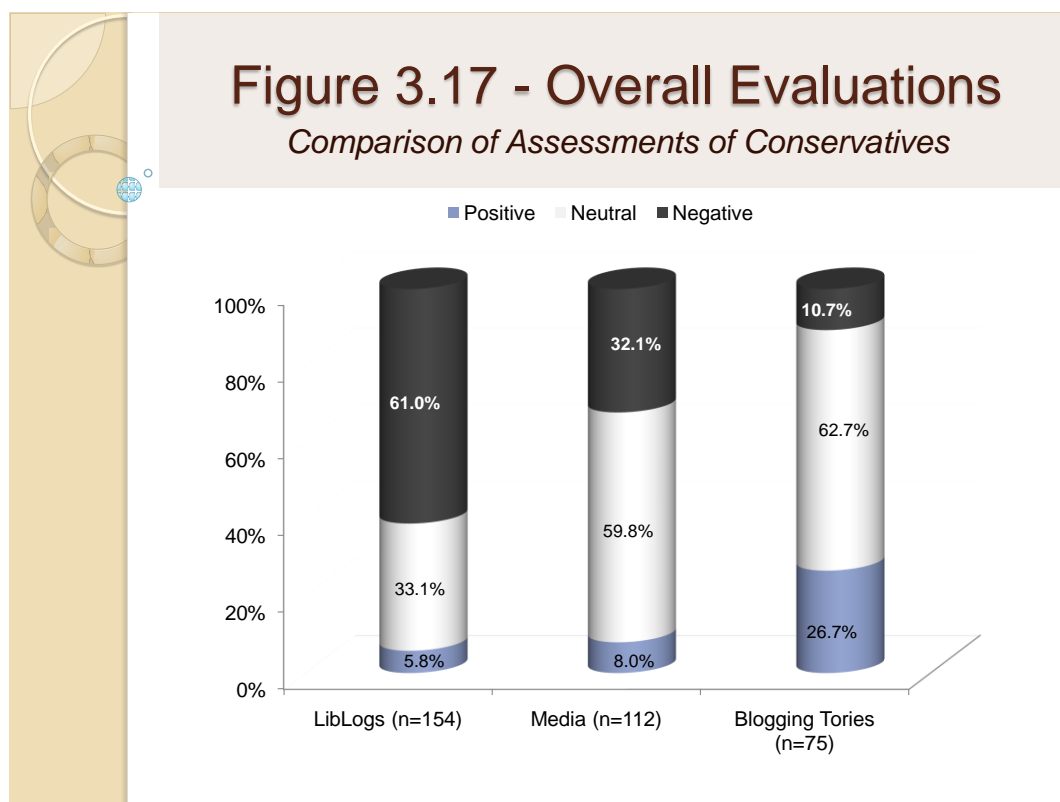
If we set apart these assessments of political figures from the points of view of journalists and bloggers, there is some very clear divergence in terms of how particular subjects are framed in news articles and commentaries versus how they are framed in blog posts. The assessment of the subject of the blog post also varied, depending upon the partisan allegiance of the author. The two Blogging Tory blogs (Stephen Taylor and Small Dead Animals) were most likely to assess the Liberals negatively (74.1%) while journalists (74.0%) and Liberal bloggers Calgary Grit and Jason Cherniak (49.0%) were more likely to frame the Liberal Party's prominent figures in neutral terms. However, the Liberal bloggers were more likely than journalists to rate their

party in positive terms, with journalists more inclined to be negative rather than positive towards Liberals in those instances where they offered a judgement.

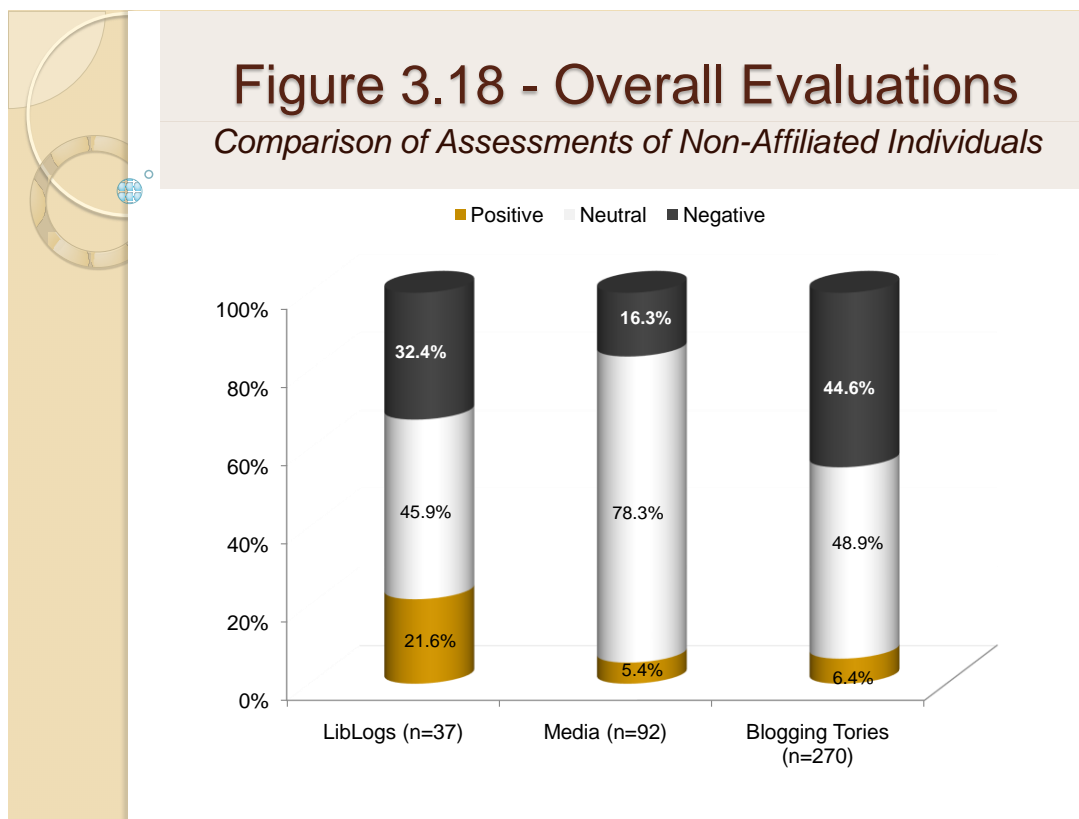


Turning to the Conservative Party, the two Blogging Tory authors and journalists were most likely to offer neutral ratings of this party's figures (62.7% and 59.8% respectively) and the Liberal authors were most inclined to be negative in their assessment of Conservatives (61.0%). While they were mainly neutral, journalists were once again more likely to be negative than positive in those cases where they did make a particular judgement of a Conservative's actions (32.1% versus 8.0% respectively), with the Blogging Tories more likely to offer positive assessments of members of their party rather than negative assessments (26.7% versus 10.7% respectively). The pattern that emerges from this analysis – at least in terms of how it affects the

two largest parties in the House of Commons – is that journalists are more likely to criticize figures in *both parties* when they do take a stand, while partisan bloggers – though they may be neutral about their own party more often than not – are more likely to praise members of the same party when they pass judgement on their actions. Meanwhile, both sets of partisan bloggers tend to be highly critical of those that they perceive to be their opponents, though obviously they are critical to differing degrees, depending on the blogger. This may be related to the notion that journalists strive to be both neutral and even-handed in their criticism of subjects they cover, whereas bloggers who are identifiably partisan have no pretences of neutrality or objectivity and therefore feel free to praise members of their own party and criticize opponents. Given the relatively small number of blogs and media items analyzed here, however, one must be cautious in generalizing this finding to all partisan blogs or to Canadian media outlets in general.



A slightly different pattern emerges when we consider the assessment of those who are not affiliated with a particular party. Like journalists, bloggers are most likely to be neutral towards subjects that are not aligned to a party, with 48.5 percent of blog posts neutral about these figures compared to 78.3 percent of media items about non-affiliated individuals. However, bloggers are more likely than journalists to be critical of these figures, with 43.0 percent of these posts criticizing non-affiliated individuals. The two Blogging Tories tended to be somewhat more critical than their Liberal counterparts of members of this group, which included journalists, bureaucrats and other non-aligned individuals (44.6% of the Blogging Tories posts versus 32.4% of the LibLogs posts are negative in tone respectively). Given previous findings on the negative tone of Canadian bloggers (Jansen and Koop 2006: 11) and items posted on online discussion boards (Jansen and Koop 2005: 623), this finding fits with the idea that this discourse tends to be negative rather than positive.



Conclusion

The Canadian bloggers examined as part of this content analysis wrote about a number of subjects, but for the most part they focused their attention on political debates, issues and personalities found in the Canadian Parliament. More often than not, these bloggers reacted to news and information generated by the so-called “mainstream media” rather than engaging in their own original analysis and reporting, with the vast majority of their posts written after information has already been reported or commented upon by a print or broadcast journalist. As well, these bloggers were more likely to link to news stories rather than opinion-based commentaries, suggesting that bloggers used the information contained in news articles to form their own commentary. In terms of what they offer their readers, it would appear these bloggers compete more with op-ed columnists and journalists who offer opinions rather than to those who simply report the news. Finally, these bloggers rarely reported original information themselves and did not strive to be “neutral” in how they presented facts and information.

Further to this, on those few occasions when these four bloggers were first to release unique information or analysis to their readers, it was very rare for professional journalists to pick up on this information and write their own stories. In total, this analysis of nearly 1,500 blog posts and nearly 1,000 items regarding federal politics identified only eight cases in which a mainstream Canadian media outlet actually followed up on an issue or subject first reported by these particular bloggers. By this measure, one could not conclude that these bloggers acted as agenda-setters for Canadian journalists in a direct, explicit way; however, this analysis does not discount the possibility that their commentaries may contribute indirectly and over the longer term to which issues are discussed and how these issues and figures are presented to the public via the media. On the other hand, given the percentage of blog posts that contained links

to mainstream media-produced articles and analysis – and given the high percentage of those that were produced before the blog post was ever written – one can conclude that Canadian journalists were the ones who, in fact, set the agenda for what these bloggers discussed. To update Bernard Cohen's well-known aphorism, during this time period mainstream journalists did not directly influence what these bloggers wrote, but they did appear to influence what they wrote about. However, it is also obvious from this research that bloggers are quite capable of generating their own commentary without assistance from newspaper articles and other mainstream media-produced content. Putting these two hypothesis-building findings together, it could be concluded that these bloggers, in particular, are part of what Soroka (2002: 8) calls the "inter-media agenda setting" process, a process in which the conventional news media establish the tone for most of the content on blogs.

This content analysis cannot conclusively demonstrate that bloggers frame these topics for journalists or the wider public. Instead, these bloggers analyzed here helped create their own frames that roughly corresponded to their own partisan leanings. When they actually rated individuals one way or the other, Liberal bloggers were more likely to assess fellow Liberals in a positive light while Conservative bloggers were more likely to view these individuals negatively; conversely, Conservative bloggers tended to be more favourably disposed to their fellow partisans when they assessed them, whereas Liberal bloggers were likely to be harsh critics of Conservatives. Journalists, meanwhile, were slightly more likely to neutrally assess individuals from each of these parties as well as those with no discernible partisan leanings; however, if they rated them at all, they tended to make negative rather than positive assessments. Furthermore, how these Conservative or Liberal bloggers rated these individuals does not seem to be affected by how a journalist rated these figures, as the overall assessments of each party

and its members by these bloggers and journalists were incongruent. One could not argue on the basis of this analysis that the reverse situation – where bloggers might affect how journalists portray certain individuals – is the case, as the vast majority of news articles and commentary were produced prior to the blog posts that link to them. While frequent blog posts assessing a subject in a particular way or using a key phrase to describe someone may have a potential cumulative effect on subsequent news coverage, such a conclusion cannot be made on the basis of this data. A more immediate and potentially more fruitful line of enquiry would be to examine how blogs are used by Canada's political journalists and communications practitioners and to assess their potential impact on the country's public discourse by asking these individuals, as well as bloggers themselves, how they have come to be used as a tool of political communication.

CHAPTER 4 – THE CANADIAN BLOGGING SURVEY

The major component of this research project involved detailed surveys with key populations regarding political blogging in Canada. As noted earlier, very little detailed research on the Canadian blogosphere exists, with very few attempts to quantify the underlying attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of bloggers and their audiences. A notable exception is the research of Chiasson et al. (2009), which surveyed political bloggers based in Quebec. Most research, however, has been qualitative (ie. Chu 2007; Hunter 2007) and while such research provides insights and understanding into the attitudes and motivations of certain individuals, it does not give us a sense of how larger communities of journalists and bloggers regard the issues related to blogs and political journalism in Canada. In addition to studying the perceptions of both bloggers and journalists regarding the impact of blogging, this chapter probes to what extent these parties interact with one another by sharing information on a formal or informal basis.

Another major gap in the literature on blogs pertains to the important role political communications professionals within government play in disseminating information to the Canadian public. As authors such as Fox (1997) and Kurtz (1998) have argued, those employed to “spin” a particular message for a prime minister, president or political party play an important role in shaping the messages that are part of public debate. It is expected that like journalists, these individuals will be highly likely to read political blogs and are sensitive to discussions taking place online regarding the words and actions of their political bosses. It is also expected that due to the common bond of partisanship inherent in both minister’s offices and in the blogosphere, these professional communicators may treat partisan blogs as conduits for delivering their messages to the Canadian public that are potentially easier to deal with than

ostensibly neutral or potentially hostile actors such as journalists. Thus, surveys of both bloggers and professional communicators probe the possible links between these two groups by asking whether and how information is shared between these parties.

This chapter provides the details of surveys conducted with three distinct respondent groups: bloggers who declare support for a federal political party and who belong to a network of partisan blogs; English-language journalists who are based in Ottawa and are members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery; and political communications practitioners, such as press secretaries, who are so-called “exempt staff” within the federal civil service and are employed by the Prime Minister’s Office, Privy Council Office, federal cabinet ministers and opposition party leaders.²⁰ After providing details on the methodology used to invite members of these groups to participate in the survey and broadly sketching the socio-demographic, professional and political characteristics of each group, this chapter provides insight on the following:

- *Perceptions of the Blogosphere:* All respondents were asked to provide their opinions on a number of issues regarding blogging and the blogosphere. These included their perceptions of blog partisanship, their status as providers of information to the public and their role vis-a-vis professional journalists and the “mainstream media.”
- *Media/Blog Consumption Patterns:* Bloggers were asked to state where they get information about Canadian politics and to offer insight into what types of media inspire them to write blog posts. Journalists and communications practitioners were asked to share details on

²⁰ The *Public Service Employment Act*, (S.C. 2003, c. 22, ss. 12 and 13, s. 128) states that: “A minister, or a person holding the recognized position of Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons or Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, may appoint an executive assistant and other persons required in his or her office.” This broad category includes individuals whose role it is to communicate with the media on behalf of their minister or MP.

how often they read blogs, which blogs they choose to read and their perceptions of the information provided on these web pages.

- *Patterns of Interaction:* This section assesses how members of these three groups interact with one another through the sharing of information and the status which it is accorded. This includes providing opinions on whether the information offered on blogs is perceived to have credibility, and if a degree of transparency is attached to the information provided to bloggers (ie. whether the source of the information is willing to be quoted on the record, etc.).

Methodology

Survey questionnaires were devised for three distinct populations: Canadian political bloggers, Parliament Hill-based journalists, and professional communicators. Many of the attitudinal questions regarding blogs were taken directly from two American studies. Dautrich and Barnes (2005) analyzed the impact of blogs on the professional duties of journalists and asked them to provide their opinions of this medium as it relates to their potential role as a source of political information to be read by the public. Sroka (2006) asked political staff on Capitol Hill in Washington whether they viewed blogs and whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements regarding the blogosphere. While Sroka's interviews extended only to what might be considered the "professional communicator" category in this study, his attitudinal questions were put to all three survey groups in order to establish points of comparison regarding perceptions of blogs in Canada.

The questionnaires for each survey group were written in March and April 2009 and received approval from the University of Manitoba's Joint Faculty-Research Ethics Board in June 2009. To minimize costs, an online survey of these three population groups was conducted. These

surveys were administered by Probe Research Inc., a Winnipeg-based professional market research company²¹, using custom software designed by CVENT, an event planning and online survey company based in Virginia. As the invitation to participate in this online survey was sent via email, a list of email addresses for potential participants was developed using publicly-available online resources.

The survey was loaded into CVENT in July 2009 and was subjected to an initial pre-test by Probe Research employees Chris Adams, Kevin McDougald and Lloyd Fridfinnson between July 23 and July 28, 2009. The survey instruments underwent minor modifications based on the advice provided by these individuals, and second pre-test versions of each instrument were sent on July 28, 2009 to a select group of journalists, communications practitioners and bloggers based in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Acting on their input, the survey instruments were slightly modified again before final versions were sent to members of the three target populations on August 27, 2009. Due to the number of revisions, only the final versions of each survey appear in the Appendix to this Thesis. The responses from both Probe staff and the pre-test group were destroyed and not included in the final results presented with this study.

Potential respondents to the survey were invited via an automatically-generated email and sent reminder emails at intervals of approximately seven days. After three weeks, the survey was closed September 21, 2009.

²¹ Once again, I would like to thank my colleagues at Probe Research, especially Scott MacKay and Rosemary Fletcher, for allowing me to utilize their survey program at no cost as well as providing technical advice on the implementation of the survey.

The following section highlights the methodologies used to collect email addresses and take a sample of opinion from each of the three target populations: partisan bloggers who identify themselves as supporters of one of the three national political parties; Parliament Hill-based journalists accredited with English-language media outlets, and political communications staff working for federal cabinet ministers and opposition party leaders. Though all participants had an equal chance to respond, these surveys do rely on the availability and willingness of each respondent to participate. They could be considered a “non-probability sample” of respondents (Babbie and Benaquisto 2002: 165) that is not necessarily representative of a broader population of journalists, bloggers or communications practitioners. Due to the fact there is a limited amount of information available on these subjects, it is almost impossible to determine whether those who responded to this survey account for a representative sample of bloggers, journalists or communications practitioners. Thus, some caution should be taken in extrapolating from these survey results to larger populations of these individuals.

Bloggers

As this study explores blogging activities and behaviours of bloggers who are outspoken in their support of national political parties, the principal researcher visited each of the blogs listed on the Blogging Tories (www.bloggingtories.ca), LibLogs (www.liblogs.ca) and New Democrats Online (www.newdemocratsonline.ca) websites and recorded valid email addresses where available. Because the focus of this study is on bloggers who support national parties, bloggers connected to the Bloc Quebecois were not included. A list of email addresses for Green Party bloggers was also requested from officials with the Green Party of Canada (which hosts its members’ blogs through the party website), but no response was forthcoming from officials in that party. Thus, Green bloggers were not invited to participate in the survey.

The following is a breakdown of Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic Party-supporting bloggers invited to participate. Blogs published by particular party organizations (ie. university clubs) and/or blogs written by candidates for public office were outside the scope of this study and their authors were not sent an invitation to participate:

Total Number of Blogs Found: 502

- Blogs with no working/visible email address (includes form emails): 258
- **Blogs with email addresses: 194**
- Website no longer functions: 21
- Blogs by politicians: 20
- Blogs by party organizations (ie. campus clubs): 8
- Blogs by media outlets: 1

Email addresses for 194 bloggers were loaded into CVENT. These individuals were sent an initial invitation to participate in the survey on August 27, 2009, with reminder emails sent to those who did not initially respond on Sept. 3, Sept.10 and Sept. 16, 2009. The following is a breakdown for those bloggers who were invited to participate.

- Completed responses: 72
- Partial Responses: 5
- Visited survey website without responding: 8
- Undeliverable emails: 15
- Opted-out/Asked to be removed from survey: 2
- No response: 92

This report analyzes the responses of bloggers (n=77) who fully or partially completed the survey.

Parliamentary Press Gallery

The Parliamentary Press Gallery posts its membership roster on its website (<http://www.gallery-tribune.ca/members.html>), yet it only provides telephone numbers for the 333 individuals listed on its website. Despite repeated requests, Parliamentary Press Gallery staff did not make its email list available, so an email contact list for Press Gallery members was developed based on the email logic posted on media outlet websites, such as www.ctv.ca, www.cbc.ca, www.theglobeandmail.com,²² and others. After removing 51 journalists who work for French-language media outlets (who are not the focus of this study), email addresses for the remaining 282 English-language journalists working on Parliament Hill were derived using this method. Altogether, 247 potential email addresses were generated by searching on media outlet websites.

These 247 journalists were invited to participate in the survey on August 27, 2009, with reminder emails sent to these individuals on Sept. 4, Sept. 11 and Sept. 16, 2009. The following is a breakdown of those who responded (It should be noted that errors in some email addresses were fixed after the initial email bounced back due to an error message):

- Completed Responses: 45
- Partial responses: 4
- Visited survey without responding: 10
- Undeliverable emails: 35
- Opted out/asked to be removed: 6
- No response: 156

²² For example, a reporter named Tom Jones working for the Globe and Mail has the following email address: tjones@globeandmail.com. See: <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/help/contact-paper/> and similar websites for other media outlets.

The following section analyzes the responses of those journalists working for English-language news outlets (n=49) who volunteered to respond to this survey.

Communications Practitioners

Using the federal government's Government Electronic Database System (GEDS), a list was developed that included exempt staff members who perform communication functions for ministers, such as press secretaries, directors of communication, etc. for the government of Canada, as well as for MPs in the Liberal and New Democratic caucuses. As many of these individuals do not have their email addresses listed online, email addresses were generated based upon the logic of federal department websites.²³ In total, 101 email addresses were generated by this method.

These 101 communications practitioners were invited to participate in the survey on August 27, 2009, with follow-up emails sent to these individuals on Sept. 4, Sept. 11 and Sept. 16, 2009. The following is a breakdown of those who responded. It should be noted that due to the guesswork inherent to this method, there were a number of emails sent that bounced back to the sender. The cases where the email addresses were successfully corrected so that it was received by the participant are also outlined below:

- Completed Responses: 12
- Partial responses: 3
- Visited survey without responding: 6
- Undeliverable email addresses corrected: 9
- Remaining undeliverable emails: 19
- Opted out/asked to be removed: 6
- No response: 61

²³ For example, if Jane Smith was listed as the press secretary to the Minister of Finance, it was presumed that her valid email address was jane.smith@fin.gc.ca.

Due to the low number of respondents (n=15), results for communications practitioners are reported according to the overall number of those who responded to a particular question rather than in percentage form. Furthermore, all results for this cohort of respondents are not statistically conclusive and should not be interpreted as being an indicative sample of the opinions of all communications practitioners working on Parliament Hill.

Table 4.1 shows the percentages of those bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners who responded (completely or partially), who could not be reached, who asked to be removed from the email list or who received an invitation to participate but did not respond. As the American Association for Public Opinion Research (2008: 34-37) notes, there are several different methods that can be used to calculate “response rates” or “cooperation rates” – the latter of which removes those who could not be reached – among survey respondents. As the AAPOR notes, there is “currently no consensus about the factors that produce the disjuncture between response rates and survey quality” (AAPOR n.d.) However, the organization notes that it is important for any web-based survey research to fully disclose as much information as possible related to what it terms “outcome rates” for all surveys.

Table 4.1 – Response Rates for Surveyed Groups			
	Bloggers	Journalists	Communications Practitioners
Total Identified	194 (100%)	247 (100%)	101 (100%)
Complete Response	37.1%	18.2%	11.9%
Partial Response	2.6%	1.6%	3.0%
Undeliverable	7.7%	14.2%	18.8%
Opted out	1.0%	2.4%	5.9%
No response	47.4%	63.2%	60.3%

Respondent Profiles

This section provides a general overview of the socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education background, family income level), political activity (voting behaviour and/or party identification) and professional characteristics (job experience) for each of the three cohorts of respondents:

Bloggers

The bloggers who participated in this study range from 16 to 69 years of age, with a median age of 37 years old and an average age of 39.1 years (S.E. = 1.547). The partisan blogosphere is predominantly male, with just 13 percent of those surveyed indicating they are women and 87 percent indicating they are men. (It should also be noted that seven out of 77 respondents did not indicate their gender).

Partisan bloggers in Canada tend to be highly educated, as nearly three-quarters of respondents have completed at least a university bachelor's degree or equivalent (33% of respondents have completed an undergraduate degree, while 27 percent have finished a graduate degree and an additional nine percent have completed some courses at a Master's or Ph.D. level). Ten percent of those surveyed have completed some post-secondary courses, while seven percent have finished a college diploma or certificate program. Just six percent of those surveyed have a Grade 12 diploma or less. (Six respondents declined to answer this question). In respect to gender, age and education, the sample of English-Canadian political bloggers shares many of the same characteristics of American bloggers surveyed by McKenna and Pole (2008: 101) and Quebec-based bloggers in Giasson et al. (2009: 12): that is, they are predominantly male, young and well-educated.

The household income of these bloggers varies considerably. After removing the large number (n=23) of individuals who declined to respond to this question, it emerges that one-quarter of respondents (24%) earn less than \$40,000 per year. Sixteen percent of those surveyed earn between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per year, while 19 percent of those surveyed earn \$60,000-\$80,000 and the same proportion (19%) earns \$80,000-\$100,000 per year.

Slightly more than one in five bloggers (22%) enjoy household incomes greater than \$100,000 per year. It would appear that the majority of these individuals derive very little of their income from the activity of blogging, as just 11 percent of those surveyed said they make money from their blog. Of these, most (six of nine respondents) made less than \$500 in a given year, with only one individual earning between \$500 and \$1,000 (one blogger was unsure of the amount, while another declined to respond). For most of these individuals, Google Ads (seven out of nine respondents) or advertisements for specific companies (five out of nine respondents) are the most likely source of their income. Only one respondent indicated that he or she receives compensation from a political party or candidate to blog, while another noted that he or she solicits donations from readers.

Blogger Political Activity

As noted earlier, authors from three major groups of partisan writers were invited to participate in this study. While the bloggers who responded could be grouped according to the data collected by the researcher, survey respondents were also asked to self-identify their blogging affiliation in order to verify the representativeness of the sample as well as to assess whether there had been any changes in the respondent's status vis-a-vis the blogging community (for example, if a blogger no longer considered themselves a member of a specific partisan group).

Comparing the self-identified blogging affiliation to the affiliation provided in the survey invitation yielded a correlation coefficient of $\lambda = .910$ (Cramer's $V=.976$), which is an extremely strong level of correlation. Thus, the self-identified partisan affiliations of bloggers to specific partisan communities is as follows:

- Blogging Tories members: 27 respondents (35% of respondents)
- Blogging Dippers/New Democrats Online members: 22 respondents (29%)
- Liblogs members: 21 respondents (27%)
- Progressive Blogger (only): 1 respondent (1%)
- Blogging affiliation not indicated: 5 respondents (7% of respondents)
- Not a member of any of these groups: 1 respondent (1%)

As well, respondents were asked to indicate if they belonged to a blog community called Progressive Bloggers (www.progressivebloggers.ca), which describes itself as an “alliance of Canadian political blogs aimed to express and promote progressive ideas.” Though its creators describe it as “centre-left,” it is also billed as “non-partisan” in that its members do not explicitly support a single Canadian political party. Approximately one-half of those surveyed (47%) belong to this group as well as to another partisan blogging entity. Perhaps not surprisingly for an organization that bills itself as representing a “centre-left” perspective, a majority of New Democrats Online (73%) and Liblog members (71%) tended to belong to both groups, while hardly any Blogging Tories (4%) said they were also affiliated with the Progressive Bloggers.

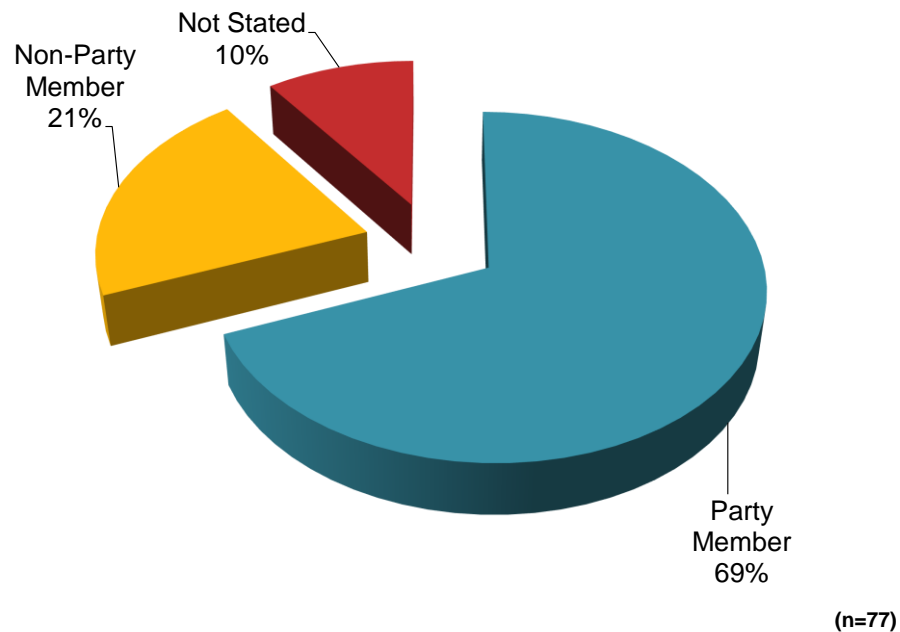
Blogger Voting Behaviour

Respondents were asked to indicate which party they voted for in the most recent (October 2008) federal election. As expected, there was an extremely strong relationship ($\lambda=.909$; Cramer's $V=.966$) between a blogger's partisan affiliation online and their political preference at the ballot box. Among those who indicated how they voted, 92 percent of Blogging Tories voted for a Conservative Party candidate, 91 percent of Blogging Dippers/New Democrats Online voted for a NDP candidate and 91 percent of Liberal bloggers voted for a Liberal candidate. Where there was deviation, nine percent of Liberal bloggers voted for the Green Party, five percent of New Democrat bloggers voted for a Liberal and five percent of Conservative bloggers voted for a candidate from a fringe party. Small numbers of Blogging Tories and New Democrats Online (4% each) said they did not vote. When the whole sample ($n=77$) is taken into consideration, 13 percent of those surveyed did not indicate how they voted in the last federal election.

Party Membership

In addition to voting for their preferred party's candidates, partisan bloggers are also highly likely to be card-carrying members of the party they support online. Nearly seven in ten bloggers (69%) currently belong to a political party, with an extremely strong correlation ($\lambda=.955$) between party membership and online partisan orientation. Among those who currently belong to a political party, every member of New Democrats Online (100%) concurrently holds a membership in the federal New Democratic Party, while 95 percent of Liberal bloggers belong to the federal Liberal party and 88 percent of Blogging Tories are paid-up members of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Figure 4.1 - Party Membership Among Bloggers

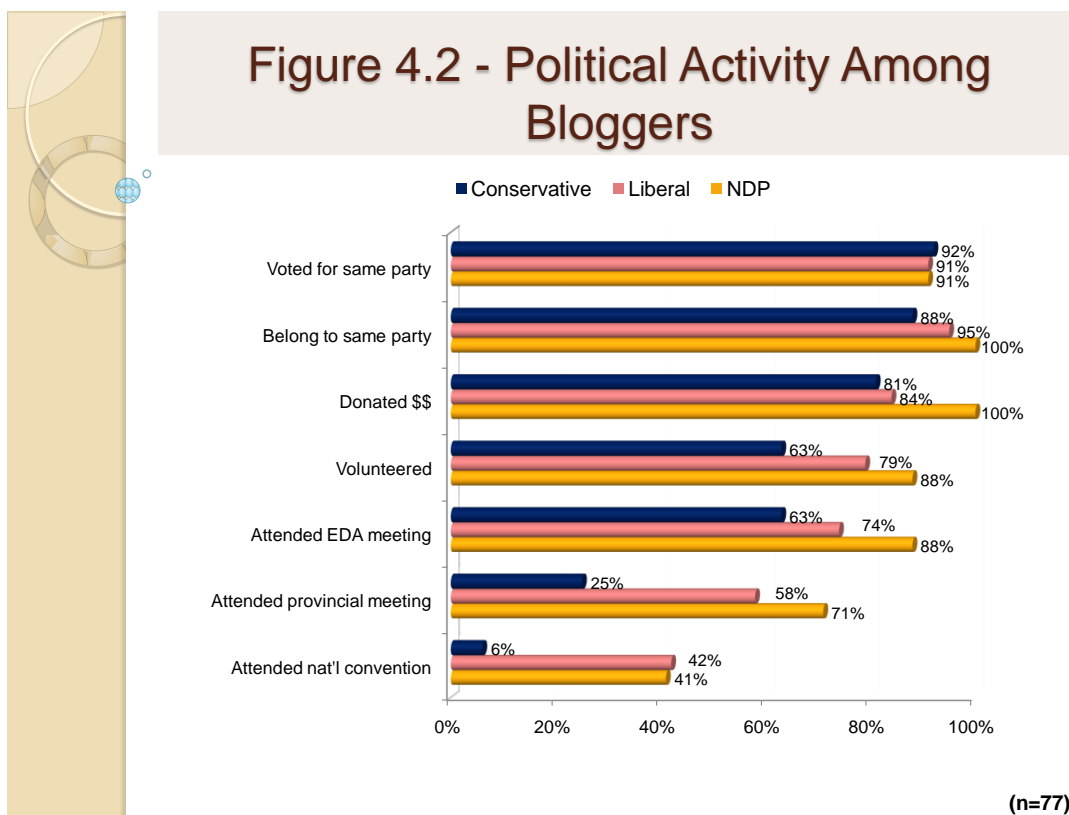


Partisan Activity

Respondents who currently belong to both a political party and a partisan blog community were asked to indicate which partisan activities they had participated in during the previous 12 months.

The overwhelming majority of these bloggers (89%) indicated that they had donated to a political party or one of its candidates, with all New Democrats (100%) and most Libbloggers (84%) and Blogging Tories (81%) doing so during the past year. A slightly smaller proportion (77%) said they had volunteered during an election campaign, with New Democrats somewhat more likely than their fellow online partisans to help out during a campaign (88% versus 79% of Liberals and 63% of Blogging Tories).

Bloggers who currently belong to a political party are also extremely likely to participate in their party organizations in their local area, with their involvement diminishing when it comes to party activities conducted at the provincial and national level. Three-quarters of these bloggers (76%) said they have recently attended a meeting of their party's electoral district association. More than one-half of these bloggers (53%) noted they attended their party's annual provincial meeting in the past year, while one-third (32%) said they were delegates to their party's national convention.



On all of these measures of partisan activity, bloggers who belong to the New Democratic Party are more likely to be engaged in these activities than their Liberal and Conservative counterparts. Nine in ten NDP-supporting bloggers (88%) attended a meeting of their local NDP electoral district association versus 74 percent of Libbloggers and 63 percent of Blogging Tories;

seven in ten New Democrats Online (71%), meanwhile, attended a provincial NDP convention compared to 58 percent of Libloggers and 28 percent of Blogging Tories who did this. Approximately four in ten Libloggers (42%) and New Democrats Online (41%) attended their party's most recent national convention compared to just six percent of Blogging Tories who did this.²⁴ These results seem to suggest that partisan bloggers tend to be "hypercitizens" in the same vein as their counterparts in Quebec (Chiasson et al., 2009) and are strongly dedicated to participating in the political process, both on-line and off-line.

Profile of Journalists

Though there was a greater level of gender parity when compared to bloggers, the majority of journalists who responded to this survey (n=49) were male (61% versus 39% female, with five respondents who did not indicate their gender). The average age of these journalists is 42.6 years (S.E. = 1.633; median age = 43 years), making them slightly older on average than the bloggers who participated in this survey. The journalists who responded to this survey ranged in age from 23 to 64 years old.

The majority of those surveyed (51%) are reporters for newspapers, magazines, television networks and/or radio stations. Other respondents work behind-the-scenes as editors or directors (15%), producers (13%) or researchers/editorial assistants (4%). One in ten respondents (11%) serve as a newspaper/magazine columnist, while the remaining six percent of respondents specialize as photographers, videographers or work in another technical field

²⁴ It should be noted here that when this survey was conducted in August-September 2009, the New Democrats had just concluded their national convention (held in Halifax in August 2009), while the Liberal convention held in Vancouver in May 2009 featured the party's confirmation of Michael Ignatieff as its new leader. By comparison, the most recent Conservative Party national convention (in November 2008 in Winnipeg) was held nearly a year prior to this survey being conducted.

(Due to the lack of occupational information on the published Parliamentary Press Gallery list, it was all but impossible to only invite reporters and columnists as opposed to those employed in more-technical positions). Nearly one-half of those surveyed have worked in the journalism profession for more than 20 years, with 32 percent indicating they have been journalists for 20-29 years and 14 percent indicating they have worked in this profession for more than 30 years. Fewer than one in four respondents, meanwhile, have worked in this business for less than 10 years, with 18 percent indicating they have served for five to nine years and nine percent serving as working journalists for fewer than five years. When asked to indicate how long they have been members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, the majority indicated they have belonged to this body for less than 10 years (34% have been members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery for less than five years and 26 percent have been members for 5-9 years).

The perceived political biases of Canadian journalists have been discussed at length in the blogosphere (Taylor 2005), by journalists (Hoy 2005) and by politicians (Libin 2006) and have been the focus of some academic studies (Desbarats 1990; Miljan and Cooper 2003) seeking to understand what partisan leanings, if any, Canadian journalists may have. To test these hypotheses, journalists were asked to indicate which party they voted for in the most recent (October 2008) federal election. Most respondents (64%) refused to say or did not indicate which party they voted for (or they did not vote), which perhaps speaks to the notion of journalists maintaining the perception of political neutrality and non-partisanship. As well, several journalists (16%) specifically indicated they did not vote in the last federal election. Only nine respondents indicated their party preference, with four stating they voted for the Liberal Party, two voting for the NDP, two voting for the Green Party and one voting for a smaller, unspecified party.

Like bloggers, more than two-thirds of journalists working on Parliamentary Hill have completed at least one university degree (36% hold a bachelor's degree, 33% hold a Master's-level degree and 9% have completed some graduate-level courses in university). Fourteen percent of those surveyed have completed a college diploma or certificate, while seven percent have some partial post-secondary education and just two percent (one respondent) finished his/her studies after receiving a high school diploma.

On average, journalists tend to earn higher levels of household income than the bloggers surveyed in this study, though it should be noted that more than one-third of those surveyed (35%, or 17 respondents) refused to divulge their incomes. Fully six in ten journalists (59%) have annual household incomes greater than \$100,000, with 50 percent earning between \$100,000 and \$199,999/year and nine percent earning more than \$200,000/year. Nearly three in ten journalists (28%) earn between \$80,000 and \$99,999 per year, while six percent earn \$60,000-\$79,999/year. Six percent (or two respondents) indicated they earn less than \$60,000 per year.

Profile of Communications Practitioners

Because of the small number of individuals (n=15) who completely or partially responded to this survey, all results will be reported on the basis of the number of individuals who responded and will not be expressed as percentages. Furthermore, due to the small sample size, none of these results can be considered statistically conclusive.

The majority of respondents (7 out of 11) were female, with four communications practitioners not indicating their gender. The communications practitioners who indicated their birth year

(n=9, as six declined to respond to this question) combined for an average age of 32.3 years (S.E. 2.619; median = 34 years). The youngest respondent was 25 years of age, while the oldest respondent was 52 years of age.

Nearly one-half of respondents (7) stated that their official job title is “press secretary,” with five noting their job title is “director of communications” and one indicating they are a “special assistant” to a cabinet minister or party leader (two respondents did not answer this question). Most respondents (12) have worked as a communications practitioner for less than a decade, with eight of those surveyed in this profession for five to nine years and four doing this job for less than five years (one respondent indicated he or she had served in this role for more than 30 years, while two declined to respond). These individuals have been working in their current positions for significantly less time: seven respondents indicated they have served in their current role for less than one year, while three practitioners have been in their current position for 1-3 years and three have been in their job for 3-5 years (two individuals declined to respond). The majority of those surveyed (10) are exempt staff members who work for cabinet ministers in the federal Conservative government; one respondent works for the New Democratic Party, while four individuals chose not to respond to this question.

All of those surveyed, save for two respondents who did not answer this question, have completed some level of post-secondary education (five practitioners hold graduate degrees, three hold undergraduate degrees, two have completed some graduate-level courses in addition to an undergraduate degree and two have completed a college diploma or certificate). Three communications practitioners have household incomes greater than \$100,000/year, with two

earning between \$80,000 and \$99,999/year, one earning \$60,000-\$79,999/year and one earning \$40,000-\$59,999/year. Eight respondents did not indicate their level of family income.

This analysis of age, gender, income and education outlines some of the key socio-demographic characteristics of partisan bloggers, Canadian Parliamentary journalists employed by English-language news outlets and communications practitioners working on Parliament Hill. They are meant to provide readers with the means to compare members of these respective groups and add to the overall understanding of these actors, each of whom may contribute to the agenda-setting process and the framing of political issues.

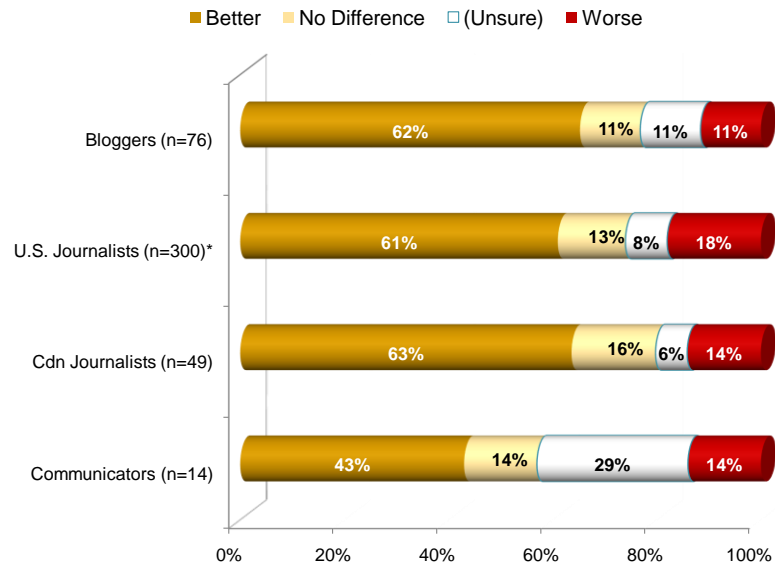
Perceptions of the Blogosphere

This section highlights the attitudes of all respondents towards blogging and the impact of the Internet on political journalism. After sharing their views how the Internet and blogs have affected the profession of journalism, respondents were asked to state their own views on a series of statements on blogs using a Likert scale to demonstrate agreement. Finally, this section includes more detailed responses from journalists and communications practitioners regarding specific ways in which their work has been affected by blogs and explores how they view the information presented in this medium (All results were derived using SPSS versions 12 and 16. Cases where the respondent did not answer the question have been removed from the cross-tabulations).

Impact of the Internet on Journalism

When asked to assess how the Internet has affected the craft of journalism, 60 percent of respondents said it has made reporting better, while more than one in ten respondents said it has either made journalism worse or not had any impact (13% each) on this profession. Views on how the Internet has affected journalism did not vary significantly among members of these three groups, as 63 percent of journalists, 62 percent of bloggers and six out of 15 communications practitioners (43%) said the Internet has improved journalism. However, journalists were slightly more likely to say that the Internet has made the practice of journalism worse than before (16% versus 11% of bloggers, while 17% of bloggers said it made “no difference” compared to six percent of journalists who felt the same way). As a point of comparison, there is no discernible difference between Canadian journalists and American journalists (Dautrich and Barnes 2005: 7) on this question, as the graph below illustrates:

Figure 4.3 - How Has the Internet Changed Journalism?

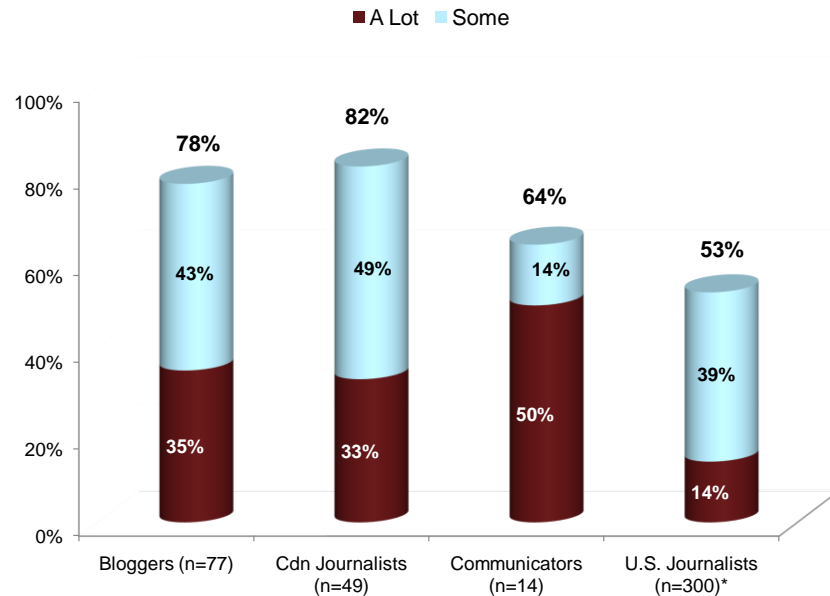


Taken from Dautrich and Barnes (2005: 7)

Effect of Blogs on Journalism

Most respondents recognized that blogs have had some impact on journalistic practice: 36 percent of respondents said blogs have affected this profession a lot while 42 percent of those surveyed said these self-published web diaries have had some impact on journalism. In general, bloggers and journalists tended to share the same views on whether or not blogging has impacted the profession of journalism (35% of bloggers and 33% of journalists said that blogs have had “a lot” of impact, while 43% of bloggers and 49% of journalists agree that they have had “some” effect on how journalism is practiced). Interestingly, bloggers and journalists based in Canada were much more likely to state that blogs have affected journalism than U.S.-based journalists who assessed the impact of blogging on journalistic practice (Dautrich and Barnes 2005: 9).

Figure 4.4 - To What Extent Have Blogs Changed Journalism?

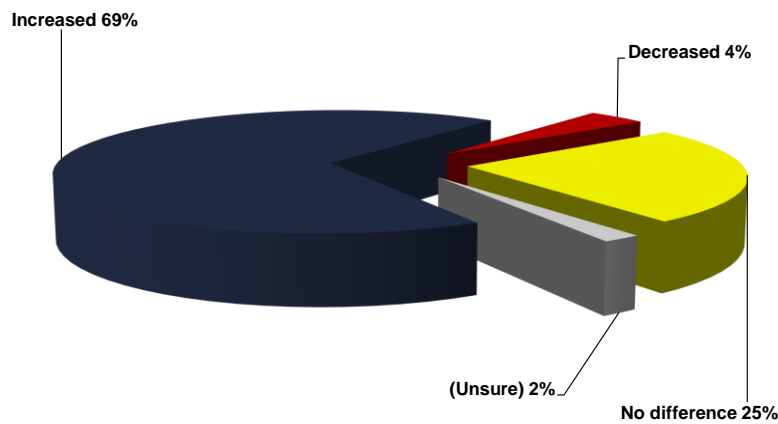


*Taken from Dautrich and Barnes (2005: 9)

Internet's Impact on Job Pressure (Journalists/Communicators Only)

Overall, the Internet is perceived to place more pressure on both journalists and communications practitioners. The term “pressure” is used here in multiple senses, and can describe the workload of both sets of respondents or the deadlines faced by journalists. More than two-thirds of journalists working on Parliament Hill (69%) say that they feel as if their job pressure has increased thanks to the World Wide Web, while one-quarter of these journalists (25%) say the Internet has made no difference to their workload and just four percent say their deadline pressure has subsided as a result of the Internet (two percent were undecided). Thirteen of 15 communicators, meanwhile, say their job pressure has increased due to the Internet, with one individual stating it has made no difference.

Figure 4.5 - How Has the Internet Affected Job Pressure?

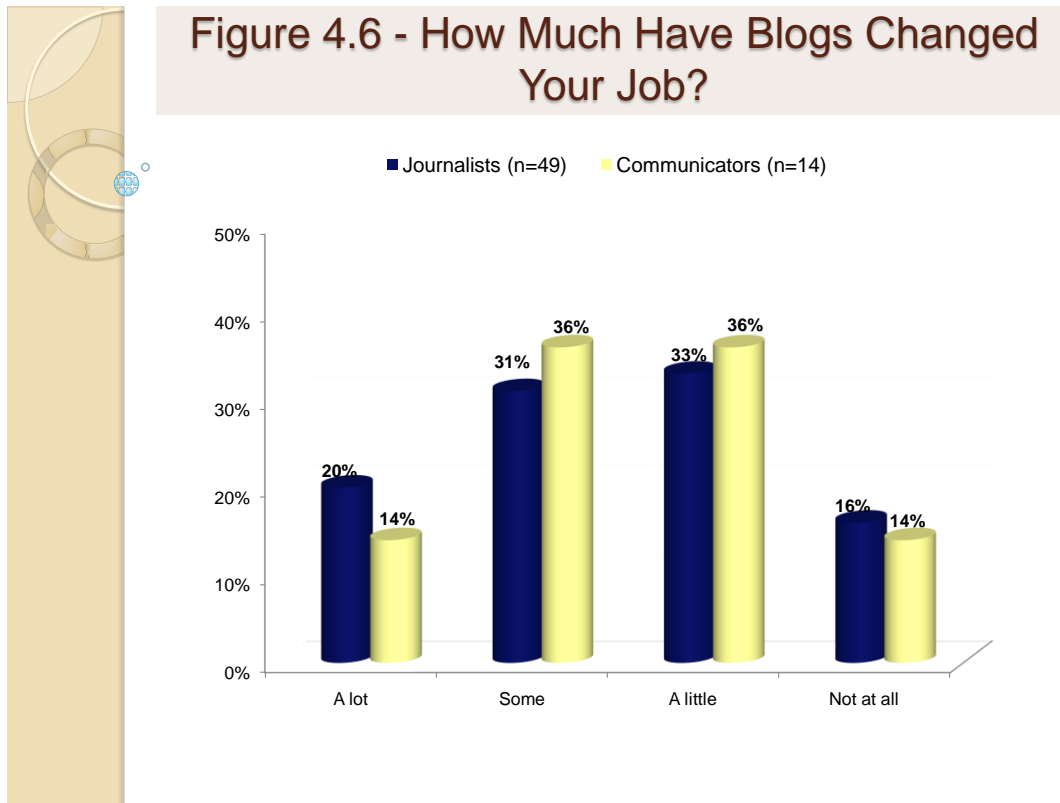


- Journalists (n=49) -

Blogger Effects on Work Patterns (Journalists/Communicators Only)

Blogs may have brought about multiple changes in work patterns for journalists and communications practitioners, and some of the ways these changes may have come about include reading blogs and responding to criticisms from these authors. More than one-half of Parliamentary Press Gallery Members (51%) acknowledge that blogs have changed how they do their job, with 20 percent stating that these websites have changed their work patterns “a lot” and 31 percent acknowledging there has been “some” change in their job practices due to blogging. One-third of journalists (33%), however, say there has been little change to their jobs due to blogging, while 16 percent of those surveyed said blogs have had no effect on how they do their jobs. Communications professionals, meanwhile, were most likely to state that blogs

have had “some” or “little” impact on how they do their jobs (five respondents each), with three of these individuals saying blogs have created “a lot” of change in their work patterns and another three respondents stating blogs have not changed how they do their jobs in any way.



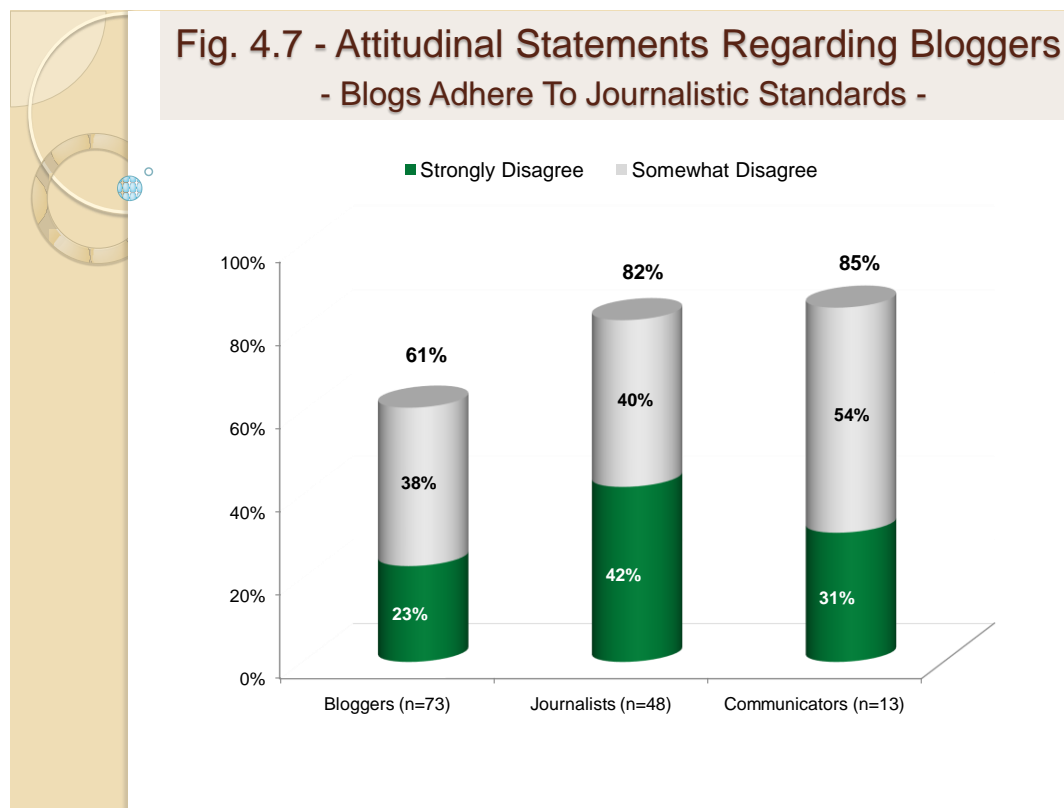
Agreement With Statements Regarding the Blogosphere-Media Relationship

Using a 1-5 scale where a “1” meant they “strongly disagree” and a “5” meant they “strongly agree,” survey participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements characterizing the blogosphere and its relationship with mainstream political journalism.

Blogger Adherence To Journalistic Standards

Interestingly, not a single respondent strongly agrees with the idea that bloggers adhere to the same journalistic standards as professional reporters. A higher percentage of bloggers

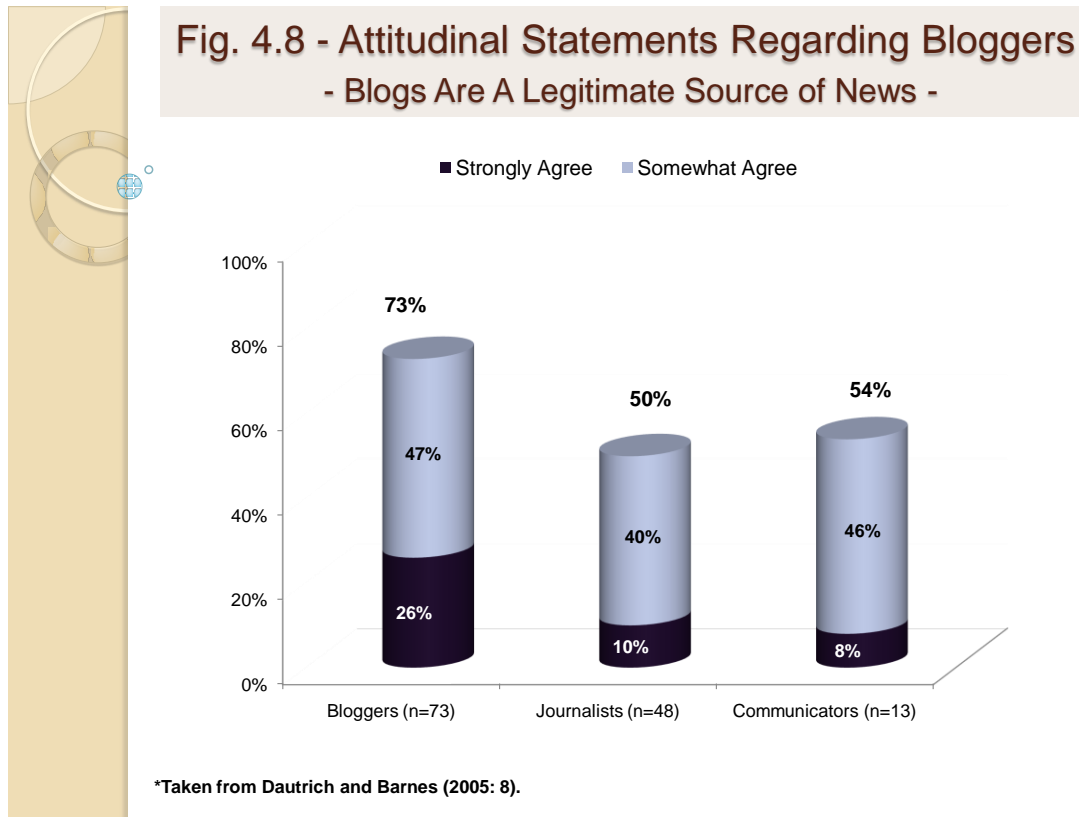
somewhat agree that their colleagues follow journalistic standards (14% percent somewhat agree that bloggers follow these norms versus 4% among journalists and two out of 13 respondents – or 16% – among communications practitioners). Journalists tend to strongly disagree that bloggers follow the same professional standards as they do (42% strongly disagree versus 23% of bloggers and four out of 13 communications practitioners).



Blogs As A Legitimate Source of News

A majority of respondents (63%) agree that blogs are a legitimate source of news, with one in five (19%) in strong agreement with this statement. There is some difference in the intensity of agreement with this idea between members of the different groups surveyed (26% of bloggers

strongly agree blogs are a legitimate source of news versus 10% of journalists and one out of 13 communications practitioners).



Blogger Partisanship (General)

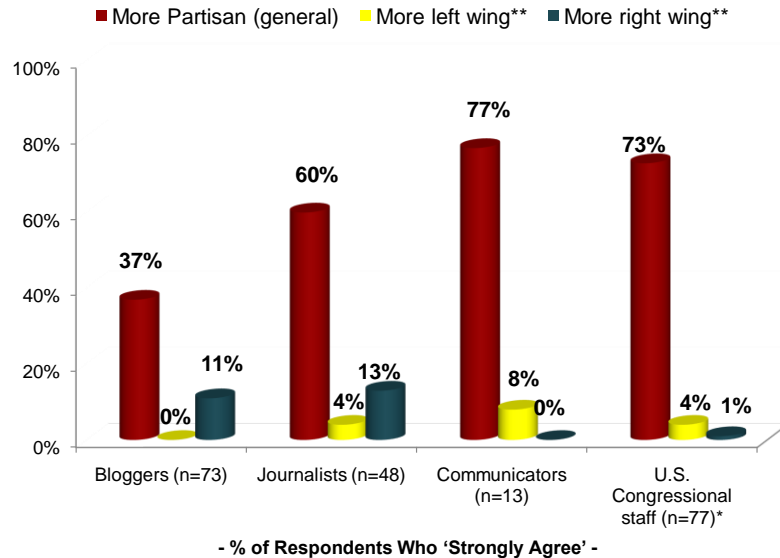
Nearly all of those surveyed (86%) agree to some extent that bloggers display more overt partisanship than members of the mainstream media, with 49 percent of all respondents strongly agreeing that bloggers are more partisan than journalists. Parliamentary Press Gallery members and communications practitioners, however, are more likely to strongly believe that bloggers are more partisan than journalists (60% of journalists and 10 out of 13 communicators versus 37% of bloggers), while bloggers are more likely to demonstrate moderate agreement with this statement (48% somewhat agree versus 27% of journalists and 1 of 13 communicators). Canadian journalists and exempt staff perceptions of the blogosphere are

comparable to those of political staff employed in the U.S. Congress (Sroka 2006: 19), with bloggers significantly less likely to view themselves as being more partisan than members of the mainstream media.

Blogger Partisanship (Left-Wing Bias)

A slight majority of respondents (52%) disputed the idea that bloggers are more likely to be left-wing than members of the mainstream media, though disagreement with this statement was somewhat muted (20% strongly disagreed and 31% somewhat disagreed). Bloggers were slightly more likely to strongly disagree with this statement than the other individuals surveyed (27% versus 15% of journalists and no communications practitioners who expressed this opinion). More importantly, 36 percent of respondents offered a neutral opinion on this subject, while 11 percent of journalists and 1 out of 13 communications practitioners expressed uncertainty when asked to agree or disagree with this statement.

Fig. 4.9 - Attitudinal Statements Regarding Bloggers
- Blogs Are More Partisan Than The Mainstream Media -



*Taken from Sroka (2006: 19).

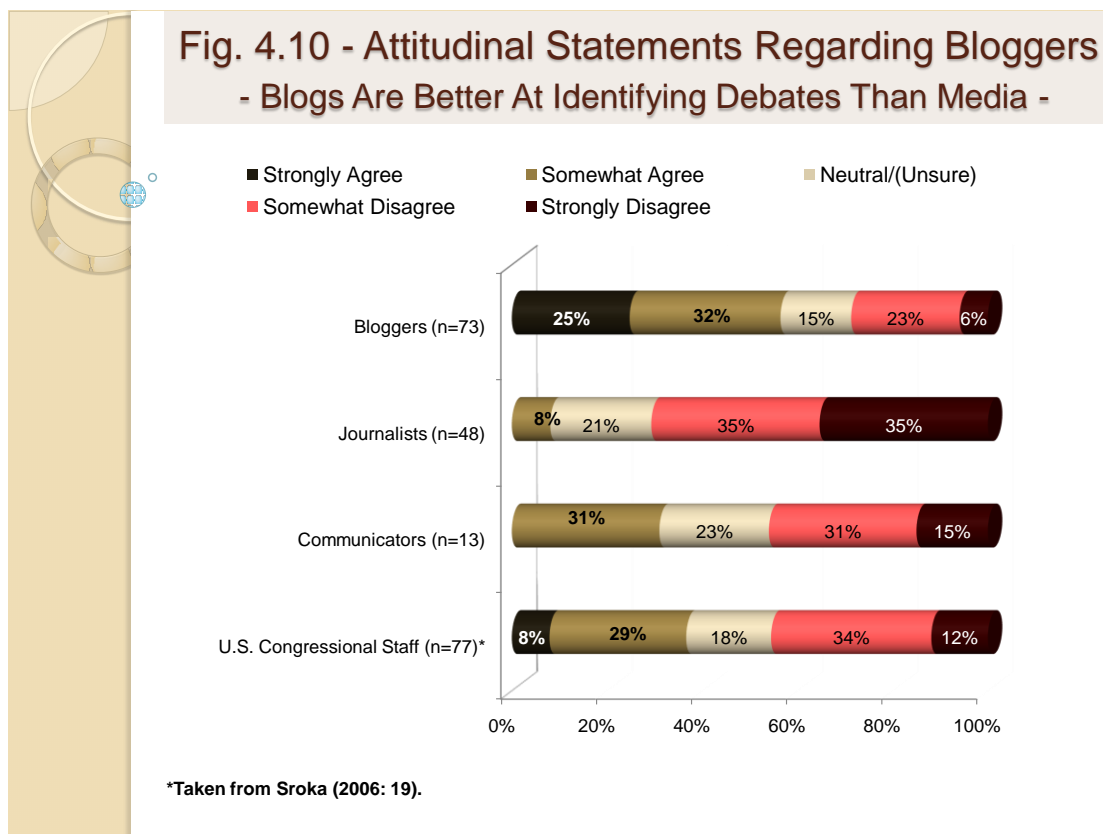
** Sroka uses the phrases "liberal" and "conservative" in his questionnaire - which are more relevant terms in the U.S. political context - rather than "left wing" and "right wing" used here. The results are simply added as a point of comparison.

Blogger Partisanship (Right-Wing Bias)

Respondents were slightly more likely to concede that bloggers tend to be more right-wing than journalists, though agreement with this statement was by no means strong, as only one-third of all respondents (33%, with 10% percent in strong agreement) concurred that the political blogosphere tilts further right than the mainstream media. More than one-third of respondents (37%) neither agreed nor disagreed, while one in four (25%) disagreed with this statement.

Bloggers As Identifiers of National Debates

Bloggers and journalists are quite divided over the question of whether blogs are better at identifying national debates than journalists. A majority of bloggers agree with this statement (57%, with 25% in strong agreement), while the vast majority of journalists do not agree with this statement (70%, with 35% in strong disagreement). Among communication practitioners, nearly one-half of those who responded to this question (six out of 13) do not agree with this statement. As the graph below illustrates, there is a significant difference between journalists and bloggers (57% of bloggers agree versus 29% of journalists), while Canadian and American political staff exhibit roughly the same level of agreement on whether blogs are better at identifying current debates (31% of Canadian communications practitioners somewhat agree versus 37% of U.S. Congressional staff that strongly or somewhat agree).

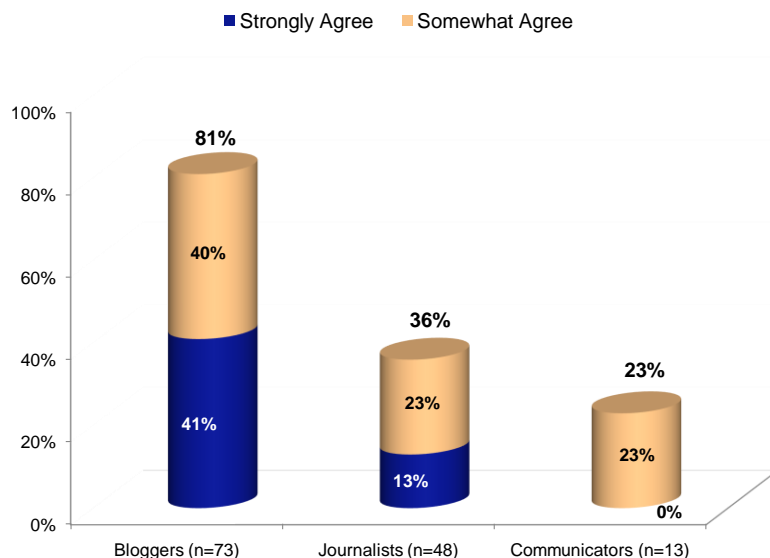


Legal Protections For Bloggers

The question of whether bloggers should have the same legal protections as journalists²⁵ – including the right to protect the identity of anonymous sources –also reveals a deep cleavage between those in the political journalism profession and those who blog about Canadian politics. Eight in ten bloggers (81%, with 41% indicating strong agreement) agree that bloggers should have the same legal protections as journalists compared to just 36 percent of journalists (including just 13% who strongly agree) who would support extending these legal protections to bloggers. Nearly one-half of journalists (46%) are against the extension of these rights to bloggers, including 25 percent who are strongly against this idea. As for communicators, seven out of 13 respondents disagreed with extending these rights to bloggers, with three somewhat in support of this idea.

²⁵ It should be noted that this question is taken from an American survey (Sroka 2006) and that the rights of Canadian journalists differ slightly from those of their American counterparts. Nonetheless, the question, as well as the question regarding access to public institutions on the following page is intended to reveal the extent to which Canadian journalists and communications practitioners view bloggers as a legitimate form of media whose authors should have the same rights and privileges that they currently enjoy.

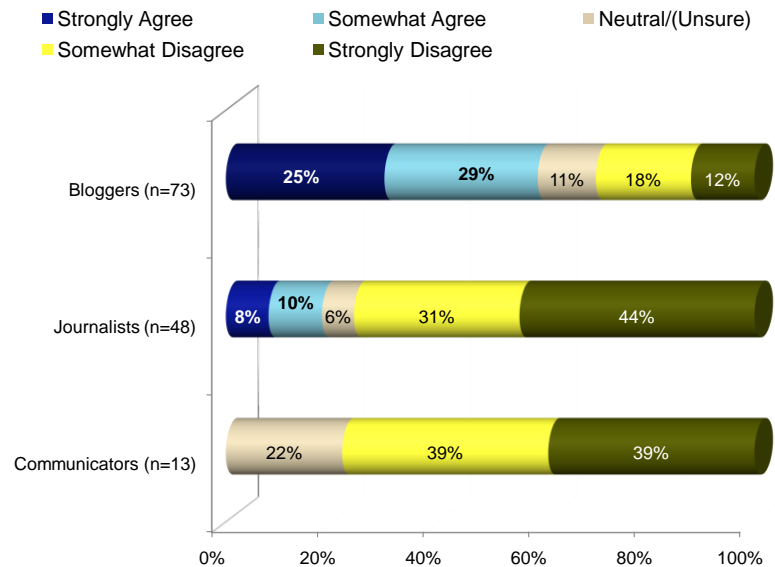
Fig. 4.11 - Attitudinal Statements Regarding Bloggers
 - Bloggers Should Have The Same Legal Protections As Journalists -



Bloggers' Access to Public Institutions

Journalists and communications professionals do not favour allowing bloggers the same degree of access to institutions such as Parliament that reporters currently enjoy. Bloggers, meanwhile, are in favour of having greater levels of accredited access to public institutions, which would presuppose that the Parliamentary Press Gallery would have to expand to include these citizen journalists. Three-quarters of journalists (75%) are against opening these institutions to bloggers (with 44 percent in strong disagreement with this idea), while 10 out of 13 press secretaries and communications directors surveyed disagreed strongly or somewhat (the remaining three were either undecided or neutral). More than one-half of those who blog (49%), meanwhile, are in support of extending access to public institutions, with 30 percent of those surveyed strongly agreeing with this notion.

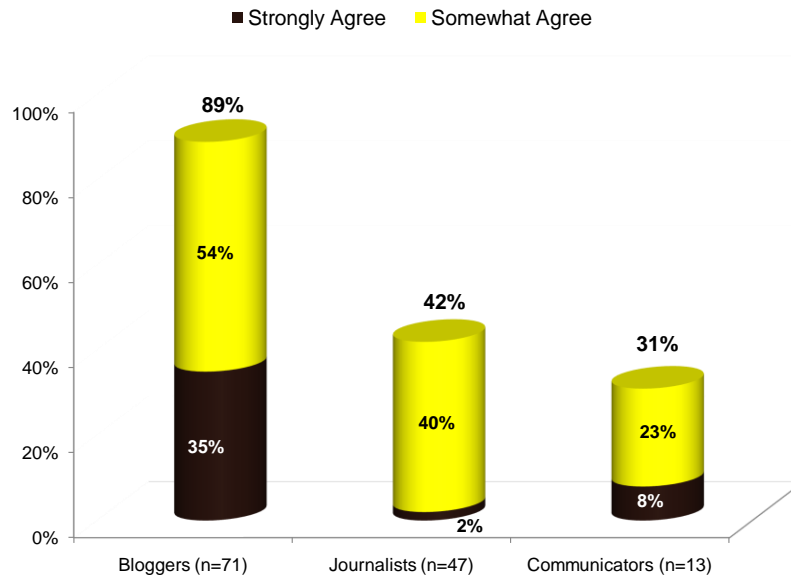
**Fig. 4.12 - Attitudinal Statements Regarding Bloggers
- Bloggers Should Have Same Access To Institutions -**



Bloggers As Watchdogs of the Mainstream Media

Among all respondent groups, there is some shared sense that bloggers act as watchdogs of professional journalists, though the intensity of agreement between those surveyed differs significantly. Overall, two-thirds of respondents (68%) strongly or somewhat agree that bloggers oversee the work of professional journalists, with 23 percent disagreeing and eight percent neutral on this question. The vast majority of bloggers (89%, including 35% who strongly agree) concur that they watch over what journalists say and write compared to just 42 percent of journalists (with just two percent who strongly agree) and six of 13 communications practitioners surveyed.

Fig. 4.13 - Attitudinal Statements Regarding Bloggers
 - Bloggers Act As Watchdogs of the Mainstream Media -



Neglect of the Blogosphere

Most of those surveyed do not feel that journalists ignore the blogosphere: one in four (24%) disagree strongly and one in two (49%) disagree moderately with this idea. Bloggers are slightly more likely than journalists to somewhat agree that professional reporters ignore the blogosphere (28% versus 13% respectively), with no journalist or blogger in strong agreement with this statement. Nine out of 13 communications practitioners disagree with the idea that journalists ignore the blogosphere (two disagree strongly and seven disagree moderately).

Blogs and Journalists Have No Relationship

Two-thirds of respondents (68%) disagreed with the notion the blogosphere and journalists have no direct, identifiable relationship, with 22 percent in strong disagreement and 46 percent in

moderate disagreement). The differences in opinion between bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners are relatively small on this question, with bloggers slightly more likely than journalists to strongly disagree that these two groups have no direct relationship (28% versus 15% respectively).

The following table highlights the correlations found for each statement and notes their level of statistical significance:

Table 4.2 Correlations for Survey Findings	
Statement	λ
Bloggers adhere to journalistic standards	.035
Blogs are a legitimate source of news	.037
Blogs tend to be more partisan than mainstream media outlets.	.085
Blogs tend to be more left-wing than mainstream media outlets.	.034
Blogs tend to be more right-wing than mainstream media outlets.	.020
Blogs are more useful than mainstream media outlets for identifying current national political problems and debates.	.127*
Bloggers should have the same legal protections as other journalists	.138
Bloggers should have the same level of access that accredited journalists have to events and public institutions like Parliament	.181**
The blogosphere acts as a “watchdog” of the mainstream media	.155**
The mainstream media ignores the blogosphere.	.008
The blogosphere and mainstream media do not have any identifiable, direct relationship.	.000

*Significant at the 95 percent confidence interval

**Significant at the 99 percent confidence interval

As the table above shows, there is a moderate and statistically significant ($p < .01$) correlation between responses related to bloggers having access to public institutions such as Parliament and acting as a watchdog of the mainstream media, with a weaker (and only statistically

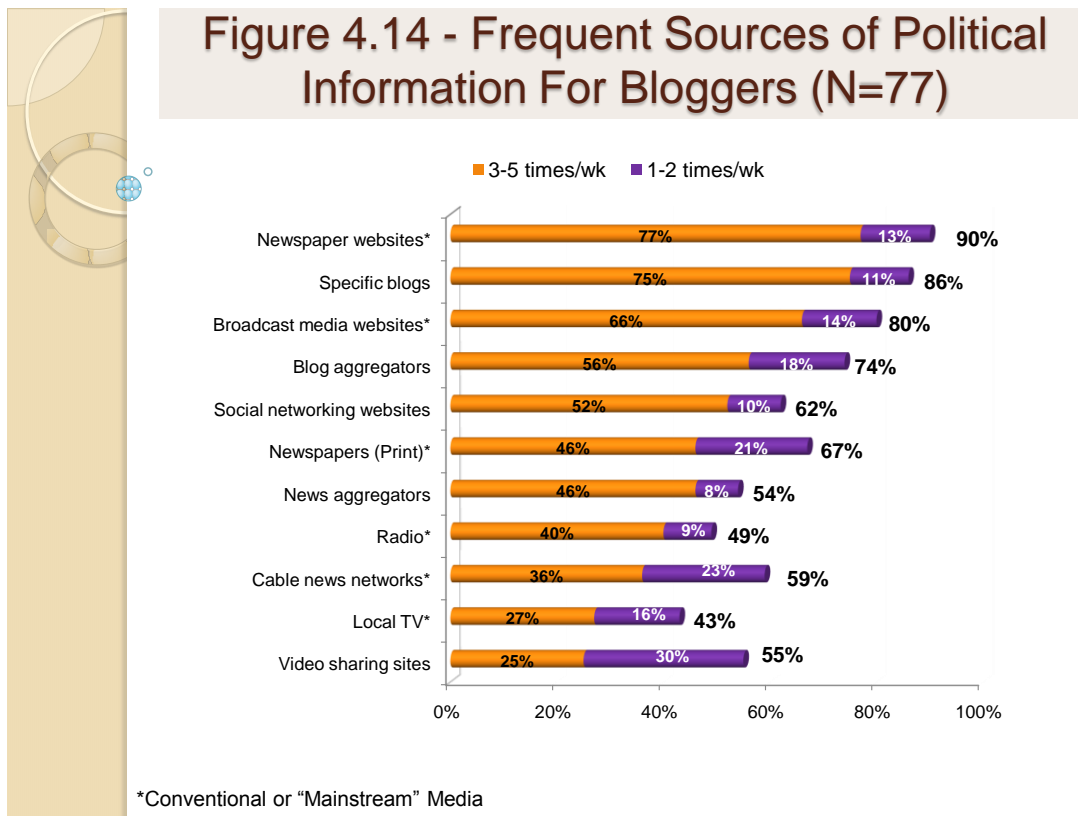
significant at the 95 percent confidence interval) relationship regarding whether bloggers are more useful than media outlets for identifying current national political debates. There is a slightly stronger relationship related to perceptions of whether bloggers should have the same legal protections as other journalists.

Blogger Consumption of News Media

This section presents the findings from a series of questions which asked bloggers to state which traditional and online types of media they use to learn about Canadian politics and how these items, as well as emerging types of social media, are utilized when constructing blog posts.

Political News Consumption

The following graph illustrates which types of media bloggers utilize to learn about Canadian politics, as well as the frequency with which each of these forms are used by respondents:

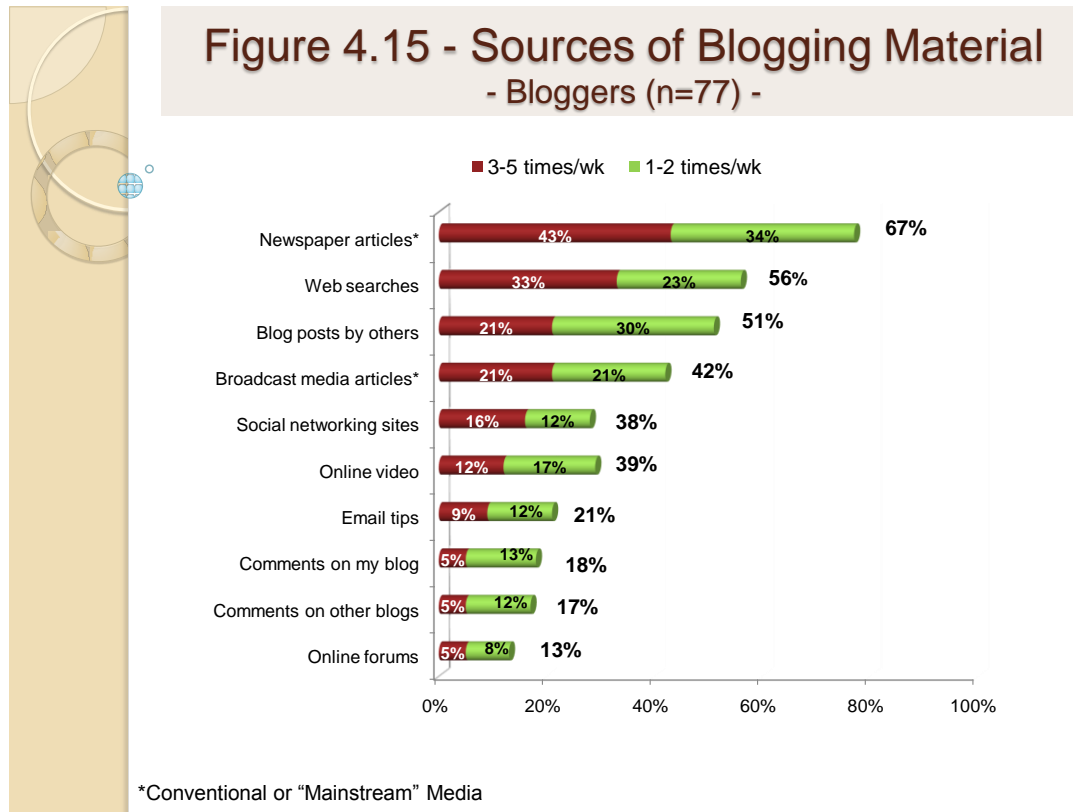


Articles from newspaper websites are the most commonly used form of political information for Canada's partisan bloggers, with 90 percent of those surveyed noting they read these once per week or more (77% read them three to five times per week, while an additional 13 percent read

them once or twice per week). Other blogs are the second most popular source of information, with three-quarters of bloggers (75%) reading them three to five times per week and 11 percent visiting other blogs once or twice a week. Broadcast media sites, such as cbc.ca or ctv.ca, are visited by eight in ten bloggers at least once per week (80%, with 66% noting they visit these sites three to five times per week). Also, three-quarters of partisan bloggers (including 56% who visit at least three times per week) read information posted on websites that aggregate a number of blog posts by partisan authors. Other sources of media that a majority of partisan bloggers utilize at least once per week to learn about Canadian politics include print versions of newspapers (67% read these at least once per week); social networking websites like Facebook (62%, with 52% indicating they use these three to five times per week); cable news channels like CBC Newsworld/News Network or CTV NewsNet (59% watch these at least once per week); video sharing websites like YouTube (55% use these once per week or more) and news aggregator websites that link to online news stories and columns (54% use these once per week or more). The least utilized forms of media – ie. those that a majority of bloggers do not use at least once per week – include radio stations (49%, though 40% listen to these three or more times per week) and local television stations (43% watch these once a week).

Sources of Blogging Material

Using the same scale, bloggers were asked to indicate how often they use different types of media to formulate blog posts. The results are illustrated in the following graph:



Once again, articles written for newspapers are the most prevalent source of material for partisan bloggers, with two-thirds of these respondents indicating that they use newspaper articles posted online to write a blog post at least once per week (67%, with 43% indicating newspaper articles are used three to five times per week). Articles in newspapers are utilized slightly more than items generated by broadcast media outlets, which are used by 42 percent of bloggers at least once per week. Web searches are also commonly used to craft blog posts, with 56 percent of respondents using these at least once per week (including 33% who write posts based on web searches at least three to five times per week). Blog posts written by

others, meanwhile, inspire fully one-half of bloggers (51%) to write something at least once per week. Other common inspirations for blog posts by Canadian partisan bloggers include online video sharing websites (39% use these once per week or more); items on social networking sites (38% of bloggers use these at least once per week); comments left on their respective blogs (18% once per week); comments left on other blogs (17% once per week) and online discussion forums (13% once per week). Interestingly, one in five bloggers (21%) say that emails sent to them by readers inspire blog posts at least once per week, with nine percent of those surveyed saying these tips are used to generate posts between three and five times per week.

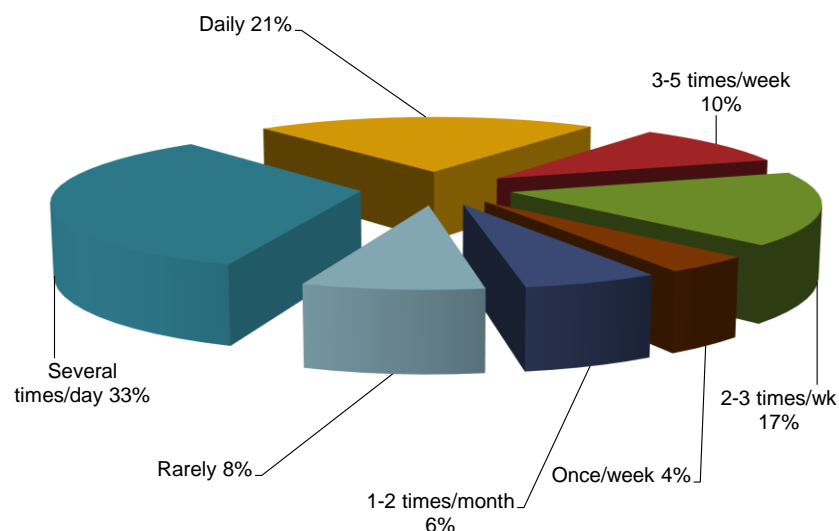
Patterns of Blog and Media Consumption

This section provides the findings from a number of questions posed to Parliamentary Press Gallery members and communications professionals within the federal government regarding their blog readership habits.

Frequency of Blog Readership

Nearly one-half of journalists surveyed (52%) read blogs at least once per day. One-quarter of journalists (27%) read blogs more than once per week, with 10 percent indicating they read blogs several (4-5) times per week and 17 percent estimating they read blogs twice or three times per week. Four percent of journalists surveyed read blogs only about once per week, while six percent said they read these websites once or twice a month. Fewer than one in ten journalists who took the survey (8%) said they read blogs rarely.

Figure 4.16 - How Often Do You Read Blogs?
- Journalists (n=48) -

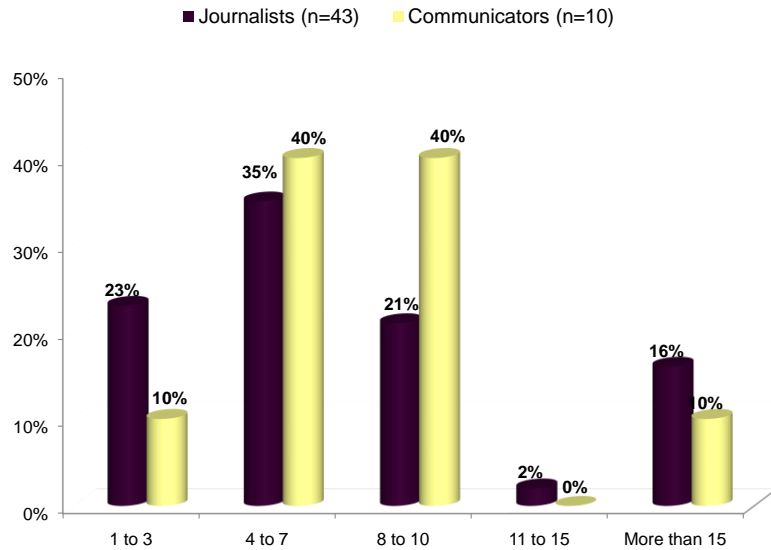


As for communications practitioners, four of 13 communications professionals who responded to this question said they read blogs at least once per day. Four respondents said they read blogs several times per week, while one stated he or she read blogs two or three times per week. Two respondents each stated they read blogs once or twice per month, while an additional two who said they rarely read blogs.

Number of Blogs Read Per Week

The majority of respondents read more than three blogs in a given week. One-third of journalists that frequently read blogs (35%, plus four in 10 communications practitioners) said they read between four and seven blogs in a week. One in five journalists (21%, plus four in 10 communicators) reported reading eight to 10 blogs, while an additional two percent of journalists noted they read between 11 and 15 blogs in a seven-day span. Sixteen percent of journalists (as well as one out of 10 communicators) are very frequent blog readers, as they noted that visit 15 or more blogs in a given week. At the lower end of the scale, 23 percent of blog-reading journalists (and one of the 10 communicators surveyed) visit one to three of these websites in an average week.

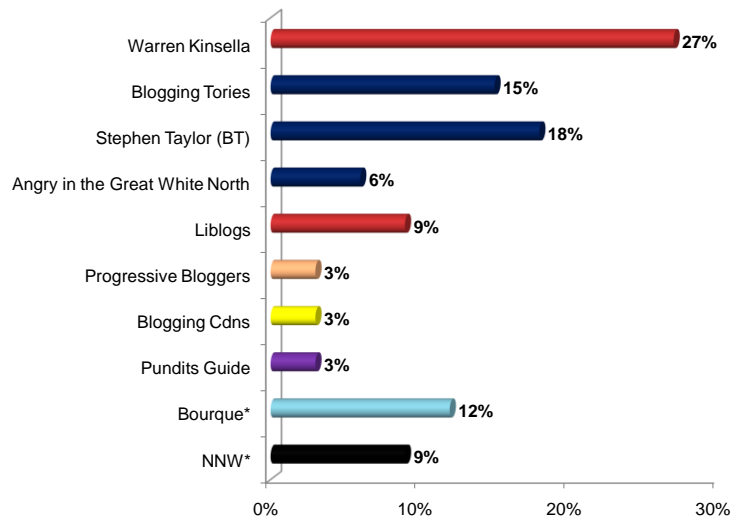
Figure 4.17 - How Many Blogs Do You Read In A Week?



Specific Blogs Visited

Journalists and communications practitioners were asked to indicate which three blogs they read most frequently (ie. at least once per month). For this question, the responses of journalists and communications practitioners have been aggregated, though the reader is urged to keep in mind that among those who responded to this question by providing the title of a blog they regularly read (n=34), the vast majority (91%) were journalists.

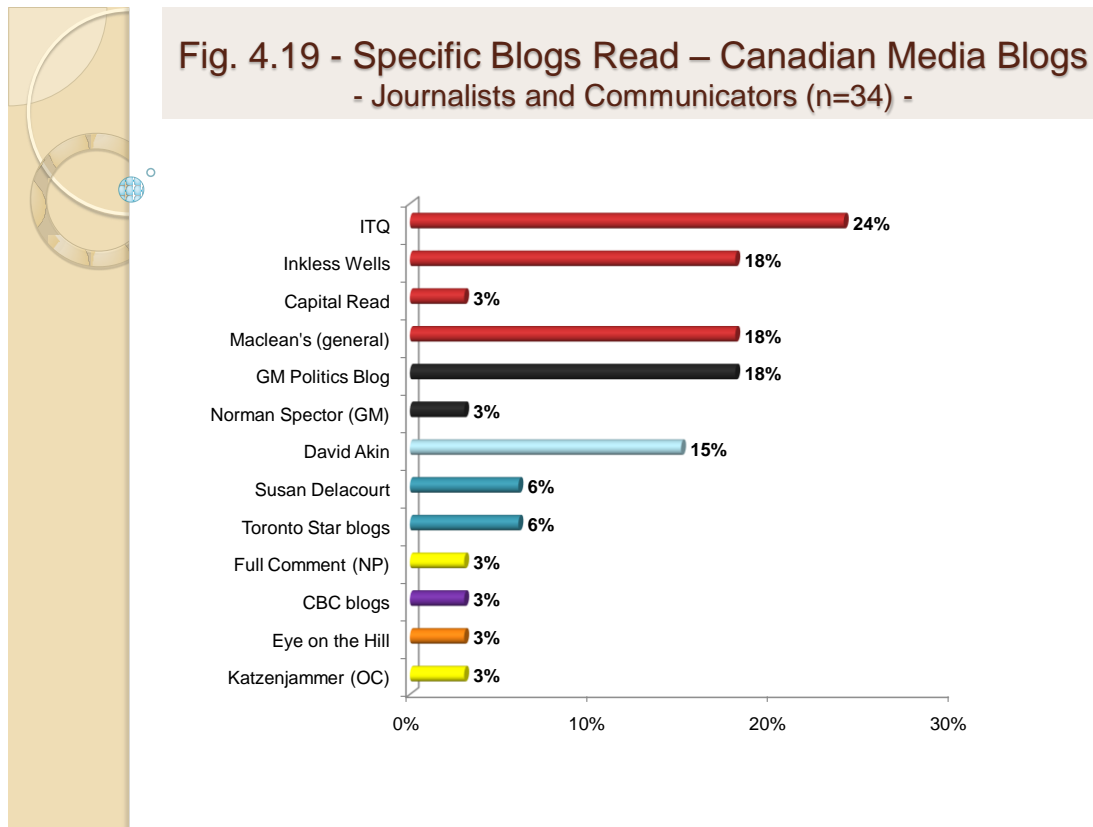
Fig. 4.18 - Specific Blogs Read – Non-Journalist Blogs
- Journalists and Communicators (n=34) -



*news aggregators

Warren Kinsella was the partisan blogger most cited by journalists and communications practitioners, with 27 percent of those who answered this question noting they read the blog written by the former aide to ex-Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien on a regular basis. The blog written by Blogging Tories co-founder Stephen Taylor (whose blog was analyzed in Chapter 3) was mentioned by 18 percent of respondents, with an additional six percent noting they regular read the Conservative blog Angry in the Great White North and 15 percent noting they read posts aggregated on the Blogging Tories website. Fewer than one in ten journalists and communications practitioners said they read blog posts on Liblogs (9%) or Progressive Bloggers (3%), with none of the respondents indicating they read New Democrats Online on a regular basis. Three percent of respondents each cited the Blogging Canadians (which is a non-partisan blog group) or the website Pundit's Guide. There may be confusion among journalists and communications practitioners about the specific definition of a blog, as significant numbers

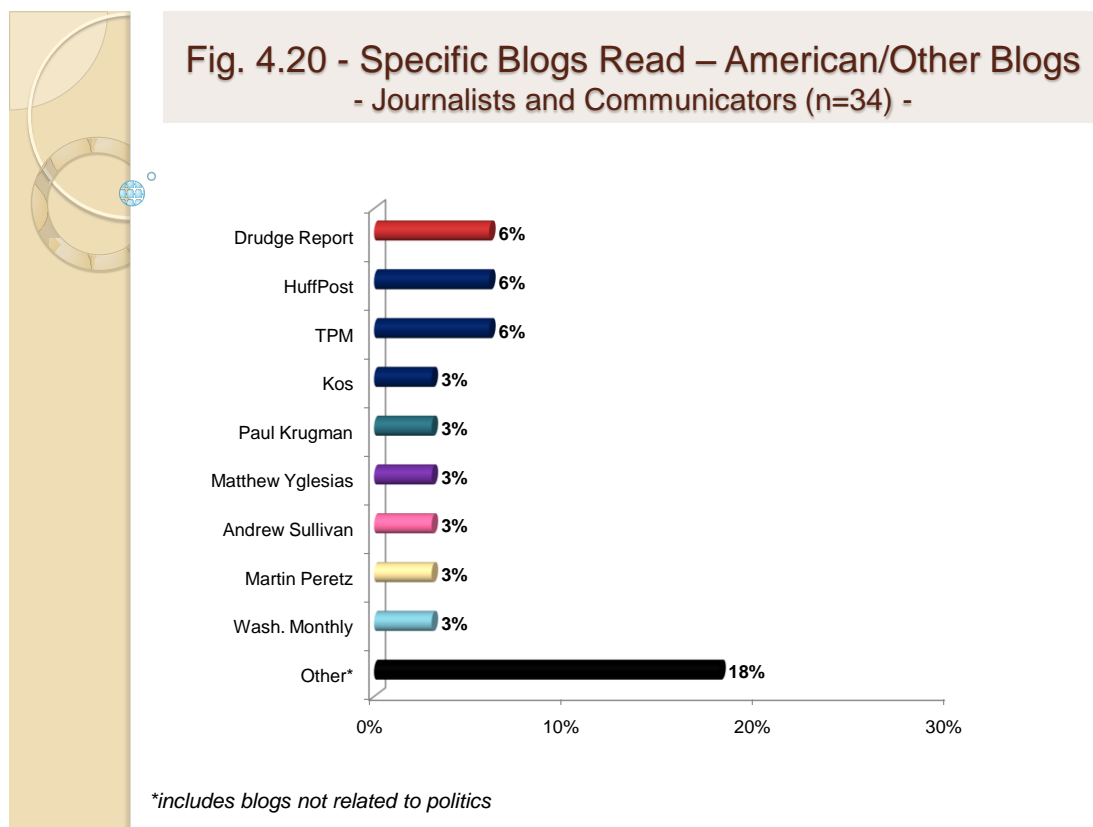
of respondents noted they read news aggregators (which are websites that, as their name implies, aggregate several political news stories and opinion columns by journalists onto a single website), including Bourque Newswatch (12%) and National Newswatch (9%).



Journalists and communications practitioners are likely to read blogs produced by other journalists and media organizations. Approximately one-in-five respondents indicated they read *Maclean's* magazine blogs, such as Inside the Queensway (24%)²⁶, Inkless Wells (18%) and Capital Read (3%); or, they noted that they read other unspecified blogs on the *Maclean's* website (18%). Similar proportions of respondents noted they read *The Globe and Mail's* Politics blog (18%, with an additional 3% noting they read the blog authored by *Globe* contributor

²⁶ In the fall of 2009, this blog's author, Kady O'Malley, joined the CBC.

Norman Spector) or the blog written by Canwest News Service journalist David Akin (14%). Slightly smaller numbers pointed out they read blogs produced by the *Toronto Star* (6%, with the same proportion specifically noting they read the blog authored by the *Star*'s bureau chief, Susan Delacourt), the *National Post* (3%), the CBC (3%), Sun Media (3% who indicated they read reporter Elizabeth Thompson's Eye on the Hill blog) or the *Ottawa Citizen* (3% read the Citizen Katzenjammer blog, which is written by Dan Gardner, a member of the newspaper's editorial board).



Some respondents also mentioned that they read prominent blogs and news aggregators originating in the United States. Some of the most cited sources of U.S.-based political information and commentary provided online included the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post and Talking Points Memo (6% each), with smaller numbers indicating they read the Daily Kos

group blog (3%) as well as blogs written by *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, *Atlantic Monthly* columnist Andrew Sullivan, *The New Republic* columnist Martin Peretz, Centre for American Progress fellow Matthew Yglesias and the magazine *Washington Monthly* (3% each).

Eighteen percent of respondents also indicated they regularly read a number of blogs related to other, non-political subjects.

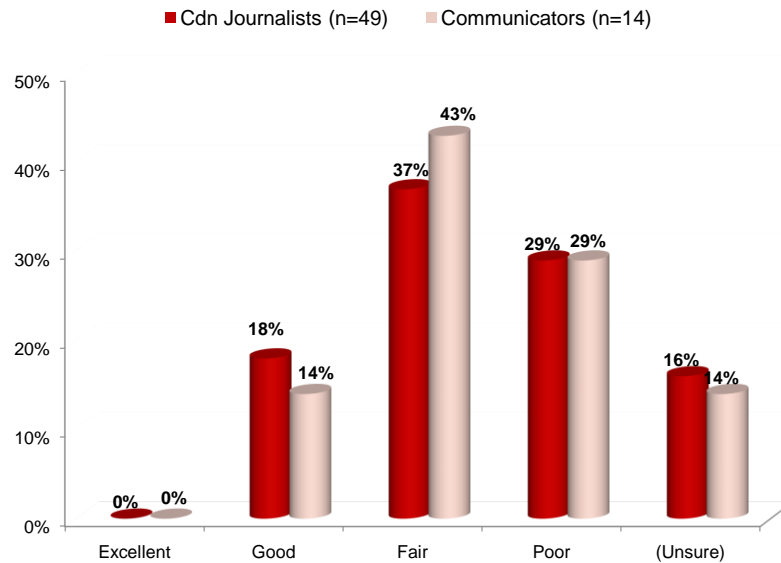
Assessment and Impact of Information From Blogs

This section explores some specific attitudes shared by journalists and communications practitioners towards blogs and provides a preliminary examination of how these individuals deal with blogs in the course of conducting their professional duties.

Quality of Information Provided By Bloggers

When asked to assess whether the quality of information provided by blogs is excellent, good, fair or poor, the majority of journalists and communications professionals provided these websites with mediocre ratings. Nearly four in ten journalists (37%) and a similar proportion of communications professionals (six out of 14 who responded to this question) said the information presented on blogs is fair. An additional three in ten journalists (29%) and a corresponding proportion of communicators (4 out of 14) felt that the information on blogs is poor. Smaller proportions of journalists (18%) and communications professionals (2 out of 14) said that information presented on blogs was good, while none of those surveyed in either professional category stated that blog content was excellent. Sixteen percent of journalists and two out of 14 communications professionals were undecided on this question.

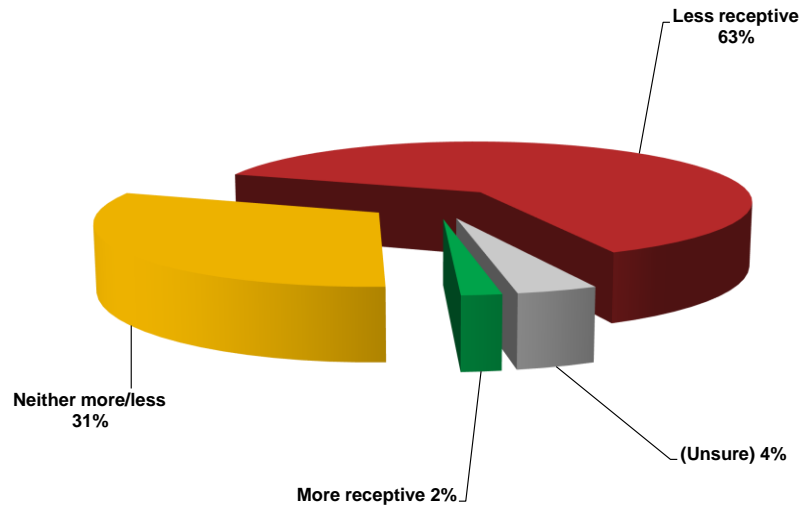
Fig. 4.21 - How Would You Rate The Information on Blogs?



Receptiveness to Information on Blogs

When asked to indicate how receptive they are to the claims made on blogs as opposed to the claims made in other types of media, journalists and communications practitioners alike tend to be neutral on whether blogs are a more or less trustworthy source of information than others. Nearly two-thirds of journalists (63%) and seven of 14 communications professionals said they were *neither more nor less receptive to the claims* made on blogs than the claims made elsewhere. Members of both groups, however, were more likely to be sceptical of the information provided on blogs (30% of journalists and five out of 14 communicators were *less receptive*) than to trust it more than information from a different source (just 2% of journalists and one out of 14 communicators were *more receptive* to claims made on blogs). Four percent of journalists (and one communications practitioner) were undecided.

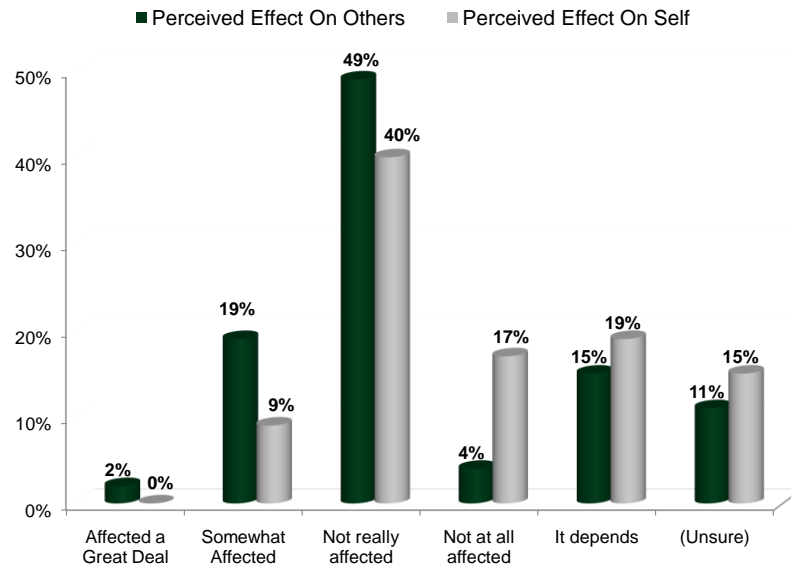
Fig. 4.22 - How Receptive Are You To Info On Blogs?
- Journalists (n=49) -



Effects of Critical Commentary Towards Political Figures

Communications professionals were asked how their relationship with a particular blogger might be affected if that individual criticized the minister or Member of Parliament who employs this spokesperson or communication director. Communications professionals were fairly evenly split on this question, with four out of 13 of those surveyed saying the relationship would not be that affected and two each saying it would somewhat affect or greatly affect future dealings with this blogger. Five out of 13 surveyed said the effect of blogger criticism would depend on the particular context or situation.

Fig. 4.23 - What Effect Does Blogger Criticism Have On What Journalists Write? (Journalists: N=47)



Journalists considered both how they would be affected to criticism from a blogger as well as how their colleagues might be affected if criticized within the blogosphere. Interestingly, very few journalists acknowledged that criticism from a blogger would have any bearing on how they report on the same subject in the future (just 9% said they would be somewhat affected) while twice that proportion (21%, including 2% who say they would be affected a great deal and 19% who say they would be somewhat affected) say that their colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery would change how they address a particular topic in light of criticism from a blogger. By and large, however, the majority of journalists said they would not be personally affected by blogger criticism (55%, including 16% who say they would be not at all affected), with a slightly smaller proportion saying the same for other journalists (53%, including 4% who say they would be not at all affected). One in five journalists (19%) said for criticism to have any effect would depend on the situation, while 15 percent were undecided. As for how criticism from a blog

might affect other journalists, 15 percent of those surveyed said any impact would depend on the situation and 11 percent were undecided.

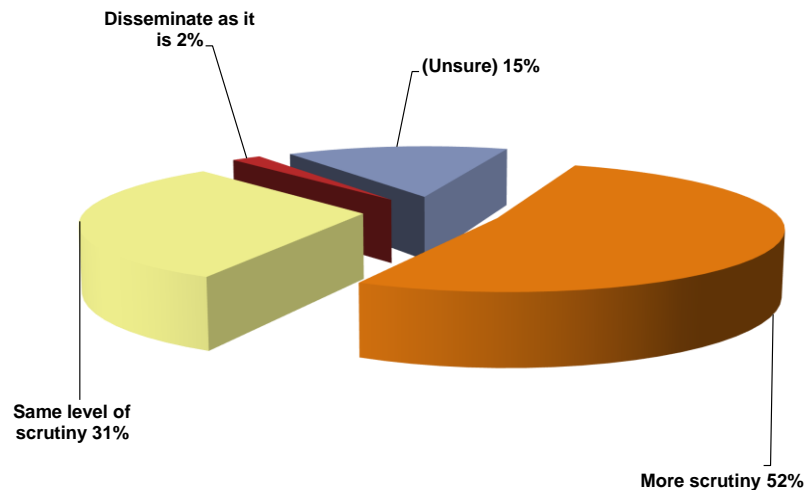
Competitive Pressure From Bloggers

Most political journalists do not regard bloggers as a competitive threat *per se*, even if blogs manage to publish information into the public domain before they do. Nearly four in ten journalists (37%) said they feel *very little pressure* to publish or broadcast information that a blogger disseminates first, while one in five (19%) feel *no pressure* to match what bloggers write. One-quarter (23%) said they feel *some pressure* to publish or broadcast the same information, while just two percent indicated they are under *a great deal of pressure* to catch up to bloggers on a particular story. Nineteen percent of respondents were undecided.

Professional Scrutiny

A majority of journalists (52%) say they apply *more scrutiny* to information published on blogs than they would to information originating from other sources, while 30 percent said they apply the *same level of scrutiny* to the claims on these websites than they would to other types of information that they examine on a regular basis. Two percent of respondents said they would disseminate something found on a blog as it is, without any additional effort taken to verify or fact-check the information. Fifteen percent of respondents were unsure when asked this question.

Fig. 4.24 - What Level of Scrutiny Do You Apply To Blogs?
- Journalists (n=47) -



Blog Attribution

Most political journalists in Canada will attribute the information they read on blogs in one form or another, with 40 percent saying they would directly attribute something read on a blog and 19 percent indicating they would provide partial attribution, such as offering a general description of the blog or its author. One-quarter of these journalists (25%) said how they would attribute something written on a blog depends on the particular example, while four percent of those surveyed said they would not attribute this information. Eleven percent of respondents were unsure.

Patterns of Interaction

This section explores how bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners interact with one another in the process of sharing information and opinions about Canadian politics.

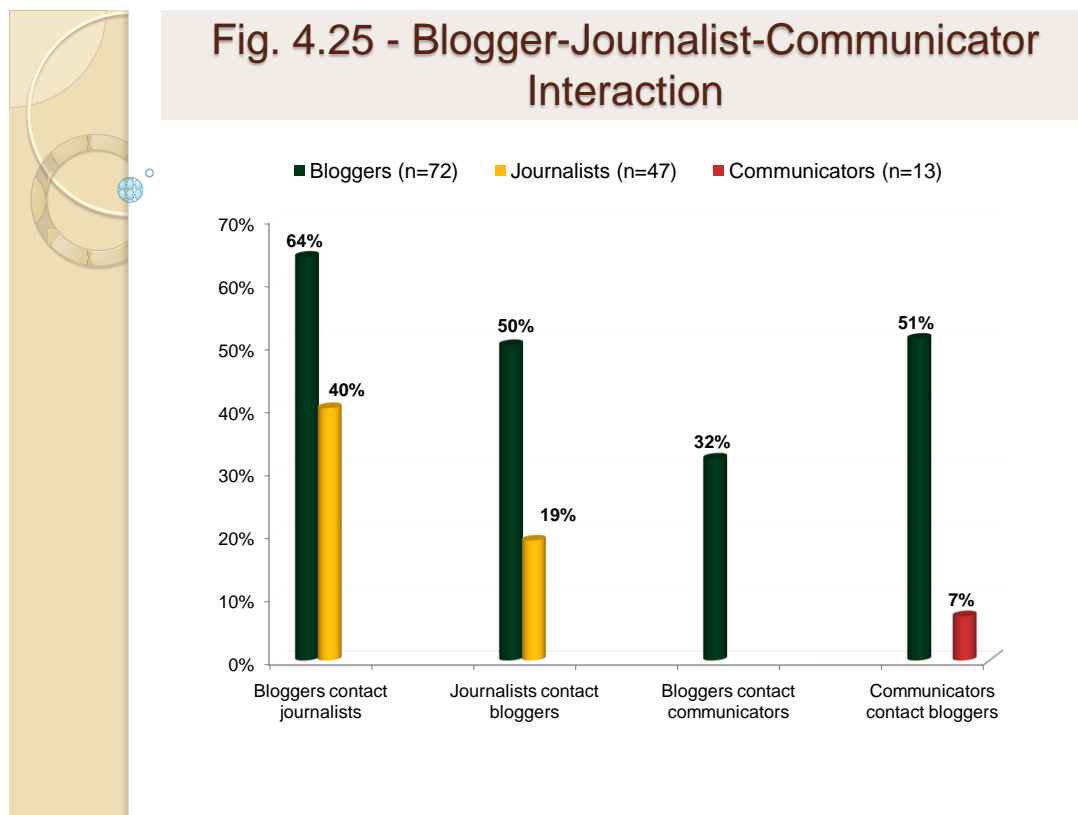
Blog and Journalist Interactions

A majority of bloggers (64%) indicated that they have contacted journalists to share information with them. These bloggers were most likely to share background information - that is, information that is not directly attributed to them – with journalists, with nearly one-half of those surveyed (47%) indicating that they shared information “on background” and smaller percentages of bloggers sharing information either “on the record” (26%) or “off the record” (15%).²⁷ Thirteen percent of these bloggers were unsure of the status accorded to their communications with journalists. A slightly smaller percentage of Parliamentary journalists (40%), meanwhile, indicated that they have been contacted by bloggers seeking to share information with them.

Conversely, one-half of bloggers surveyed (50%) said that journalists have initiated contact with them in the past. Once again, information provided by journalists to bloggers was most likely to be on background/not for attribution (50%) or off the record (22%), though some bloggers noted

²⁷ This survey used a three-part measure to indicate the status of information shared between these different actors. “On the record” (or direct attribution) refers to a situation where the oral or written communication can be both published/broadcast and attributed to the person sending it. “On background” (also known as “without attribution” or “not for attribution”) refers to a situation where the information and opinions can be disseminated, but cannot be attributed to someone by name or by their exact job description. An example of this would be newspaper stories where a journalist makes an assertion qualified by the phrase “sources said...” or “a senior government official said...” “Off the record,” meanwhile, refers to information that cannot be shared publicly in any way, but may sufficiently inform a journalist about an issue so that he or she may seek to have another source confirm the information on the record (Goodwin and Smith 1994: 148-150; see also Peterson 2001: 202-203, in which the terms “background” and “off the record” are defined slightly differently.

that journalists have granted them permission to publish this information on the record (17%). When asked how often they would use information provided by a journalist to write a blog post, one-half (50%) said they would sometimes use this material, with a relatively small cohort (8%) indicating they always use this information to write a blog post. Thirty-one percent of bloggers said they rarely publish information journalists share with them, while six percent said they never print tips from journalists and an additional six percent could not say how often they do this.



For their part, journalists are less likely to note that they have initiated contact with a blogger. Only about one in five Parliamentary Press Gallery members (19%) said they have done this (though nine percent of respondents declined to say if they have contacted a blogger with information). For those journalists that communicate with bloggers (n=9), contact is usually not

that frequent, with one-third (33%) sharing information with them once or twice a year and a similar proportion (33%) interacting with them once or twice a month (11% said they talk to bloggers once or twice a week and 22% said they contact them three times a week or more). As bloggers also indicated, this information is usually shared on a not-for-attribution basis, with 44 percent of journalists saying they talk to bloggers “on background” and 22 percent each noting they interact either “on the record” or “off the record.” Thinking about all of those times that they have received information from a blogger, the majority of journalists (55%) said they have printed or broadcast the information themselves, though one-third (33%) noted this information has also been used as a non-attributable “lead” to research a story and a smaller share (22%) said that they have not and would not use this information as the basis for a news story or opinion column.

Blogger Interactions With Public Relations Professionals

Nearly one-third of bloggers (32%) say that they have contacted a communications professional (ie. press secretary, public relations officer, etc.) to seek information or request an interview with a politician that would be used in turn to write a blog post. A majority of those who have done this (61%) say that the information provided to them was shared on the understanding that it was on the record, though smaller numbers noted the information was shared either “on background” (26%) or “off the record” (4%). It is more common, however, for a communications person to initiate contact with a blogger: 51 percent of bloggers say they have been approached by a political communicator offering to provide information or offer them an interview with an elected official. Among those who have been contacted, one-half (51%) said that this information was provided to them on the record, with three in ten saying it was shared on background (30%) or off the record (17%). Bloggers are more likely to use information provided

by their political sources than information provided by journalists to write a blog post: 17 percent of those surveyed said they will always use information from a communications professional to write a post, with 62 percent noting they sometimes use this information. Small numbers said they rarely (14%) or never (5%) share communications from political staff with their readers.

Due to the small number of respondents, it is difficult to make generalizations about how communications professionals interact with bloggers based on the responses of those surveyed. However, just one communications professional (equalling eight percent of respondents) said he or she had offered to share political information with bloggers (four individuals surveyed declined to answer this question). This individual noted that he or she had done this once or twice in the past year, and that the information was shared on background, in the same manner that this information would be shared with a journalist.

Two communications practitioners noted that they had offered to have their minister or party leader conduct an interview with a blogger, with one individual noting that this offer had been made “once or twice in the past year” and the other indicating the offer is typically made “once or twice per month.” It is more common for these practitioners to contact bloggers to rebut comments critical of their minister or party leader, as five of those surveyed noted that they do this, albeit rarely (three said they have taken this step once or twice in the past year, while one said he or she did this once or twice in the past month, and the remaining practitioner was unsure). All five communications practitioners indicated that this rebuttal was conducted “on background.” Generally, communications practitioners were of mixed opinions on whether criticism of their political bosses on blogs affected their relationship with the blog’s author: five said that it depends on the situation, while four noted that this criticism would not really affect

their relationship with a blogger. Two, meanwhile, said it would somewhat affect it, and two said it would affect the relationship a great deal.

As for the practice of contacting bloggers to criticize a political figure from a rival party, only one individual indicated that he or she had done this in the past year, with the information also shared on background.

Conclusion

This survey research illustrates, for the first time, some of the ways in which Canadian political bloggers, English-language journalists covering Parliament and political communications professionals interact with one another. Though the ability to generalize based the findings presented here is somewhat limited by lower-than-expected response rates from both journalists and communications professionals, it provides a preliminary yet valuable portrait of how blogs have changed some of the practice of political journalism in Canada's federal Parliament. At the same time, however, it provides some evidence to suggest that even though there are new actors capable of providing information about federal politics to Canadians, their influence appears to be somewhat limited and it may remain so should journalists and communications professionals continue to resist treating bloggers as a legitimate form of media. Based on the findings reported in this chapter, at present there is a general hesitance on the part of these professionals to regard bloggers as a professional group in their own right and to accord them status as legitimate purveyors of political information.

This research provides both a necessary socio-demographic portrait of one understudied group of actors – journalists – in the Canadian political process (Taras 1990: 41) as well as offers an

indication of some of the characteristics of the Canadian political blogosphere. Compared to their colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery and in the communications offices of federal MPs, political bloggers who support all parties tend to be overwhelmingly male and tend to earn lower levels of income. Compared to the general Canadian population, however, bloggers tend to have somewhat higher levels of education²⁸ and income²⁹ as well as exhibit a significantly greater degree of political activism. For instance, more than 95 percent of political bloggers reported voting in the last federal election compared to just 59 percent of the Canadian population (Elections Canada 2008) who actually turned out to vote. More than two-thirds of political bloggers (69%) reported that they are currently members of a political party, compared to an estimated two percent of the Canadian population estimated to belong to a party (Carty and Young 2004: 430-431). In general, political bloggers who have a party membership reported being as active in partisan affairs such as fundraising, volunteering on campaigns, attending meetings and conventions and so on as other party members,³⁰ with NDP-supporting bloggers more likely to be engaged in these activities than their Liberal and Conservative-supporting counterparts.

²⁸ As of 2006, 18 percent of the Canadian population had completed an undergraduate university degree (Statistics Canada, 2006a) compared to 69 percent of partisan bloggers who have reached this level of educational attainment.

²⁹ The median household income in 2006 was \$63,600 (Statistics Canada, 2006b). While comparisons are inexact due to the ranges used, 60 percent of bloggers earned incomes greater than \$60,000 per year.

³⁰ For instance, Carty and Young (2004: 440) found that 89 percent of party members have donated funds to a candidate or party, while 79 percent had attended a local electoral district meeting and 72 percent volunteered in an election campaign. This survey found that 89 percent of bloggers who hold active party memberships have donated to a campaign or party, 76 percent have attended a riding-level party meeting and 74 percent have volunteered on a campaign. The difference is that while Carty and Young asked if party members have ever participated in these activities, this survey asked if these party members have done this in the past two year.

Second, it appears that these actors – bloggers, journalists and communications practitioners – acknowledge, to a large degree, that the Internet and blogs have affected the practices of political journalism and political communications. However, partisan bloggers are more likely to view what they do as having the same level of professional legitimacy – journalists and communications practitioners alike tend to disagree with the notion that blogs are legitimate forms of news or important contributors to national debates. Nor do these individuals generally agree that bloggers should be accorded the same legal and professional freedoms and privileges that journalists have enjoyed for decades.

Many journalists surveyed indicated that they regularly read a number of political blogs, though they are likely to treat the information on these blogs with an enhanced level of scepticism. And while it would seem that they do read certain partisan blogs (especially Conservative ones) regularly, there could be distinctions made between how they view these blogs as opposed to blogs written by their colleagues. Only a small number of specific partisan blogs are read frequently by a relatively-wide number of journalists and communications practitioners, with these individuals also reading a number of blogs produced by their colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Indeed, it should also be noted here that a common criticism made by journalists taking this survey is that it did not allow them to distinguish between blogs. One journalist echoed the opinion expressed by other Parliamentary Press Gallery members as follows:

Of the blogs I read, I am most likely to read blogs by other mainstream journalists as they tend to follow basic journalistic standards ... Secondly, I read political blogs by people who have a connection to the political players in Ottawa, such as Warren Kinsella, Stephen Taylor, Monte Solberg...etc. I spend little to no time reading the many other political blogs by people who are simply writing highly

charged, partisan opinions. My interest in reading blogs is to search for news. Blogs that are purely opinion are of no value when I am looking for news stories.³¹

At the same time, bloggers are not only more likely to get information about Canadian politics from journalistic sources than from other blogs, but they also tend to use media accounts to construct their own contributions to public discourse about Canadian politics. This result corroborates the finding from Chapter 3 that journalists were more likely to act as agenda-setters for blog discussion than for these bloggers to successfully set the agenda for journalists.

In terms of how bloggers may frame perceptions of political figures and events, the scepticism shown by journalists towards what bloggers write suggests that Canadian partisan bloggers do not significantly affect these perceptions, though it is interesting to note that journalists were slightly more likely to think that their colleagues would be more affected by blogger criticism than themselves. Also, these journalists who were surveyed do not feel competitive pressure from bloggers to match them if these websites publish information before they do, and they are more likely to view information presented on blogs with a greater degree of scepticism than they would information from other sources.

When informal interactions between these different actors are taken into account, there were also reported differences in terms of the level of interaction – for example, bloggers were more likely to say that they contact journalists and communications professionals seeking information, as well as to say that they have been contacted by journalists seeking to share information with them. Some communicators noted that they have contacted bloggers seeking to rebut critical comments of their own political bosses and to utilize this medium to criticize others, but the lack

³¹ Personal communication with author, September 16, 2009. Published with permission.

of responses from this group makes it difficult to generalize as to whether this is a widespread phenomenon. While it would appear that some members of these different groups interact on a semi-regular basis – and more often than not at the *sub rosa* level of “background” rather than on a public basis – the results of this survey make it difficult to generalize as to whether these interactions affect how individuals are portrayed on blogs and in the news media. In addition to providing a benchmark as to the means, manner and frequency of interaction among these three groups, these hypothesis-building findings do suggest that the presence of blogs is acknowledged and recognized by both journalists and communications practitioners as a reality of contemporary political communication in Canada, even if their overall impact may not be particularly great.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to outline the impact of partisan blogs on the practice of political journalism in Canada. It draws upon the broad theoretical framework of the Internet facilitating the creation of an unmediated “public sphere” (Habermas 1989) that creates accessible discursive spaces where any citizen might participate in deliberation. It also provides an original and hypothesis-building framework for thinking about how political agendas, issues and debates are created, shaped and manipulated in a mass-mediated representative democracy. In this context, political blogs are viewed as potentially new forums for any person to express his or her opinions and connect with like-minded individuals seeking to discuss political issues of mutual interest. However, the theory of blogs as an open, citizen-mediated forum for freewheeling political discussion has not quite meshed with the practice of political blogs as “online soapboxes” (Jansen and Koop 2006) or a virtual “echo chamber” (Wallsten 2005) for messages already resonating in traditional forms of media covering politics, including newspapers, magazines, cable news channels, talk radio, etc.

This thesis focused on Canadian political blogs, specifically on those that primarily discuss Canadian politics at the federal level and whose authors publicly identify themselves as supporters of a specific national party contesting federal elections. This subset of bloggers was selected because these actors were perceived – at least in media coverage leading up to and following the 2006 federal election – to have a significant impact on how information about the campaign was reaching the public (Chu 2007). However, this group’s impact on political debates had not been studied in any great depth, especially outside the critical time period of an election campaign or party leadership race. As a result, this research sought to uncover what influence, if any, partisan blogs might have on the content of media discourse on politics in

Canada, assessing how these blogs' authors might shape characterizations of leaders and issues in an overt way (through what they write on their blogs, including the extent to which they discuss information presented in other forms of media) as well as in a covert way (through less-formal interactions with journalists and with political "communications practitioners" working for Members of Parliament, Senators and party leaders). This research also sought to discover how other actors engaged in discussion with blogs and bloggers, to identify their perceptions of this new medium and to measure the impact, if any, of blogging on political communication in Canada. A content analysis of four potentially-influential partisan blogs was undertaken to determine how blogs might directly affect political debates conducted in the media. Meanwhile, a survey of selected partisan bloggers, English-language parliamentary journalists and political communications practitioners was initiated to identify informal interactions and engagement between these three groups as well as to assess attitudes among members of these groups towards political blogging.

The obvious limitations that face almost every researcher – adequate time, adequate resources and the inability to generalize on the basis of research limited to particular time periods, fixed geographic places and finite groups of subjects – must be kept in mind when assessing this research undertaking. But to address the issues raised earlier, let us return to the original research questions guiding this thesis and assess how adequately the surveys and content analysis have answered these queries.

RQ1: How do Canadian partisan bloggers and journalists covering the federal government interact with and perceive one another?

The survey questions regarding attitudes and perceptions of blogging and its relationship to the mainstream media present a number of interesting exploratory findings that address the relationship between journalists and partisan bloggers. Both journalists and bloggers who were surveyed tend to acknowledge that blogs have changed the practice of journalism in Canada, and journalists recognize that blogs have had some effect on how they do their jobs. Both bloggers and journalists acknowledge that bloggers do not adhere to traditional journalistic conventions like non-partisanship and political neutrality, and journalists perceive bloggers to be highly partisan. The real divergences of opinion between journalists and bloggers are related to perceptions of the legitimacy of blogs: journalists are less likely than bloggers to view these websites as real sources of news and tend to be more sceptical of what they read on blogs than other sources of information. As well, journalists generally disagree with the notion that some of the benefits of their profession, such as certain legal protections and the right to be physically present to cover Parliament, should also be offered to bloggers. For their part, bloggers are more likely to see themselves as “watchdogs” who force journalists to be more transparent and/or accountable for what they write and say, though journalists tend to resist the suggestion that criticism from bloggers affects their work.

In addition to being actively engaged in party politics, the bloggers who responded to this survey tend to consume a large amount of their political information from news media sources, including newspaper and broadcast media websites. Furthermore, they acknowledge that this information regularly influences what they write about on their blogs, with the results of the

content analysis (Chapter 3) backing up the finding that news-based rather than opinion-based media items are more likely to form the basis of what is written in a blog post. Journalists, meanwhile, are also highly likely to read blogs, with half of those surveyed reading these websites at least once per day. Journalists tend to read a mixture of blogs written by both fellow journalists as well as self-identified political partisans. Going beyond what they read to examine how bloggers and journalists interact on an informal basis, it appears that there is a significant amount of “backchannel” communication taking place between these two groups, though with bloggers more likely to state that they have contacted a journalist in the past to share information or have been contacted by a journalist themselves. In most circumstances, information shared between these individuals was shared on a confidential or semi-confidential basis; that is, not for attribution or not for publication (off the record).

These findings, which are admittedly exploratory, provide important insights into how journalists and bloggers relate to one another in the course of discussing political issues in Canada. More than anything, they suggest that there is a certain degree of interdependence between these two sets of actors, with bloggers relying more heavily on journalists to supply them with news and information that can be used as the basis for commentary offered on their own websites.

RQ2: What effect and/or influence have partisan bloggers had on the content produced by journalists covering the federal Conservative government in the period following its election (that is, after January 23, 2006)?

The content analysis (Chapter 3) conducted on posts written by two prominent Liberal and two prominent Conservative bloggers between February 1 and July 31, 2006 suggests that these

writers had very little direct influence on what journalists wrote about the newly-elected Conservative government and related political issues. These bloggers only reported a small proportion of original information in their posts; furthermore, very little of this original reporting was later repeated by a journalist in a publication or broadcast. While this is an admittedly narrow measure of whether blog posts influence what is presented in news stories and commentaries, it does show that in early 2006, what were considered “influential” or at least “prominent” partisan blogs were not exactly been sources of breaking news and information. In the context of Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s and the federal Conservative government’s dispute with the Parliamentary Press Gallery, this is an important finding, as it suggests that blogs were only sporadically used to distribute political information that did not initially go through the “filter” of the mainstream media. There are occasional examples where a blogger was the first to report information, but these only account for eight posts out of nearly 1,000 written about national and provincial political issues during the six-month span covered by this content analysis. Generally speaking, it would appear that even with restrictions imposed on their access to the Prime Minister and to cabinet ministers (Vongdouangchanh 2006), members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery still reported almost all of the news coming from Parliament Hill during this period, with bloggers subsequently commenting on this information on their own websites.

The analysis of how certain partisan figures are perceived also revealed differences between how these bloggers described particular subjects and how these figures were framed by journalists. Perhaps owing to long-standing conventions regarding fairness and political neutrality, those journalists whose work was commented on by partisan bloggers tended to assess figures from the major parties in neutral terms, whereas how the partisan bloggers

studied framed these figures depended significantly on their own party affiliation – that is, the two Liberal bloggers were more likely to praise politicians from their own party and criticized Conservatives while the two Conservative bloggers assessed their own fellow partisans in positive terms and criticized members of the Liberal Party. Though this analysis offers only a snapshot based on entries found on four specific blogs and a relatively small sample of media-produced news stories and commentary, it is also interesting to note that these bloggers very rarely discussed smaller parties represented in Parliament and federal elections, such as the Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party and the Green Party.

Also, as noted earlier journalists who cover Parliament and the federal government tend to acknowledge that blogs have had some effect on their work, though they are less likely to acknowledge that what is written on a blog has much bearing on how they discuss a particular political issue or figure. They also report that they tend to be more sceptical of information found on blogs, though for the most part they indicate they will attribute it to its author should they end up using the content found in a blog post to write a news story or commentary.

RQ3: How are partisan blogs used to transmit political messages on behalf of a particular political party, and to what extent is this information relayed to the public by journalists covering the governing and parliamentary processes at the national level in Canada?

Unfortunately, this question is probably the most difficult of these three to respond to with a conclusive answer, mainly due to the fact that such a small number of communications practitioners participated in the survey. Based on the responses of bloggers, it would appear that some communications practitioners working for a federal cabinet minister or party leader do

recognize the potential of blogs to transmit information. One-half of political bloggers surveyed (51%) said they have been contacted by a communications professional in Ottawa, while one-third (32%) have sought information from these individuals or have requested an interview with the politician for whom the communications practitioner assists with media relations. A handful of communications practitioners did acknowledge that they have offered to make an elected official available for interviews with bloggers, and in most instances communications between these political staffers and bloggers have been shared with an understanding that information shared could be related publicly. As well, most bloggers indicated that in most circumstances, they use the information they receive from these communications practitioners to write a blog post.

It is difficult to say to what extent these findings can be generalized to reflect patterns of interaction between bloggers and political communicators. It is even more difficult to judge with any certainty whether the net effect of these discussions has any bearing upon what journalists write or broadcast about Parliament or the federal government. Judging by the responses of journalists, the answer would be “probably not,” as the content analysis suggested that journalists very rarely repeated information first disseminated by a blog. As well, in their survey responses journalists surveyed expressed a reluctance to acknowledge blogs as legitimate, credible sources of information. However, this does not discount the possibility that blogs may still be seen as an important avenue for communications professionals to share information, especially if these professionals are seeking to reach a specific audience. For example, if bloggers (and their readers) are “opinion leaders” (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948) or “hyper-citizens” (Giasson et al., 2009) – that is, individuals who are more inclined to participate in political discussion and become active in partisan politics – then it may serve the interests of politicians

and those who help them communicate to share certain information with bloggers that is not meant for members of the mass public, who typically learn about politics from newspapers and television networks. For example, messages may be transmitted by communications practitioners to party supporters to encourage them to support a particular government or party initiative, donate funds, write a letter to a newspaper editor or telephone a radio call-in show, participate in a rally, and so on. While this component of political activism was not explicitly studied in this thesis, it stands to reason that blogs might be regarded as a means of encouraging political activism among members of a select group. This is treading in the realm of conjecture, however, and requires more in-depth analysis before it can be asserted more forcefully.

To sum up, there are obvious limits to what the study can claim to have discovered through the original research, but the findings add new and valuable knowledge to this relatively unexplored area of political communication. It suggests that generally speaking, Canadian bloggers are not creating an alternative discursive space outside of traditional forms of media, nor do they provide their readers with radically new insights into political issues and debates. If the findings from four potentially influential bloggers can be generalized to bloggers in general, they suggest that partisan blogs repeat information presented by mainstream media outlets and are heavily reliant on these media to provide content that they can comment upon. Even on those rare occasions when these bloggers reported new information that has not been put forward in another public forum, this does not necessarily lead to journalists taking this information and sharing it with a wider audience. Thus, one cannot conclude that partisan bloggers in Canada are “agenda-setters” in the sense that they determine which political issues are emphasized in public debates, though the bloggers surveyed here (as opposed to journalists and

communicators) tend to view themselves as being better at identifying political debates and issues through their work. If anything, they take their cues from journalists and – perhaps indirectly – communications practitioners, though this cannot be stated conclusively.

Regarding whether bloggers frame political discussion, the content analysis suggested that some partisan individuals who write blogs provide a highly polarized conception of political figures and events that is highly dependent on their particular party affiliation: as the results in Chapter 3 showed, Liberal bloggers were highly critical of Conservatives and praised members of their own party, while Conservative bloggers were highly critical of Liberals and generally positive about their own party's leaders. The tone of discussion on blogs tended to be more negative than positive, echoing the findings of early research on Internet-based dialogue (Jansen and Koop 2005; Hill and Hughes 1997, Norris 2001) as well as more recent research on Canadian partisan blogs (Jansen and Koop 2009). Overall, this research suggests partisan blogs appear to complement, rather than directly compete with, journalists who report on political issues at the federal level. Though their legitimacy is in some ways questioned by journalists and communications practitioners alike, it would seem that they are an entrenched component of the Canadian media environment. By contributing to political discussions and assessing the claims and counter-claims inherent to partisan debates, blogs play a complementary role to traditional media outlets by offering individuals a broader and more inclusive forum for debating issues. Though the Canadian political blogosphere could hardly be described as the type of idealized public sphere envisioned by Habermas (1989) or those who view the Internet as facilitating a more inclusive and participatory form of democracy (ie. Barney 2001, 2005), the partisan blogosphere is a notable component of how political discussions are conducted in Canada in its own right, considering it did not even exist a decade ago. By

engaging other partisans and those interested in politics, they may perform an important role as opinion leaders amongst their own communities of partisan and politically engaged individuals. However, they may not be “opinion leaders” whose voices are so influential in political discussions that they are regularly heeded by journalists and the wider public. To answer the question, “Are bloggers online opinion leaders or opinionated followers?” the evidence presented here suggests the latter is more likely the case than the former, though there is some exploratory evidence to suggest that bloggers do play both roles at times.

Limitations and Future Research

This hypothesis-building research is important in that it broadly sketches the role partisan blogs play in political debates in Canada. It reveals how blogs are perceived by their authors, by journalists and by communications practitioners. Due to the fact that blogs have been in existence for approximately a decade, there are very few models in place for empirically analyzing how these websites might shape the content of political discussion as reflected in media coverage of issues. Thus, this thesis is ground-breaking in a number of ways. It offers the first quantitative survey of a relatively large number of Canada’s English-speaking partisan bloggers and Parliamentary Press Gallery-affiliated journalists regarding issues related to blogging and political communication in the Internet age. It also makes an attempt to incorporate the opinions of political communications practitioners affiliated with federal cabinet ministers and party leaders regarding these issues. It is also believed to be the first study to use content analysis to assess how a sample of partisan bloggers utilize media-produced items in their posts, and it explores how these bloggers portray political actors and issues. And yet, the application of this research is hampered by a number of mitigating factors.

First, the small number of political communicators who responded to the survey does not allow readers to draw strong conclusions regarding how blogs are used to craft and disseminate political messages in Ottawa or elsewhere, which is unfortunate given how little research has been done on these individuals and the role they play in federal politics in the first place. Second, the focus on English-language blogs and English-language media ignores the role blogs might play in facilitating dialogue among members of Canada's francophone community. While surveys have been conducted which examine the attitudes and behaviours of francophone (specifically Quebec-based) political bloggers (Raynauld et al., 2009; Giasson et al., 2008), future research should include members of both of these groups to determine what they have in common and what sets them apart when it comes to the role they play in political discussion in Quebec and Canada

Qualitative research – specifically, in-depth interviews – into the utilization and application of blogs, especially by communications practitioners, would provide a more in-depth understanding of how blogs are perceived by various political actors and how they might be used to shape political discussion. This methodology should also be employed on a broader level with journalists, as it would allow them to not only describe how they view and utilize blogs, but also allow them to better distinguish between blogs by various authors and would mitigate the criticism of this survey-based approach expressed by some journalists about how this survey generalized different types of blogs. In-depth interviews with journalists have yielded a number of insights into their practices as well as their perceived effect on policy-making (see, for example, Linsky, 1986 and Sparrow, 1999). Case studies are another qualitative method that could be used to analyze how issues flowed across various types of media in specific cases. Chu (2007) utilizes a case study approach in his analysis of how Canadian bloggers discussed

the income trust issue during the 2006 federal election, while Brown (2009) does this in a very limited way in regards to how an American blogger violated Justice John Gomery's publication ban of Jean Brault's testimony to the sponsorship inquiry.

Future researchers should also utilize more sophisticated models that analyze a larger number of political blog posts and media-produced items that would allow them to track the development of particular "memes" (Leskovec et al., 2009) over time, as this would allow for a broader examination of the agenda-setting potential of blogs and might allow researchers to draw firmer conclusions about whether bloggers shape impressions of political figures and events that are conveyed on their websites and in traditional forms of media. Additional content analysis should look at the extent to which bloggers engage in creating specific frames. To offer just one potential example, it would be worthwhile to compare the extent to which bloggers utilize "issue frames" (writing posts about issues) or "game frames" (focusing on the "3 P's" of personality, polls and party tactics) and comparing the use of these frames between specific partisan groups as well as to specific media outlets in the way that Sampert and Trimble (2004) compared how *The Globe and Mail* and *National Post* used these two frames in their coverage of the 2000 Canadian federal election.

Nonetheless, this research provides an important starting point in terms of understanding the impact of blogs on mass communication and public debate on political issues in Canada. It suggests that outside of the campaign period, potentially influential partisan blogs did not directly shape the contours of public debate and were instead highly reliant on political journalists to set the agenda for public discussion. Still, these bloggers offered competing and highly-divergent frames for understanding events and issues that were closely related to the

frames expressed by those of their own political affiliation. These Canadian bloggers may indeed act as opinion leaders for others within their own partisan communities much in the way that Drezner and Farrell (2007) suggest “A-list” blogs act as influential nexuses of opinion for other, lesser-read blogs. And though some bloggers may have the potential to act as opinion leaders for journalists who read their work, the evidence presented here suggests their capacity to do this is limited, at best.

As a corollary, this research reveals that established political actors such as journalists and communicators and emerging actors like bloggers have very different views regarding the proper place of political blogs as legitimate sources of news and information serving the Canadian public. As media outlets evolve due to changes in communication technology and a corresponding decrease in revenue streams, it is important to assess which new actors may fill the void left by shrinking newsrooms and fewer numbers of paid, full-time journalists. This research indicates that while the barrier to enter the blogosphere – essentially, an Internet connection and a set of opinions – may be quite low, the obstacles to bloggers offering citizens something more than regurgitated information and highly-partisan opinion remain quite high. In short, the Canadian political blogosphere appears to be far from a Habermasian utopia of rational, unmediated deliberation among equals, and tends to resemble an online echo chamber for political activists of all stripes. The ability to express an opinion, to behave as an amateur pundit and to create a partisan echo chamber online does not equate with the development of a truly deliberative and inclusive public sphere for the benefit of all.

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APPENDIX I: INVITATION, CONSENT FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRES



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Confirmation and Consent Form (NB: These are the first two pages for all three surveys)

Thank you for participating in this important research initiative. Once again, please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential and will not be attributed to you personally. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact the principal researcher, Curtis Brown, at canadian.blogstudy@gmail.com.

This survey is being administered by Probe Research Inc., a Winnipeg-based professional market research firm, and is being collected using Cvent, a secure, web-based software system for collecting survey data.

In order to confirm that the correct person has participated in the survey, please confirm your name and email address in the space provided below. Once again, please be assured that your identity will be kept completely confidential and your responses will not be attributed to you personally.

Name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

SUBMIT



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INFORMED CONSENT

This consent form, a copy of which can be printed for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research project, which is being conducted as one of the requirements for a Master's of Arts Thesis in Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, examines how blogs shape political debate within Canada. It asks bloggers, Parliamentary journalists and communications practitioners within the federal government about their blog-reading activity and how they use blogs to communicate with each other and the wider Canadian public. If you wish to receive a summary of the research, please contact the principal researcher at canadian.blogstudy@gmail.com

Your responses and your contact information will be kept completely confidential. Confidentiality will be preserved by assigning your survey responses a unique identification number that does not permit those examining the survey data to attach specific responses to individuals.

The principal researcher has secured the services of Probe Research Inc., a Winnipeg-based market research firm, in order to administer this survey. Probe Research Inc. is a member of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) and conducts market research in accordance with its own privacy policies as well as those of the MRIA (for more information, please visit <http://www.probe-research.com/detailpol.htm>). Probe Research Inc. uses a web-based program provided by the software firm Cvent (www.cvent.com) to administer the survey.

All data, including your contact information, collected as part of this survey will be stored on a secure server based at Cvent's head offices in McLean, Va. It will only be accessible to the principal researcher and authorized personnel with Probe Research Inc. and Cvent. All data will be destroyed on or before Dec. 31, 2010.

This research project has been approved by the University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB). Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Ms. Margaret (Maggie) Bowman, Human Ethics Coordinator
Office of Research Services
CTC Building
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-7122
Fax: (204) 269-7173

By clicking yes below, you agree to participate in this study and understand that your responses, including demographic information, will be kept confidential and private in accordance with the aforementioned protocols as well as the University of Manitoba's guidelines on informed consent for research subjects. You may decline to answer any question contained in the survey, and you may also choose terminate your participation at any point.

_____ (Yes, I consent) - continue

_____ (No, I do not consent) – study closed and marked as “declined”

Survey of Canadian Political Bloggers³²

1. Do you feel the emergence of the Internet has made journalism better, worse or has it not made much difference?

_____ **Better** 1
_____ **Worse** 2
_____ **No difference** 3
_____ **(Unsure)** 99

2. Thinking about weblogs, or “blogs,” how much do you think blogs have changed the profession of journalism in the past few years?

_____ **A lot** 1
_____ **Some** 2
_____ **A little** 3
_____ **Not at all** 4
_____ **(Unsure)** 99

³² Bolded questions are taken from Dautrich and Barnes’ 2005 survey of American journalists. Italicized questions are taken from Sroka’s 2006 survey of American Congressional communications practitioners.

3. Please indicate which of the following media sources you use to obtain information and commentary about Canadian politics. For each category, please indicate **how often** you use each medium:

Medium	Never	1-2 times/ month	1-2 times per week	3-5 times/ week	Once per day or more	(Don't Know/Unsure)
Newspapers (print version)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Specific newspaper websites (eg. www.theglobeandmail.com)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Specific broadcast media websites (eg. www.cbc.ca)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Radio stations	1	2	3	4		99
Local TV broadcasts	1	2	3	4	5	99
Cable news channels (CBC Newsworld, CTV Newsnet, CNN)	1	2	3	4	5	99
News aggregator websites (eg. National Newswatch, Bourque Newswatch)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Specific blogs	1	2	3	4	5	99
Blog aggregators (ie. Blogging Tories, LibLogs, Blogging Dippers)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Social networking websites (eg. Facebook)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Video sharing websites (eg. Youtube)	1	2	3	4	5	99

4. Thinking about all of the posts you have written on your blog, please indicate whether you have used information from the following types of media to write a post. Once again, for each category, please indicate how often you use each medium:

Medium	Never	1-2 times/ month	1-2 times/ week	3-5 times/ week	Once per day or more	(Don't Know/Unsure)
Other blog posts	1	2	3	4	5	99
Web searches	1	2	3	4	5	99
Articles on newspaper websites	1	2	3	4	5	99
Articles on TV/radio websites	1	2	3	4	5	99
Email tips from readers	1	2	3	4	5	99
Comments on your blog		2	3	4	5	99
Comments on other blogs	1	2	3	4	5	99
Online discussion forums	1	2	3	4	5	99
Online video/audio	1	2	3	4	5	99
Items on social networking websites		2	3	4	5	99

5. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. For each statement, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with it:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Bloggers adhere to journalistic standards	1	2	3	4	5	99
Blogs are a legitimate source of news	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more partisan than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more left-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more right-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs are more useful than mainstream media outlets for identifying <u>current</u> national political problems and debates.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
Bloggers should have the same legal protections as other journalists	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Bloggers should have the same level of access that accredited journalists have to events and public institutions like Parliament</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99

6. Have you ever contacted a journalist to share information with him or her?

Yes ____1

No ____2 (Skip to Q. 8)

(Decline) ____98 (Skip to Q. 8)

Unsure ____99 (Skip to Q. 8)

7. Was the information typically offered ...

For attribution ____1

On background ____2

Off the record ____3

(Unsure) ____99

8. Have you ever been contacted by a journalist seeking to share information with you?

Yes _____ 1

No _____ 2 (Skip to Q. 11) 2

(Decline) _____ 98 (Skip to Q. 11)

Unsure _____ 99 (Skip to Q. 11)

9. Was the information typically offered ...

For attribution _____ 1

On background _____ 2

Off the record _____ 3

(Unsure) _____ 99

10. Thinking about all of the times a journalist has given you information, would you say you relay this information in a blog post ... ?

Always _____ 1

Sometimes _____ 2

Rarely _____ 3

Never _____ 4

(Unsure) _____ 99

11. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about the relationship between the “blogosphere” and the media. Once again, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with each statement:

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>
<i>The blogosphere acts as a “watchdog” of the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere ignores the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere and mainstream media do not have any identifiable, direct relationship.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99

12. Have you ever contacted a communications director, press secretary or other public relations professional to seek information or request an interview in order to use this to formulate a blog post?

Yes _____ 1

No _____ 2 (Skip to Q. 14)

(Decline) _____ 98 (Skip to Q. 14)

(Unsure) _____ 99 (Skip to Q. 14)

13. Was the information typically offered ...

For attribution _____ 1
On background _____ 2
Off the record _____ 3
(Unsure) _____ 99

14. Have you ever been contacted by a public relations professional, an elected official or a member of their staff offering information or an offer of an interview with the understanding that you could use this information for a blog post?

Yes _____ 1
No _____ 2 (Skip to Q. 17) 2
(Decline) _____ 98 (Skip to Q. 17)
(Unsure) _____ 99 (Skip to Q. 17)

15. Was the information typically offered ...

For attribution _____ 1
On background _____ 2
Off the record _____ 3
(Unsure) _____ 99

16. Thinking about all of the times a public relations professional has given you information, would you say you relay this information in a blog post ... ?

Always _____ 1
Sometimes _____ 2
Rarely _____ 3
Never _____ 4
(Unsure) _____ 99

17. Do you earn income as a result of your blogging activities?

Yes _____ 1
No _____ 2 (Skip to next section)
(Unsure) _____ 99 (Skip to next section)

18. What are the sources or features that generate this income? (Please click all that apply)
(incomesource)

Google Ads _____ 1
Advertisements for specific companies _____ 2
Income from political parties/candidates _____ 3
Advertisements for political parties/candidates _____ 4
Other: _____
 Reader support (5)
 BlogAds (6)
Unsure _____ 99

18a. Google Ads (incsce1)

Yes Google Ads _____ 11
No Google Ads _____ 22

18b. Income from political parties/candidates (incsc2)

Yes income from parties/candidates – 11

No income from parties/candidates – 22

18c. Advertisements from specific companies (incsc3...)

Yes ads for specific companies – 11

No ads for specific companies – 22

18d. Advertisements for political parties/candidates

Yes ads for parties/candidates – 11

No ads for parties/candidates – 22

18e. Reader support

Yes reader support – 11

No reader support – 22

18f. AdSense

Yes AdSense - 11

No AdSense - 22

19. Approximately how much income did you earn from your blog in the past 12 months? Please check the most appropriate category:

\$0 - \$500 _____ 1

\$500 - \$1,000 _____ 2

\$1,000 - \$5,000 _____ 3

\$5,000 - \$9,999 _____ 4

\$10,000 - \$50,000 _____ 5

More than \$50,000 _____ 6

My operating costs exceed revenue: _____ 7

Unsure: _____ 99

Demographic Information

D1. I am: Male _____ 1 Female _____ 2 (Declined) _____ 98

D2. In what year were you born: _____ (Declined) _____ 98

D3. Please indicate the highest level of education you have attained:

Less than high school _ 1

High school diploma _____ 2

Some university/college courses _____ 3

Completed college diploma/certificate program _____ 4

Completed university undergraduate degree _____ 5

Some graduate-level university courses _____ 6

Completed graduate degree _____ 7

(Declined): _____ 98

(Unsure) _____ 99

D4. Which of the following categories best describes your family income (total income before taxes of all persons in your household)?

Less than \$20,000/year _____ 1
\$20,000-\$39,999/year _____ 2
\$40,000-\$59,999/year _____ 3
\$60,000-\$79,999/year _____ 4
\$80,000-\$99,999/year _____ 5
\$100,000-\$199,999/year _____ 6
More than \$200,000/year _____ 7
(Declined) _____ 98
(Unsure) _____ 99

D5. Which of the following blog communities do you belong to?

Blogging Tories _____ 1
LibLogs _____ 2
Blogging Dippers (New Democrats Online) _____ 3
Green Blogs _____ 4
Progressive Bloggers _____ 5
None of these _____ 6

D5a. Progblogs

Also belongs to Progressive Bloggers – 11
Does not belong to Progressive Bloggers - 22

D6. Which party's candidate did you vote for in the last federal election?

Conservative Party _____ 1
Liberal Party _____ 2
New Democratic Party _____ 3
Green Party _____ 4
Other Party _____ 5
I did not vote _____ 9
(Declined) _____ 98
(Unsure/Don't Know) _____ 99

D7. Are you currently a member of a political party?

Yes _____ 1 (Continue)
No _____ 2 (Skip to end)
(Unsure) _____ 99 (Skip to end)

D7. Which one?

Conservative Party of Canada _____ 1
Liberal Party of Canada _____ 2
New Democratic Party of Canada _____ 3
Green Party of Canada _____ 4
Other Party _____ 5
(Declined) _____ 98
(Unsure) _____ 99

D8. Which of the following activities did you do in the past **two years** for your party (click all that apply)?

Donated to the party and/or one of its candidates _____ 1
Volunteered during an election campaign for one of its candidates _____ 2
Attended a meeting of the party's local electoral district association _____ 3
Attended the party's provincial/territorial annual meeting _____ 4
Attended the party's national convention _____ 5

D8a. Donated to the party and/or one of its candidates (ptyactv1)

Yes – 11
No – 22

D8b. Volunteered during an election campaign for one of its candidates (ptyactv2)

Yes – 11
No – 22

D8c. Attended a meeting of the party's local electoral district association (ptyactv3)

Yes – 11
No – 22

D8d. Attended the party's provincial/territorial annual meeting (ptyactv4)

Yes – 11
No – 22

D8e. Attended the party's national convention (ptyactv5)

Yes – 11
No – 22

Survey of Journalists

1. Do you feel the emergence of the Internet has made journalism better, worse or has it not made much difference? ³³
☐ Better 1
☐ Worse 2
☐ No difference 3
☐ (Unsure) 99
2. Has the Internet increased or decreased the deadline pressure you face, or has it made no difference?
☐ Increased 1
☐ Decreased 2
☐ No difference 3
☐ (Unsure) 99
3. Thinking about weblogs, or “blogs,” how much do you think blogs have changed the profession of journalism in the past few years?
☐ A lot 1
☐ Some 2
☐ A little 3
☐ Not at all 4
☐ (Unsure) 99
4. To what degree have blogs changed how you personally do your job?
☐ A lot 1
☐ Some 2
☐ A little 3
☐ Not at all 4
☐ (Unsure) 99
5. Overall, how would you rate the quality of information presented on blogs?
☐ Excellent 1
☐ Good 2
☐ Fair 3
☐ Poor 4
☐ (Unsure) 99

³³Bolded questions are taken from Dautrich and Barnes’ 2005 survey of American journalists. Italicized highlighted are taken from Sroka’s 2006 survey of American Congressional communications practitioners. These questions are included so that comparisons can be made with Canadian journalists and communications practitioners.

6. When you encounter a news story in the mainstream media that had its origins in the blogosphere, how does that affect your perception of that story?

It makes me more receptive to its claims _____ 1

It makes me less receptive to its claims _____ 2

It makes me neither more nor less receptive to its claims _____ 3

(Unsure) _____ 99

7. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about blogs. For each statement, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with it:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Bloggers adhere to journalistic standards	1	2	3	4	5	99
Blogs are a legitimate source of news	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more partisan than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more left-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more right-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs are more useful than mainstream media outlets for identifying current national political problems and debates.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
Bloggers should have the same legal protections as other journalists	1	2	3	4	5	99
Bloggers should have the same level of access that accredited journalists have to events and public institutions like Parliament	1	2	3	4	5	99

8. How often do you read blogs?

- _____ Several times per day 1
_____ Daily 2
_____ Several times (4-6) a week 3
_____ A few times (2-3) a week 4
_____ Once a week 5
_____ A few times per month 6
_____ Rarely 7 (Skip to Q. 11)
_____ Never 8 (Skip to Q. 11)
_____ (Unsure) 99

9. In a typical week, approximately how many blogs do you read?

- _____ One to three 1
_____ Four to seven 2
_____ Eight to 10 3
_____ 11-15 4
_____ More than 15 5
_____ (Unsure) 99

10. Which three blogs do you visit most often? (Open)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
(97) – No specific blog

10a. Warren Kinsella - spblog1

- Yes Warren Kinsella – 111
No Warren Kinsella – 222

10b. Inkless Wells (Maclean's blog) - spblog2

- Yes Inkless Wells – 111
No Inkless Wells – 222

10c. Inside the Queensway (Maclean's blog) – spblog3

- Yes ITQ - 111
No ITQ – 222

10d. Capital Read – Maclean's blog – spblog4

- Yes Capital read – 111
No capital Read - 222

10e. Maclean's blogs (general) – spblog5

- Yes Maclean's blogs – 111
No Maclean's blogs - 222

10f. Susan Delacourt blog (Toronto Star) – spblog6

- Yes Susan Delacourt – 111
Yes Susan Delacourt - 222
- 10g. Toronto Star political blog (general) – spblog7
Yes Toronto Star blog – 111
No Toronto Star blog - 222
- 10h. The Globe and Mail Politics blog – spblog8
Yes The Globe and Mail blog – 111
No The Globe and Mail blog - 222
- 10i. Full Comment (National Post) – spblog9
Yes Full Comment – 111
No Full comment - 222
- 10j. CBC blogs (general) – spblog10
Yes CBC Blogs – 111
No CBC blogs - 222
- 10k. David Akin – spblog11
Yes David Akin – 111
No David Akin – 222
- 10l. Eye on the Hill (E. Thompson, Sun Media) – spblog12
Yes Eye on the Hill – 111
No Eye on the Hill – 222
- 10m. Norman Spector – spblog13
Yes Norman Spector - 111
No Norman Spector – 222
- 10n. Blogging Tories – spblog14
Yes Blogging Tories – 111
No Blogging Tories - 222
- 10o. Stephen Taylor (BT) – spblog15
Yes Stephen taylor – 111
No Stephen Taylor - 111
- 10p. Yes Angry in the Great White North (BT) – spblog16
Yes Angry ... – 111
No Angry ... - 222
- 10q. Liblogs – spblog17
Yes Liblogs – 111
No Liblogs - 222

10r. Progressive Bloggers – spblog18
Yes Prog Bloggers – 111
No Prog Bloggers – 222

10s. Blogging Canadians – spblog19
Yes Blogging Canadians – 111
No Blogging Canadians – 222

10t. Pundits Guide – spblog20
Yes Pundits Guide – 111
No Pundits Guide - 222

10u. Bourque Newswatch – spblog21
Yes Bourque – 111
No Bourque – 222

10v. National Newswatch – spblog22
Yes NNW – 111
No NNW – 222

10w. Drudge Report – spblog23
Yes Drudge – 111
No Drudge - 222

10x. Huffington Post – spblog24
Yes Huffington – 111
No Huffington – 222

10y. Daily Kos – spblog25
Yes Kos – 111
No Kos – 222

10z. Paul Krugman – spblog26
Yes Krugman – 111
No Krugman – 222

10aa. Talking Points Memo – spblog27
Yes TPM – 111
No TPM – 222

10ab. Matthew Yglesias – spblog28
Yes Yglesias – 111
No Yglesias – 222

10ac. Andrew Sullivan – spblog29

Yes Sullivan – 111

No Sullivan – 222

10ad. Washington Monthly – spblog30

Yes WM – 111

No WM - 222

10ae. Katzenjammer – spblog31

Yes Katzenjammer – 111

No Katzenjammer – 222

10af. Kirk Lapointe's Media Manager – spblog32

Yes KLMM – 111

No KLMM – 222

10ag. Librarian of Fortune – spblog33

Yes Librarian – 111

No Librarian – 222

10ah. Elgin Street Irregulars – spblog34

Yes Elgin St. – 111

No Elgin St. 222

10ai. Hockey Buzz blog – spblog35

Yes HB blog – 111

No HB blog – 222

10ai. David Scrimshaw – spblog36

Yes Scrimshaw – 111

No Scrimshaw – 222

10aj. Stephen Lagace – spblog37

Yes Lagace – 111

No Lagace – 222

10ak. Martin Peretz – spblog38

Yes Martin Peretz – 111

No Martin Peretz - 222

11. Thinking about your colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, what effect would you say criticism from blogs of what they have written/broadcast affects how they cover a particular issue or political figure?

- _____ They are affected a great deal 1
 _____ They are somewhat affected 2
 _____ They are not really affected 3
 _____ They are not affected at all 4
 _____ It depends on the situation 5
 _____ (Unsure) 99

12. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about the relationship between the “blogosphere” and the media. Once again, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with each statement:

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>
<i>The blogosphere acts as a “watchdog” of the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere ignores the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere and mainstream media do not have any identifiable, direct relationship.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99

13. Do you receive news tips and story ideas from bloggers?

- _____ Yes 1
 _____ No 2
 _____ (Decline) 98
 _____ (Unsure) 99

14. Do you share information that you have acquired with bloggers?

- _____ Yes 1
 _____ No (Skip to Q. 18) 2
 _____ (Decline) 98 (Skip to Q. 18)
 _____ (Unsure) 99 (Skip to Q. 18)

15. How often would you say that you have done this?

- _____ Three times or more per week 1
- _____ Once or twice per week 2
- _____ Once or twice per month 3
- _____ Once or twice in the past year 4
- _____ Never 5
- _____ (Unsure) 99

16. Is this information typically offered...

- _____ For attribution 1
- _____ On background 2
- _____ Off the record 3
- _____ (Unsure) 99

17. Thinking about this information, please select which statements most accurately describe it (check all that apply):

- _____ I share information with bloggers that I would print or broadcast myself 1
- _____ I share information with bloggers that I consider "leads" to follow up for a story 2
- _____ I share information with bloggers that I would never use on air/in print 3
- _____ (Unsure) 99

17a. Share info would print/broadcast myself – pbinfo

- Yes share info would print – 111
- No share info would print – 222

17b. Share info that would be leads to follow – leads

- Yes leads – 111
- No leads – 222

17c. Share information would never use – wontuse

- Yes share info would never use – 111
- No share info would never use - 222

18. If a blogger criticizes an article you write and/or something you say on air, to what extent does it affect how you write about or speak about the topic in the future?

- _____ It affects it a great deal 1
- _____ It somewhat affects it 2
- _____ It does not really affect it 3
- _____ It does not affect it at all 4
- _____ (It depends) 5
- _____ (Unsure) 99

19. If a blogger publishes something you have not written about or broadcast, what degree of pressure do you feel to publish/broadcast the same information?

- _____ A great deal of pressure 1
- _____ Some pressure 2

_____ Very little pressure 3
_____ No pressure 4
_____ (Unsure) 99

20. If a blogger publishes something before you do, to what extent do you scrutinize this information before disseminating it as compared to how you would scrutinize information contained in interviews, press releases, etc.? Please indicate which statement best applies:

_____ I examine the information on a blog with a greater deal of scrutiny before disseminating it 1
_____ I examine the information on a blog with the same degree of scrutiny before disseminating it 2
_____ I disseminate the information and correct it later if it turns out to be inaccurate 3
_____ I disseminate the information and leave it at that 4
_____ (Unsure) 99

21. If a blogger publishes something and you decide to publish/broadcast it, what sort of credit will you offer to the blogger as the originating source of the information?

_____ Direct attribution (author's name and blog title) 1
_____ Indirect attribution (general description of author and/or blog) 2
_____ No attribution 3
_____ It depends 4
_____ (Unsure) 99

Professional Information:

P1. What is your primary job function?

_____ Reporter 1
_____ Editor/director 2
_____ Television/radio producer 3
_____ Photographer/videographer 4
_____ Columnist/news analyst 5
_____ Other 9
_____ Editorial Assistant 9
_____ Researcher 10
_____ TV tech cam 11
_____ (Declined) 98
_____ (Unsure) 99

P2. For how many years have you worked as a professional journalist?

_____ Fewer than five years 1
_____ 5-9 years 2
_____ 10-19 years 3
_____ 20-29 years 4
_____ 30+ years 5
_____ (Declined) 98
_____ (Unsure) 99

P3. For how many years have you been a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery?

_____ Fewer than five years 1
_____ 5-9 years 2
_____ 10-19 years 3
_____ 20-29 years 4
_____ 30+ years 5
_____ (Declined) 98
_____ (Unsure) 99

P4. Which party's candidate did you vote for in the last federal election?

_____ **Conservative Party** 1
_____ **Liberal Party** 2
_____ **New Democratic Party** 3
_____ **Green Party** 4
_____ **Bloc Québécois** 6
_____ **Other** 5
_____ **I did not vote** 9
_____ **(Declined)** 98
_____ **(Unsure)** 99

Demographic Information

D1. I am: Male _____ 1 Female _____ 2 (Declined) _____ 98

D2. In what year were you born: _____ (Declined) _____ 98

D3. Please indicate the highest level of education you have attained:

Less than high school _____ 1
High school diploma _____ 2
Some university/college courses _____ 3
Completed college diploma/certificate _____ 4
Completed university undergraduate degree _____ 5
Some graduate-level university courses _____ 6
Completed graduate degree _____ 7
(Declined) _____ 98

D4. Which of the following categories best describes your family income (total income before taxes of all persons in your household)?

Less than \$20,000/year _____ 1
\$20,000-\$39,999/year _____ 2
\$40,000-\$59,999/year _____ 3
\$60,000-\$79,999/year _____ 4
\$80,000-\$99,999/year _____ 5
\$100,000-\$199,999/year _____ 6
More than \$200,000/year _____ 7
(Declined) _____ 98

Survey of Parliamentary Communications Practitioners

1. Do you feel the emergence of the Internet has made journalism better, worse or has it not made much difference?
☐ Better 1
☐ Worse 2
☐ No difference 3
☐ (Unsure) 99
2. Has the Internet increased or decreased the pressure you face in your job, or has it made no difference?
☐ Increased 1
☐ Decreased 2
☐ No difference 3
☐ (Unsure) 99
3. Thinking about weblogs, or “blogs,” how much do you think blogs have changed the profession of journalism in the past few years?³⁴
☐ A lot 1
☐ Some 2
☐ A little 3
☐ Not at all 4
☐ (Unsure) 99
4. To what degree have blogs changed how you do your job as a communications practitioner?
☐ A lot 1
☐ Some 2
☐ A little 3
☐ Not at all 4
☐ (Unsure) 99
5. Overall, how would you rate the quality of information presented on blogs?
☐ Excellent 1
☐ Good 2
☐ Fair 3
☐ Poor 4
☐ (Unsure) 99

³⁴Bolded questions are taken from Dautrich and Barnes’ 2005 survey of American journalists. Italicized highlighted are taken from Sroka’s 2006 survey of American Congressional communications practitioners. These questions are included so that comparisons can be made with Canadian journalists and communications practitioners.

6. When you encounter a news story in the mainstream media that had its origins in the blogosphere, how does that affect your perception of that story?

It makes me more receptive to its claims _____ 1

It makes me less receptive to its claims _____ 2

It makes me neither more nor less receptive to its claims _____ 3

(Unsure) _____ 99

7. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about blogs. For each statement, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with it:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Bloggers adhere to journalistic standards	1	2	3	4	5	99
Blogs are a legitimate source of news	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more partisan than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more left-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs tend to be more right-wing than mainstream media outlets.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>Blogs are more useful than mainstream media outlets for identifying <u>current</u> national political problems and debates.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
Bloggers should have the same legal protections as other journalists	1	2	3	4	5	99
Bloggers should have the same level of access that accredited journalists have to events and public institutions like Parliament	1	2	3	4	5	99

8. How often do you read blogs?

- _____ Several times per day 1
- _____ Daily 2
- _____ Several times (4-6) a week 3
- _____ A few times (2-3) a week 4
- _____ Once a week 5
- _____ A few times per month 6
- _____ Rarely 7 (Skip to Q. 11)
- _____ Never 8 (Skip to Q. 11)
- _____ (Unsure) 99

9. In a typical week, approximately how many blogs do you read?

- _____ One to three 1
- _____ Four to seven 2
- _____ Eight to 10 3
- _____ 11-15 4
- _____ More than 15 5
- _____ (Unsure) 99

10. Which three blogs do you visit most often? (Open)

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

10a. Warren Kinsella - spblog1

- Yes Warren Kinsella – 111
- No Warren Kinsella – 222

10b. Inkless Wells (Maclean's blog) - spblog2

- Yes Inkless Wells – 111
- No Inkless Wells – 222

10c. Inside the Queensway (Maclean's blog) – spblog3

- Yes ITQ - 111
- No ITQ – 222

10d. Capital Read – Maclean's blog – spblog4

- Yes Capital read – 111
- No capital Read - 222

10e. Maclean's blogs (general) – spblog5

- Yes Maclean's blogs – 111
- No Maclean's blogs - 222

- 10f. Susan Delacourt blog (Toronto Star) – spblog6
Yes Susan Delacourt – 111
Yes Susan Delacourt - 222
- 10g. Toronto Star political blog (general) – spblog7
Yes Toronto Star blog – 111
No Toronto Star blog - 222
- 10h. The Globe and Mail Politics blog – spblog8
Yes The Globe and Mail blog – 111
No The Globe and Mail blog - 222
- 10i. Full Comment (National Post) – spblog9
Yes Full Comment – 111
No Full comment - 222
- 10j. CBC blogs (general) – spblog10
Yes CBC Blogs – 111
No CBC blogs - 222
- 10k. David Akin – spblog11
Yes David Akin – 111
No David Akin – 222
- 10l. Eye on the Hill (E. Thompson, Sun Media) – spblog12
Yes Eye on the Hill – 111
No Eye on the Hill – 222
- 10m. Norman Spector – spblog13
Yes Norman Spector - 111
No Norman Spector – 222
- 10n. Blogging Tories – spblog14
Yes Blogging Tories – 111
No Blogging Tories - 222
- 10o. Stephen Taylor (BT) – spblog15
Yes Stephen taylor – 111
No Stephen Taylor - 111
- 10p. Yes Angry in the Great White North (BT) – spblog16
Yes Angry ... – 111
No Angry ... - 222

- 10q. Liblogs – spblog17
Yes Liblogs – 111
No Liblogs - 222
- 10r. Progressive Bloggers – spblog18
Yes Prog Bloggers – 111
No Prog Bloggers – 222
- 10s. Blogging Canadians – spblog19
Yes Blogging Canadians – 111
No Blogging Canadians – 222
- 10t. Pundits Guide – spblog20
Yes Pundits Guide – 111
No Pundits Guide - 222
- 10u. Bourque Newswatch – spblog21
Yes Bourque – 111
No Bourque – 222
- 10v. National Newswatch – spblog22
Yes NNW – 111
No NNW – 222
- 10w. Drudge Report – spblog23
Yes Drudge – 111
No Drudge - 222
- 10x. Huffington Post – spblog24
Yes Huffington – 111
No Huffington – 222
- 10y. Daily Kos – spblog25
Yes Kos – 111
No Kos – 222
- 10z. Paul Krugman – spblog26
Yes Krugman – 111
No Krugman – 222
- 10aa. Talking Points Memo – spblog27
Yes TPM – 111
No TPM – 222

- 10ab. Matthew Yglesias – spblog28
Yes Yglesias – 111
No Yglesias – 222
- 10ac. Andrew Sullivan – spblog29
Yes Sullivan – 111
No Sullivan – 222
- 10ad. Washington Monthly – spblog30
Yes WM – 111
No WM - 222
- 10ae. Katzenjammer – spblog31
Yes Katzenjammer – 111
No Katzenjammer – 222
- 10af. Kirk Lapointe's Media Manager – spblog32
Yes KLMM – 111
No KLMM – 222
- 10ag. Librarian of Fortune – spblog33
Yes Librarian – 111
No Librarian – 222
- 10ah. Elgin Street Irregulars – spblog34
Yes Elgin St. – 111
No Elgin St. 222
- 10ai. Hockey Buzz blog – spblog35
Yes HB blog – 111
No HB blog – 222
- 10ai. David Scrimshaw – spblog36
Yes Scrimshaw – 111
No Scrimshaw – 222
- 10aj. Stephen Lagace – spblog37
Yes Lagace – 111
No Lagace – 222
- 10ak. Martin Peretz – spblog38
Yes Martin Peretz – 111
No Martin Peretz - 222

11. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about the relationship between the “blogosphere” and the media. Once again, please indicate whether you strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with each statement:

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>
<i>The blogosphere acts as a “watchdog” of the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere ignores the mainstream media</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99
<i>The blogosphere and mainstream media do not have any identifiable, direct relationship.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	99

12. Do you share information with bloggers that you hope they will use to write a blog post?

_____ Yes 1
 _____ No 2 (Skip to Q. 17) 2
 _____ (Decline) 98 (Skip to Q. 17)
 _____ (Unsure) 99 (Skip to Q. 17)

13. How often would you say that you do this?

_____ Three times or more per week 1
 _____ Once or twice per week 2
 _____ Once or twice per month 3
 _____ Once or twice in the past year 4
 _____ Never 5
 _____ (Unsure) 99

14. Is this information typically offered...

_____ For attribution 1
 _____ On background 2
 _____ Off the record 3
 _____ (Unsure) 99

15. Thinking about what you have shared with bloggers, please select which statements most accurately describe this information (check all that apply):

- _____ I share information with bloggers that I would share for attribution with a reporter 1
_____ I share information with bloggers that I would share with a journalist on background 2
_____ I share "off the record" information with bloggers that I would also share "off the record" with a trusted reporter 3
_____ I share information with bloggers that I would never share under any circumstances with a reporter 4
_____ (Unsure) 99

16. Have you ever contacted a blogger to offer an interview with your minister/MP that you hope will be used to in a blog post?

- _____ Yes 1
_____ No 2 (Skip to Q. 18)
_____ (Decline) 98 (Skip to Q. 18)
_____ (Unsure) 99 (Skip to Q. 18)

17. How often would you say that you do this?

- _____ Three times or more per week 1
_____ Once or twice per week 2
_____ Once or twice per month 3
_____ Once or twice in the past year 4
_____ Never 5
_____ (Unsure) 99

18. Have you ever contacted a blogger to provide information that rebuts comments critical of your employer, party or government?

- _____ Yes 1
_____ No (Skip to Q. 21) 2
_____ (Decline) 98 (Skip to Q. 21)
_____ (Unsure) 99 (Skip to Q. 21)

19. How often would you say that you do this?

- _____ Three times or more per week 1
_____ Once or twice per week 2
_____ Once or twice per month 3
_____ Once or twice in the past year 4
_____ Never 5
_____ (Unsure) 99

20. If a blogger criticizes your minister/member of parliament, your party or you personally, to what extent does it affect whether you share information with this individual in the future?

- _____ It affects it a great deal 1
- _____ It somewhat affects it 2
- _____ It does not really affect it 3
- _____ It does not affect it at all 4
- _____ (It depends) 5
- _____ (Unsure)

21. Have you ever contacted a blogger to provide information intended to critique, rebut or embarrass a politician from a rival political party?

- _____ Yes 1
- _____ No 2 (Skip to next section)
- _____ (Decline) 98 (Skip to next section)
- _____ (Unsure) 99 (Skip to next section)

22. How often would you say you have done this?

- _____ Three times or more per week 1
- _____ Once or twice per week 2
- _____ Once or twice per month 3
- _____ Once or twice in the past year 4
- _____ Never 5
- _____ (Unsure) 99

23. Was this information typically offered...

- _____ For attribution 1
- _____ On background 2
- _____ Off the record 3
- _____ (Unsure) 99

Professional Information:

P1. Which title best describes your position within your office?

- _____ **Press secretary 1**
- _____ **Director of communications 2**
- _____ **Special assistant 3**
- _____ **Executive assistant 4**
- _____ **Chief of staff 5**
- _____ **Other: _____ 9**
- _____ **(Declined) 98**

P2. For how many years have you worked as a communications practitioner?

_____ Fewer than five years 1
_____ 5-9 years 2
_____ 10-19 years 3
_____ 20-29 years 4
_____ 30+ years 5
_____ (Declined) 98

P3. Which party does your Leader/Minister/MP represent?

_____ Conservative Party 1
_____ Liberal Party 2
_____ New Democratic Party 3
_____ Green Party 4
_____ Bloc Québécois 5
_____ Independent 6
_____ (Declined) 98

P4. How many years have you worked for your current Leader/Minister/MP?

_____ Less than one year 1
_____ 1-2 years 2
_____ 3-5 years 3
_____ More than 5 years 4
_____ (Declined) 98

Demographic Information

D1. I am: Male _____ 1 Female _____ 2 (Declined _____ 98)

D2. In what year were you born: _____ (Declined) _____ 98

D3. Please indicate the highest level of education you have attained:

Less than high school _____ 1
Completed high school _____ 2
Some university/college courses _____ 3
Completed college diploma/certificate _____ 4
Completed university undergraduate degree _____ 5
Some graduate-level university courses _____ 6
Completed graduate degree _____ 7
(Unsure) _____ 99
(Declined) _____ 98

D4. Which of the following categories best describes your family income (total income before taxes of all persons in your household)?

Less than \$20,000 _____ 1
\$20,000-\$39,999 _____ 2
\$40,000-\$59,999 _____ 3
\$60,000-\$79,999 _____ 4
\$80,000-\$99,999 _____ 5
\$100,000-\$199,999 _____ 6
More than \$200,000 _____
(Declined) _____ 98
(Unsure) _____ 99

APPENDIX II: CODEBOOK FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

Variable Name	Description	Categories
1. caseid	Case identification - includes initials of blog, date (yymmdd) and letter for each part of day	eg. SD091120
2. blog	Blog title	1. Small Dead Animals 2. Jason Cherniak 3. Stephen Taylor 4. Calgary Grit
3. blogdate	Date blog post published (yymmdd)	eg. 091120
4. blogtime	Time blog published (using 24 hour clock)	eg. 2100
5. subject	Does the blog post refer to Parliament, a federal political party, a federal political party leader or a federal political issue in some way?	1. About Parliament or federal party/leader/MP/issue 2. About provincial government or issue; 3. About other political issue 4. About other subject
6. link	Does blog post link to or reference something produced by a mainstream media outlet?	1. Yes 2. No 3. Dead Link
7. outlet	What type of media outlet produced the linked-to material?	1. Newspaper 2. Television Network 3. Radio Station 4. Other
8. mediatype	What type of story is it?	1. News article-hard news story 2. Newspaper editorial 3. Newspaper column 4. Live broadcast clip-interview 5. Radio commentary 6. Television or radio interview 7. Television commentary 8. Other
9. mediadate	Date media item published	eg. 091120
10. mediatime	Time media item published	eg. 2100
11. timing	Is the item published before or after the blog was first posted?	1. Before 2. After 3. Updated 4. Other
12. evaluation	How does the blogger evaluate the media-produced item?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative
13. exclusive	Does the blog post contain information the blogger deems to be exclusive, is brought forward by private means (ie. reader	1. Yes 2. No

	email/picture or something uncovered in a non-media/non-blog forum, or is found uniquely/first published on that website? (use of words/phrases like "exclusive," "first reported here," "as I first wrote," "someone sent me..." etc.)	
14. subject	Who is the first person referred to in the blog post?	1. Party Leader 2. Member of Parliament 3. Premier/Member of Provincial Legislature 4. Party "Notable" (Leadership Canadidiate, Ex-leader, Ex-Cabinet Minister-MP 5. Party Staff (chief of staff, communication director, party president, etc.) 6. A party (general reference) 7. Other
15. bipartisan	What is the stated political affiliation of the individual?	1. Liberal 2. Conservative 3. New Democrat 4. Bloc Quebecois-Parti Quebecois 5. Green 6. Republican 7. Democrat 8. Other 9. Unknown
16. evaluation	How does the author of the blog post evaluate the person/party he or she refers to?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative
17. link	Does the exclusive blog post link to or mention a news item that references the same material as that relayed in the blog post, or that the author claims references material from the blog post?	1. Yes 2. No 9. Not applicable
18. subject	Who is the first person referred to in the media-produced item?	1. Party Leader 2. Member of Parliament 3. Premier/Member of Provincial Legislature 4. Party "Notable" (Leadership Canadidiate, Ex-leader, Ex-Cabinet Minister-MP 5. Party Staff (chief of staff, communication director, party president, etc.) 6. A party (general reference) 7. Other

19. mpartisan	What is the stated political affiliation of the individual?	1. Liberal 2. Conservative 3. New Democrat 4. Bloc Quebecois-Parti Quebecois 5. Green 6. Republican 7. Democrat 8. Other 9. Unknown
20. mevaluation	How is this subject evaluated within the media-produced item?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative
21. bmcitation	Does the media item cite the blog or the blog post?	1. Yes 2. No
22. msource	In what way does it attribute the blog as the originating source of this information, if at all?	1. Direct attribution 2. Indirect attribution ("on a Conservative blog") 3. Unclear 4. No Attribution

For all variables:

98 – Not applicable

99 – Unknown/Information not available

APPENDIX III: AUDIT TRAIL FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

Based on the codebook shown in Appendix II, this audit trail demonstrates how blog posts and media articles were coded. Furthermore, as the items were not subjected to an inter-coder reliability test, this audit trail should show researchers how subjective judgements of each item analyzed were coded in a consistent manner. It is hoped that this framework will allow those evaluating this thesis to assess the veracity of the content analysis conducted on the four blogs described in Chapter 4, which will in turn allow readers to make an informed judgement regarding the conclusions drawn from this research.

The four blogs analyzed in this thesis can be found at the following URLs:

Stephen Taylor (<http://www.stephentaylor.ca/page/89/>)

- Begins with entry posted on Jan. 25, 2006

Calgary Grit (http://calgarygrit.blogspot.com/2006_02_01_archive.html)

- Begins with entry posted on Feb. 1, 2006.

Small Dead Animals (http://www.smalldeadanimals.com/archives/2006_02.html)

- Begins with entry posted on Feb. 1, 2006.

Jason Cherniak (<http://jasoncherniak.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2006-02-11T13%3A28%3A00-05%3A00&max-results=20>)

- Begins with entry posted on Jan. 31, 2006. (NB: The site is currently locked down and requires a password to be read. The author of the blog, Jason Cherniak, granted the researcher access to analyze what he wrote).

The following pages illustrate some examples of how the posts were coded, with specific examples illustrating cases where the interpretation of the latent content may have been somewhat subjective. Therefore, categories with more objective data (such as the date and time of the respective blog posts and media articles) are not discussed below:

Subject:

As noted in the codebook, each blog post was analyzed based on whether it dealt with national political issues, provincial or local political issues, international (including U.S) political issues and non-political issues. The following are some examples of posts that would fall into each category:

National Politics: Any post that dealt with Parliamentary debates and issues was included in this category, including those where Canadian parliamentarians may have been debating international politics – for example, as the following example, which deals with Canada-U.S. relations, shows:

"Graham tells Harper not to get too cozy with Bush" (Small Dead Animals, July 7, 2006)

The Globe And Mail invites their readers to ["join the conversation"](#);

James CHIPMAN from Canada writes: Listen up folks , this is the Liberals at their finest , crapping on anyone who gets things done for Canada , pity. Dont worry liberals we wont forget the sponsorship scandal , for at least 2 more elections anyway...

Provincial/Local Politics: Any post that dealt with a provincial political or local political issue was placed in this category, as the following examples from Quebec and Saskatchewan, respectively demonstrate:

Unifier la Gauche (Calgary Grit, February 5, 2006)

I'd say it's been a good couple of weeks for Jean Charest, wouldn't you?

The Harper win can only help him, a new poll shows sovereignty down (well...[kinda](#)), and now a [new left wing separatist party](#) has been founded in Quebec.

Anyone know how credible these guys are? How many votes can they realistically be expected to siphon off from the PQ?

posted by calgarygrit at [12:31 PM](#) |

Lorne Calvert's Old Boys Parliament (Small Dead Animals, March 31, 2006)

The [Saskatchewan Youth Parliament](#) has a colourful history;

*[I]it wasn't until 1945 that Youth Parliament in Saskatchewan began to consistently meet again. At this time, the Older Boys Parliament began its evolution towards what we now call SYP. There were many spirited debates on whether to admit females, non-Christians and smokers. The members at the time decided to allow smokers to join but not females or non-Christians. In 1959, there was a resolution debated on permitting females to join the organisation. At the time, **current Saskatchewan premier Lorne Calvert was a member and gave a passionate speech against admitting females, while his then girlfriend watched from the gallery.** Apparently, they broke up soon afterwards. [emphasis mine]*

You don't say!
(note: the 1959 date seems to be in error)

Update - [Saskatoon SP](#) picks up the item.

Posted by Kate at [4:50 PM](#)

U.S./International Politics: This category included posts about political issues taking place in other countries (including U.S. domestic politics), or upon the international stage. The following blog post is an example:

Best News Of The Day Year (Small Dead Animals, July 31, 2006)

[NRO](#);

Fidel is in surgery for serious intestinal bleeding. He has handed power over temporarily to his brother Raul.

Here's hoping!

Non-Political Issue: This category included stories that had nothing to do with politics, and included blog posts about sports, entertainment, other personal interests of the author or (as the following example illustrates, general interest news items:

This Just In (Small Dead Animals, July 9, 2006)

Women are [different than men](#).

All joking aside, the report contains some interesting findings;

Scrutinizing more than 23,000 genes to measure their expression level in male and female tissue, the researchers found a direct correlation between gender and the amount of gene expressed.

In fact, more than half of the inspected genes have shown striking and measurable differences in expression patterns between males and females, the researchers reported...

Media Outlet

For this variable, the type of media outlet that produced the content that the blogger referenced was recorded. The categories included newspapers, television stations (including the websites of the CBC, CTV, Global Television, the BBC and others), radio stations and "other," a category which included some web-based media outlets). Blog posts containing links were coded regardless of whether the content was actually accessible – that is, if the link worked – or if the blog post actually contained a link to an URL. For example, the following post was cited as referencing a television program, despite not actually containing a link to the program (which wasn't available online):

Dingwall Is Not Worth Discussing (Jason Cherniak, February 5, 2006)

I am watching Question Period. It is a very even handed debate between Jane Tabor, Jason Kenney and Jay Hill (two Conservative MPs likely to become ministers). They just spent five minutes talking about David Dingwall's severance package. As you might expect, I have a few comments on the inanity of this...

Type of Article:

The type of media-produced item that the blogger linked to was recorded. This was intended to illustrate whether the blogger relied more on news and information as opposed to opinion or commentary in the process of constructing a blog post. The key distinction in this is whether the author of the media-produced item offers their own opinions in the course of describing figures and events. The following examples provided illustrate the use of a link to a news story in a blog post:

MSM confirms RCMP investigation of Liberal Senator (Stephen Taylor, June 6, 2006)

CTV News has just confirmed a detail which I broke on this blog 7 days ago. [Last week, I explained:](#)

"Today, I learned that new improprieties by Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne may land him in trouble with the RCMP. This morning, the Senate board of Internal Economy heard that he allegedly filed a false \$20,000 travel claim and I've heard that his own colleagues are going to call for an RCMP criminal investigation." ...

The post contained a link to this news article found on the CTV news website:

Senator Misused Office Resources: Committee

(http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060601/senator_060601/20060602/)

CTV.ca News Staff

Date: Fri. Jun. 2 2006 6:33 AM ET

A special Senate subcommittee alleges Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne improperly used his office resources, even asking his staff to cut down trees on his property, CTV News has learned.

"I found his executive assistant Mr. Daniel Cote cutting down about six large trees and another 15 small trees," claimed Neil Faulkner, who lives beside Lavigne's Wakefield, Que. estate.

The two properties are nestled next to the Gatineau River.

Faulkner said relations with his neighbouring senator were peaceful, until he came home one day to the harsh sounds of chainsaws.

According to Faulkner, some of the trees cut down were allegedly on his property. He sued Lavigne, and then took the further step of filing a complaint with the Senate.

"I felt it was a fair question to ask the Senate: was this man on the Senate payroll?" said Faulkner.

Last year, the Senate Committee on Internal Economy responded by creating a special subcommittee to investigate how Lavigne managed his office resources.

So far, the subcommittee's findings remain secret and the investigation is ongoing.

"It would be grossly improper to make any comment at all about the work of the committee while the committee is continuing its work – I'm sure you can understand that," said Liberal Senator Joan Fraser.

However, along with allegations of using his staff to cut down trees, CTV News has also learned that Lavigne may have improperly claimed about \$23,500 in travel expenses...

Meanwhile, the following is an example of an opinion-based commentary that was linked to by Small Dead Animals in a posted dated June 14, 2006. Compared to the discussion of Senator Lavigne and the clear presentation of facts related to his case in the CTV article, this media-produced commentary clearly shows the author expressing personal opinions:

**“Time is Right For Skepticism” (Antonia Zerbisias, Toronto Star, June 6, 2006, C7.
(Retrieved from Canadian Newsstand)**

Okay, not to put too fine a point on it the Toronto Star kicked butt with its scoop on Friday's arrests of 17 suspected Islamic extremists across the GTA.

Don't take my word for it.

The New York Times, which borrowed heavily from our coverage, even ran a story about us yesterday, praising the efforts of (my friend) terrorism beat reporter Michelle Shephard, who had been tracking this tale for two months...

... depending on what edition of which national paper Canadians received, on Saturday morning the first inkling they may have had of the alleged bomb plot in their midst was the police news conference at 10 a.m.

That's because the Globe buried the story, cobbled together from CBC and Reuters reports, on page A2. As one former newspaper exec emailed me on Saturday, "in my day, heads would roll for a lapse like that."

The National Post, meanwhile, which had an obviously long- planned feature about extremists-in-our-midst by terrorism expert Stewart Bell, managed to squeeze in some news of the arrests. But it offered almost no details.

We had it all, including photos of the arrests and suspects.

Not to blow our horns too long and loud, it must be said that there's always danger in getting too close to sources, especially when it comes to courts, crime and cops. There's a fine line between collusion and co-operation and maintaining close contacts...

Timing of Blog Post

As noted earlier, the date and time that appeared on both blog posts and media-produced items was recorded and, where applicable, converted to Eastern Standard Time (EST) so as to show the real-time evolution of how blog posts link to existing media content – or in a handful of cases, link to something produced after they had written an initial blog post. Indeed, the coding noted the difference between something being in the media before the blog post and clear examples where the news article had been initially posted and then updated (with a new timestamp) after the blog post had been written. To offer one example:

...Same as the Old Boss (Calgary Grit, February 6, 2006)

First of all, let's put aside the fact that he appointed David Emerson to Cabinet.

Secondly, let's put aside the fact that Harper will *appoint* a Senator, and put him into Cabinet.

So what about the [Cabinet itself](#)?...

posted by calgarygrit at [4:42 PM](#)

The words "Cabinet itself" contained a hyperlink to a CTV News article:

Harper Sworn in as Canada's 22nd Prime Minister

CTV.ca News Staff

Date: Tue. Feb. 7 2006 6:24 AM ET

Since the swearing-in of the Conservative government's first ministry took place on the morning of Monday, February 6, 2006, nearly 24 hours elapsed between the time that this event occurred (shortly after which CTV and other media outlets would have published the first news of the new cabinet on their websites) and the time posted on the link if you access it today. Quite clearly, the story was updated – likely several times during Feb. 6, 2006, and the author of Calgary Grit linked to an earlier version of the story when he published his blog post at 4:42 p.m. on the afternoon of February 6. In this case, CTV would have updated the story and re-posted it to the same URL

(http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060206/cabinet_main_060206/20060206?hub=TopStories) after the blog post was published; however, it is quite obvious from the tone of the post and the logical sequence of events that the blogger did not break this news himself but rather reacted to something already put in the public domain by a media outlet.

Evaluation of Blog Post

To assess the extent to which bloggers engage in criticism of journalists and their work, the blogger's evaluation of a media outlet's story was included in this content analysis. In cases where bloggers linked to a news story, the blogger's assessment was coded as positive or negative. If the blogger made no comment about the story – or if he or she did not write their own criticism of a news story, but perhaps repeated or linked to something someone else said – the post was coded as “neutral.” The following is an example of a post that would have been coded this way:

Question MacKay and You Will Pay (Jason Cherniak, May 20, 2006)

Peter MacKay has decided to punish the residents of Dartmouth-Cole Harbour because their excellent MP, Mike Savage, had the gall to ask him a question in the House of Commons. The story is [here](#):

After Mr. Savage issued a press release Thursday calling on the minister to apologize for the cap-in-hand comment, Mr. MacKay upped the ante by suggesting Mr. Savage would pay dearly for his criticisms.

"I'll look at projects coming out of his riding, but his ability to influence me, you can imagine, is going to be severely diminished," he told Stephen Maher, this newspaper's Ottawa bureau chief.

Is this the new politics that we can expect from the Conservatives? I think this is the worst form of partisanship.

Posted by Jason Cherniak at [1:18 PM](#) _

The post linked to and cited three paragraphs from an article in the Halifax Chronicle-Herald (which can no longer be accessed). As one can see, the author offered no particular judgement on the newspaper or the way it presented this story. Contrast this with a post written earlier that day by Jason Cherniak which was coded as assessing an article negatively:

The Post is a Tabloid (Jason Cherniak, May 20, 2006)

Instead of admitting that they were wrong, the Post proclaims "[Iranian embassy denies dress code](#)" - as if it is debatable. As far as I am concerned, this blatant failure to report the news has turned the Post into a tabloid. I will never take it seriously again.

Posted by Jason Cherniak at [8:57 AM](#)

This post contained a link to an article that appeared in the National Post entitled “Iranian embassy denies dress code,” which was a follow-up article to an earlier news story and opinion columns in the National Post that claimed the Iranian government had passed a law ordering members of religious minority groups (such as Jews and Christians) to wear special coloured strips of cloth. In the story, the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa denied that this was the case, and clearly, Cherniak criticized the *National Post* for reporting this information in the first place.

The following is another example of a blog post that criticized the media outlet it linked to:

CBC trying to pin evacuation faults on Harper (Stephen Taylor, July 23, 2006)

In an article on the CBC website yesterday, [the state-run broadcaster tries to label the Conservative government's evacuation of Lebanese-Canadians from Lebanon as slow](#).

The article even gives a subtitle to a section of the article which we anticipate will be critical of the evacuation effort. The subtitle reads "**Criticize evacuation work**".

The CBC reports,

Protesters also criticized Harper's support of the Israeli mission and the slowness of the Canadian evacuation from Lebanon...

Clearly, the blog's author is critical of how the CBC News story presented the story of the Conservative government's evacuation of Lebanese-Canadians from Lebanon and specifically chastised this broadcaster in this post. Stephen Taylor wrote a number of posts about the Lebanese evacuation in July 2006, and though he was critical of various news outlets in them, not all posts would be classified as "negative" if they were not specifically critical of a particular news outlet. In this post, for example, he criticized "the media" in general without citing a specific complaint towards the video clip of the CTV News story he linked to at the bottom of the post:

Stephen Harper cares about Lebanese-Canadian people (Stephen Taylor, July 20, 2006)

As has been noted [around the blogosphere](#), the media seems to be climbing all over itself to frame the evacuation of Lebanese-Canadians from Lebanon as too "slow" and as a "disaster".

Where was the flotilla of ships awaiting immediate rescue and extraction from Lebanon, critics asked. The same critics who rush to condemn Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper are the same brave critics that question why Canada would ever need to start spending on military equipment...

On the following page, meanwhile, is an example of a "positive" assessment by a blogger towards a journalist's work. In the post, the blogger specifically praises the author of this magazine piece for writing the "defining piece" of the 2006 election and describing the work as offering "a great look inside the Liberal campaign." Finally, he urges readers to buy a copy of the magazine to read it in its entirety:

The Untold Story (Calgary Grit, February 3, 2006)

I'm sure there will be a few books out on this election and the Martin months for Christmas 2006 but, until then, Paul Wells' Maclean's article on the campaign will remain the defining piece. He's got the great one liners:

"...his staff, whom [Martin] often calls the best campaign team in history - Martin is not a particularly meticulous student of history - had come up with a plan."

He's got the analysis. He's got the campaign preparation and strategy for the Tories. He's also got a great look inside the Liberal campaign, illustrated beautifully in this paragraph:

And the polls? Nationally they showed the Liberals tied with the Tories or even a bit behind. Alcock said his only worry was that the Liberals were running too strong, not too weak. "There's a lot of people who argue that we had to come down in order to activate what we need, which is people needing to stop Harper," Alcock said. "In fact if we're going to do better than last time - that is, get a majority - we'd rather be a bit lower than we are."

Alcock was describing a political version of the slingshot effect, by which space probes fly dangerously close to planets so they can borrow some gravitational energy to whip away even more quickly. The Liberals had decided they needed to flirt with losing to win.

Two things were immediately obvious about this strategy. First, it was extremely dangerous, because as a rule of thumb, when you flirt with losing, you lose. And it was awfully familiar. It was as if somebody had taken the 2004 campaign and decided that its chaotic shape - trouble, decline, panic, last-minute recovery - was the shape all winning campaigns must take.

Alcock paused and looked at his interrogator. "I know this sounds like bullshit."

Who was arguing that the road to victory lay in near-defeat. "Well, David Herle is certainly one of the big ones."

There you have it - a look inside the mind of David Herle. If that paragraph alone isn't worth buying a Maclean's, I don't know what is.

Exclusivity of Information

As noted, the justification for saying that a post offered “exclusive” information was structured fairly broadly. Still, an overwhelming majority of posts did not achieve this status. The following are two examples of posts that contained “exclusive” information.” The first post, by Calgary Grit, documents events that happened at an Alberta Liberal Party annual general meeting. Though it might not be considered “newsworthy” by journalists, it does offer an example of how partisan blogs can bring information to light based on their involvement in political parties:

Promises Made, Promises Kept (Calgary Grit, March 3, 2006)

Got back into town last night after what was a fairly uneventful Liberal convention. Despite this, I promised an update, and the theme of the convention was “Promises Made, Promises Kept”, so I’ll throw a few posts up. In general, it was probably lower attended than past policy conventions, but the general consensus seems to be it was a net gain for the party, so I’m sure the organizers are smiling this morning. We got some interesting policy debate but since the PM has made it clear he doesn’t particularly care about the policies passed, there’s not a lot I can say about that.

posted by calgarygrit at [4:02 PM](#)

The following post, meanwhile, is a bona-fide example of a blogger breaking information about a story that was later followed up by the media. Interestingly, the blog post shows that the blogger showed both what he originally wrote, as well as an “updated lede” and other information added later that took into account that came to light after other media outlets reported the story. (It should be noted that Taylor cited, but did not link to, the actual CTV News story):

BREAKING: Senate to call for RCMP criminal investigation of Liberal senator (Stephen Taylor, June 1, 2006)

The updated lede: Today, I learned that new improprieties by Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne may land him in trouble with the RCMP. This morning, the Senate board of Internal Economy heard that he allegedly filed a false \$20,000 travel claim and I’ve heard that his own colleagues are going to call for an RCMP criminal investigation.

The original post: It recently came to my attention that a major corruption scandal would be breaking in the Senate today (specifically this morning) concerning the Senate’s Board of Internal Economy... The meeting of the special committee of the Senate occurred *in camera* meaning “in secret” and I have just confirmed that the testimony has been “explosive”. The meeting exited around 11am this morning and so far, members of the board have been tight-lipped. Details to follow...

UPDATE: Turns out the testimony in the Senate committee today concerned the actions of **Liberal Senator Raymond Lavigne**, a late-term Chretien appointment.... It appears that Senator Lavigne’s problems extend further than being caught for the abuse of taxpayer dollars and parliamentary staffers for the landscaping his personal property. Today, I have learned that new improprieties by the Liberal senator may land him in trouble with the RCMP. **Today, the Senate board of Internal Economy heard that he allegedly filed a false \$20,000 travel claim and I’ve heard that his own colleagues are going to call for an RCMP criminal investigation.**

UPDATE: CTV News had a report of this story tonight. David Akin reports the exact amount of \$23,500 and describes that Lavigne has a week to pay it back. I hope that’s not what is meant when those in Ottawa talk about “Parliamentary privilege”.

Linking Behaviour:

For this variable, it was simply recorded whether or not a blog post that “broke” a story referenced or linked to a news story that referenced the same information provided in the blog post. In the vast majority of cases, this was coded “not applicable,” as the blog post either contained no link to a media article or the media article was produced prior to the blog post. In most cases where a blog provided “exclusive” information, media outlets did not reference this material. The example provided above where Stephen Taylor was the first to release information about the investigation into Senator Lavigne is one of only eight examples noted in this study where a blogger later pointed to a media outlet referencing the information that he or she put into the public domain.

The following three categories refer to how individuals were framed in blog posts, with the same coding rules applied to the media articles linked to by these respective bloggers:

Blog Post/Media Article Subject

The subject of the blog post was coded according to the categories outlined in the codebook: federal party leader, Member of Parliament/Senator, provincial politician (including premier), party “notable” (including ex-MPs and non-elected leadership candidates), party employee (including ministerial assistants and staff) and others (a category that included journalists, bureaucrats and others). In some cases, the blogger may make a generic reference to “Liberals” or “Conservatives” – these were coded separately. The following post is an example:

Radio Free Liberal (Jason Cherniak, May 16, 2006)

The Liberal Party is finally starting to enter the media age. They are doing what is essentially a free web-based advertisement called "Radio Free Liberal". There is now a link on the sidebar (along with some other changes). I look forward to many more new and creative ideas.

Partisan Affiliation of Blog/Media Article Subject:

The partisan affiliation of the blog post was coded, even in cases where the blogger did not explicitly state the subject’s partisanship but where it is well-known – for example, a reference to former prime minister Paul Martin would be coded as “Liberal” and a reference to then-current prime minister Stephen Harper was coded as “Conservative,” even if the blogger did not explicitly use these labels when referring to them. Other parties that were coded included the New Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Bloc Québécois (and its provincial cousin, the Parti Québécois), the U.S. Republican Party and the U.S. Democratic Party. The partisan affiliation was categorized as “other” for parties not listed here. This category included provincial parties with no federal equivalent, such as the Saskatchewan Party, whereas references to Progressive Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats at the provincial level were coded using the same codes as their federal counterparts. The “unknown” category was used in cases where the exact partisan affiliation of the individual was either not stated, or is unknown: this would include journalists, even if they had a commonly-known perspective. For example, a reference to an op-ed columnist who generally supports conservative ideas (and may write things agreeing with the Conservative Party’s policies) would still fall into this category because it is not known if he or she actually belongs to the Conservative Party. For an elected party leader or MP, on the other

hand, it is quite clear that he or she would be a “Conservative” or a “Liberal,” even if this fact was not explicitly stated by the blogger.

Assessment of Blog Post/Media Article Subject:

Using the same categories and coding criteria that were used when assessing how bloggers evaluated the work of journalists, it was noted how the blogger evaluated the subject of each blog post (and how journalists evaluated the subject of media articles that bloggers linked to). In the following example, blogger Jason Cherniak offers a “positive” assessment of a number of Liberal MPs, including Scott Brison who “spoke well” in Cherniak’s opinion at a Liberal event:

LPC(O) Leadership Panel (Jason Cherniak, May 5, 2006)

Before going back to LPC(O), I'll give some thoughts on the leadership panel last night.

Scott Brison spoke well and pointed out that he is from a rural riding. When asked about Kyoto, he talked about incentives. Overall, I would say that - surprise, surprise - he will be the right-wing candidate in the race. I got to sign his nomination papers in his suite.

Maurizio seems like a smart, young guy. He also spoke well and I think it is doing him good to get up on stage and show his capabilities. He will be very important to the Party in the future...

The following is another example of both a positive assessment of the subject (Per Bylund who wrote a commentary for the Ludwig von Mises Institute that the author linked to):

The Right To Be Relieved Of Burden

[A brilliant piece by Per Bylund](#) on the degrading effects of the welfare state on Swedish society...

Posted by Kate at [1:47 PM](#)

Conversely, this is an example of a negative assessment of the subject of a post by a particular blogger. It is quite apparent that the blogger, Stephen Taylor, is critical of how the former Parliamentary ethics advisor, Howard Wilson (who was appointed by the former Liberal government, but was not a member of the party) conducted investigations:

Shapiro makes news again

(Stephen Taylor, March 3, 2006)

The [CTV headline](#) screams:

Harper to be investigated by ethics commissioner

Ah yes, Bernard Shapiro the Liberal appointee whose resignation has been demanded by no less than Ed Broadbent after Shapiro was found in contempt by a House of Commons committee:

“Mr Shapiro has extraordinary serious credibility problems. It leaves open the clear question of his impartiality because of what he decided or what he has decided NOT to do.” — Ed Broadbent, NDP MP

Remember the Liberal government? (how could one forget?). Remember all of those allegations of corruption? Remember Adscam, the ITC scandal, the Dingwall mess? The Liberal appointed Ethics Commissioner made a feeble attempt to investigate Sgro (he even mishandled that one)! Hence, quite a credibility issue as decided by a multi-party committee of government.

So, what is Bernard Shapiro investigating?

David Emerson's floor crossing of course!

Was it ethical? This question has the Ethics Commissioner launching a preliminary investigation into conflict-of-interest allegations against the Conservative PM's appointment.

Did Shapiro investigate Belinda's floor crossing (hers was certainly more opportunistic than Emerson's as it came at a time when Paul Martin was facing certain defeat without her)? Did Shapiro investigate Brison's defection to the Liberals? Shapiro DID NOT investigate either Stronach's or Brison's floor crossings...

The 38th Parliament was led by a Liberal government. There ~~were~~^{were} ~~not~~^{weren't} ANY (were hardly any) investigations by Shapiro into any of the activities of Liberal parliamentarians. Now, we have the 39th Parliament, led by a Conservative government and Shapiro can't wait to start an investigation. Is there an agenda here by a supposedly independent officer of Parliament?

This is another example of how the subject of the blog post would be coded “negative,” with the media article it linked to offering a positive assessment of the main subject of both items, Garth Turner. These are compared side-by-side below:

Woe Is Me!

(Calgary Grit, March 28, 2006)

John Ibbitson has a [column](#) today which shows just how disconnected from reality Garth Turner truly is. Consider the following:

For Mr. Turner, however, the little guy is the bleeding upper middle class.

Halton, on the edge of Greater Toronto, is full of them: Mr. Turner chronicled their plight in his speech.

He recalled talking to a man whose house "was worth maybe half a million - modest for his neighbourhood. He told me it felt like his life was being squeezed now from all sides. Property taxes, income taxes, GST...'All I've got is this' He kicked the bricks at his front door."

Then there was the woman who decided to stay at home and raise her kids. Her husband makes six figures, but "our friends who have two incomes make a lot less, and always have more money to throw around. The system is killing my family."

Glad to see someone is fighting for this severely disadvantaged demographic.

posted by calgarygrit at [8:45 PM](#)

Why Garth Turner is the Future of Politics

By John Ibbitson

The Globe and Mail, March 28, 2006. A4.

Here's some really bad news: Garth Turner matters. The newly elected Conservative MP for Halton delights in being a renegade. He is already a pariah within the party leadership, after publicly denouncing David Emerson's recruitment.

He has developed budget recommendations that urge the Conservatives to abandon a key election promise. (He won't say which one, yet.)

And last night, Mr. Turner delivered a speech to the Hull-Aylmer Conservative riding association that castigated Conservative colleagues who sacrifice their independence in hopes of being rewarded with cabinet rank.

"The Prime Minister has nothing I covet," the financially secure MP declared.

"Unlike many of my colleagues who want to be in cabinet or want to be parliamentary secretaries or want to have additional pay, more titles, a bigger office in a better building or a seat in the House of Commons closer to the boss, I don't care. And I don't think they should care, either."

So the unofficial lottery to guess the date when Garth Turner gets expelled from caucus is already under way. He will become another John Nunziata, another Carolyn Parrish: colourful, eccentric, good for a quote, entirely marginal.

Except that Garth Turner represents something that is both very old and quite new, and dangerously compelling. He is a digital populist...

... He has his own blog. His website is filled with news, information, links. He has converted part of his House of Commons office into a webcasting studio.

While the Conservative communications office plots ways to get the leader on television and in the newspaper -- dying technologies, so they say -- Mr. Turner BlackBerries, webcasts and blogs...

(Note to style editors everywhere: Mr. Turner and his ilk are no longer upercasing Internet, and we still are. What does that say?)

He sings the praises of interactive virtual town-hall meetings, of constituents casting electronic ballots that determine the vote of the MP in the House, of live video greetings to 90th birthday parties.

	<p>Much of it sounds quite appalling: identifying the suburban middle class as disenfranchised, when it is in fact the most cosseted demographic in society; catering to the narcissism and self-pity of people who should thank God each and every morning for their blessings; giving the whip hand to anyone angry enough and articulate enough to fire off an e-mail demanding lower taxes, an easier commute, tax breaks for private-school tuition -- and just why are there so many immigrants cluttering up the place?</p> <p>It doesn't matter. The suburban middle class elects the government, and Mr. Turner understands them. He may understand them even better than Stephen Harper does.</p> <p>Kick Garth Turner out of caucus? They'd be kicking out the future of Canadian politics.</p>
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