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# Intermedia Agenda Setting in Television, Advertising, and Blogs During the 2004 Election

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*This study examined whether the candidate-controlled public relations tools of political ads and candidate blogs were successful in influencing the issue and news agenda of the major television news networks during the 2004 presidential election. Data showed strong correlations between blogs and the media agenda. Advertisements did not correlate with the media agenda. Cross-lag analyses showed that the media set the candidates' agenda. The authors suggest intermedia agenda setting occurred as the media transferred their agenda to campaign blogs.*

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Once political parties name their official candidate for president, campaigns have a precise window of time to educate the public about the candidates and issues. In 2004, the so-called hot phase of the general election cycle period ran from Labor Day to Election Day (Bichard, 2006; Tedesco, 2005). During this time, candidates embraced a multimedia strategy in an attempt to influence the media agenda and ultimately impact a voting public (Bichard, 2005). In communicating the campaign's messages, the major campaigns of incumbent Republican president George W. Bush and challenger Democrat senator John F. Kerry employed a variety of public relations tools, which included television advertisements and Weblogs, or blogs.

Advertising has been an active part of campaigning since the 1952 presidential election. In their analysis of 13 presidential election cycle ads, Johnston and Kaid (2002) proposed that "two of the most important functions (of advertising) are helping the candidate define or redefine his or her image and providing a forum where campaign issues can be explained or developed" (p. 281). In the late 1990s, candidates began to employ Web sites, which have been considered by many as advertisements as well (Kaid, 2004; Klotz, 1997). This study focused on two facets of campaign controlled-messaging to determine if such messages impacted the media during the 2004 presidential election.

Specifically, our study examined whether political ads, along with candidate blogs, were successful in influencing the issue and news agenda of the major television news networks during the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Although a great deal of literature in agenda setting focuses on the transfer of salience between the media and the public (i.e., first-level agenda setting), intermedia agenda setting examines how media content influences other media content (i.e., fourth-stage agenda setting). Based on intermedia agenda setting literature, we analyze and discuss the implications of this potential effect on both theory and applied campaigns.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Decades have passed since the McCombs and Shaw (1972) published the original agenda-setting study. As noted by McCombs (1992), there are more than 100 empirical studies testing and supporting the original agenda setting hypothesis, which predicted that the media agenda of issue saliency may influence the public's agenda of issue saliency.

### Intermedia Agenda Setting

Extending beyond the original hypothesis linking the public and media agenda, agenda setting researchers aim to understand the forces that shape the media's agenda of issues (Wanta & Foote, 1994). In 2004, McCombs (2004) termed the re-

relationship between source-media agenda setting the “fourth stage” of agenda setting. Correlations between numerous sources and news media support the notion of fourth-stage agenda setting. Previous research determined that public relations materials, such as candidate press releases (Kaid, 1976), advertising (Boyle, 2001; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994), or political address (Wanta & Foote, 1994; Wanta, Stephenson, Van Slyke Turk, & McCombs, 1989), can successfully set the agenda in the news media.

Intermedia agenda setting, a component of fourth-stage agenda setting, is the term that refers to those instances when the media agenda is shaped by other media (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Reese & Danielian, 1989). This line of research traditionally focused on the relationships between national news agencies and daily newspapers (McCombs & Shaw, 1976). Gilbert, Eyal, McCombs, and Nicholas (1980) found the New York Times to be a leader in intermedia agenda setting, signaling important news and issues for other gatekeepers across the nation. Reese and Danielian went on to establish a link between newspapers and television networks. These examples illustrate that intermedia agenda setting has come to refer to both within- and between-channel agenda-setting effects.

More recently, media scholars expanded their investigation of the intermedia agenda-setting process. For example, television news follow in one another’s lead as they take cues from each other on the issue saliency of news stories (Reese, Grant, & Danielian, 1994). Protess and McCombs (1991) found that elite newspapers influence the news agendas of local newspaper as well as local television. Golan (2006) provided further evidence for intermedia agenda setting by identifying significant intermedia agenda setting influence of the New York Times over the international news agenda of three leading American evening newscasts.

Of particular interest to researchers is the intermedia agenda-setting role that political advertising may have on the mass media. After all, unlike newspapers or television newscasts, the very nature of political advertising is based on its attempt to shape public discourse and opinion. Roberts and McCombs provided one of the first empirical tests of this phenomenon (Roberts, Anderson, & McCombs, 1994). Their analysis of the 1990 Texas gubernatorial campaign provided evidence for the intermedia agenda-setting effect of political advertising on the news agendas of three local television stations and a local daily newspaper. In a replication of this study, Lopez-Escobar et al. (1998) found strong evidence of intermedia agenda setting as political advertising influenced the news agendas of both television and newspaper news during the 1995 Spanish elections. In his analysis of the 1996 U.S. presidential election, Boyle identified an intermedia agenda setting effect as political advertisements of both candidates Clinton and Dole were effective in impacting the political coverage of the campaign in both television newscasts and print newspapers (Boyle, 2001).

B. Lee, Lancendorfer, and Lee (2005) provided additional evidence for the intermedia agenda-setting phenomenon in their examination the influence of

Internet bulletin boards on newspaper coverage of the 2000 South Korean elections. They found that Korean newspapers and Internet bulletin boards had a reciprocal intermedia agenda setting effect in the shaping of their agendas of issues and attributes. Similarly, B. Lee et al. found that traditional newspapers had a significant influence over the issue saliency and on the overall coverage in four online newspapers (K. Lee, 2004). More recently, Lim (2006) identified an intermedia agenda-setting effect as two Korean online newspapers influenced the issue agendas of a wire service. The results of Lim's analysis did not point to a converse relationship.

Tedesco (2005) investigated the candidate–journalist relationship during the 2004 election, building on fourth-stage agenda-setting research. Correlations revealed an intercandidate agenda-setting effect, where one candidate set the agenda for the other. Cross-lag correlations showed newspapers influenced Kerry's agenda, but Bush's agenda influenced newspapers. This paints the picture of an interrelated set of agendas with the president having the most influence over newspapers, news influencing the challenger/opponent, and then the opponent at times influencing the president's agenda. Although this may oversimplify Tedesco's (2005) findings, cross-lag correlations did show Bush responding to Kerry-led agenda initiatives during the summer months of the campaign.

These studies provide the basis for extending inquiry into the fourth stage of agenda-setting research, through examining not only different channels (Internet, television) but any prospective candidate–journalist or candidate–candidate relationships as well. The literature reviewed below focuses on traditional agenda-setting online, modern campaign tools such as blogs, and the relationship between advertising and agenda setting.

### Agenda Setting and the Internet

Several studies investigated how agenda setting works on the Internet. Certainly, it is not proposed that an overall "Internet agenda" can be constructed, as its content is so dynamic and vast. Scholars indeed have linked Internet usage (Wanta & Cho, 2004) as well as the nature of the online medium itself (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) as factors that may shape or influence the agenda-setting process.

Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) correlated the relationship between online media coverage and electronic bulletin board discussion. They found that news media content actually informed discussion on the electronic bulletin boards. That is, participants used information learned from the media to elaborate on the topics discussed in the online political forums. The transfer of salience from the media to the electronic bulletin board participants ranged from 1 to 7 days, illustrating the true velocity of the medium.

Wanta and Cho (2004) examined the role that Internet use plays in the agenda-setting process. By comparing data from telephone interviews (public agenda)

with traditional news coverage (media agenda), the researchers found that Internet use can both inhibit and enhance agenda-setting effects. Those who go online for longer periods may be self-selecting exposure to issues, therefore inhibiting the salience of the media agenda (Wanta & Cho, 2004). Conversely, those who go online motivated by information seeking are likely going to Web sites that reinforce the media agenda, thus enhancing the agenda-setting effect.

Ku, Kaid, and Pfau (2003) measured the transfer of issue salience from candidate Web sites during the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign and the voters' issue agenda saliency. The authors argued for the importance of candidate Web sites in the modern campaign based on its potential for an agenda setting effect on potential voters.

### Modern Campaign Strategies and Tactics

Since the introduction of candidate Web sites in the 1990s, campaigns slowly adopted computer-mediated communication technology as a means to disseminate campaign messages. Although encouraging interpersonal communication and get out the vote campaigning (e.g., calling, door-to-door canvas) will always remain a staple in campaigns, electronic means of communicating gained momentum. Indeed, candidates moved beyond merely posting press releases and media endorsements on their Web sites to hosting interactive and personalized features like e-mail newsletters, in-depth campaign information, and blogs (Tedesco, 2004; Trammell & Williams, 2004; Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005).

During the 2004 campaign cycle, campaigns introduced blogs into the overall campaign Web site, and every viable candidate during the campaign's primary season integrated the communication tool into their campaign site (Baker & Stromer-Galley, 2004; Trammell, Williams, Postelnicu, & Landreville, 2006; Williams et al., 2005). The popular press heralded the interactive and personalized, forumlike Web space as a true tool of democracy. Campaigns positioned blogs as a direct link to campaign headquarters where supporters or interested parties could find out the most up-to-date information about what was going on with the campaign.

Blogs are Web pages with frequently composed entries arranged in reverse chronological order (Blood, 2002; Walker, in press). An increasing number of people use blogs for political news, and this number grew substantially during the election. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) estimated that 32 million American read blogs around the time of the 2004 U.S. presidential election. The profile of an average blog reader painted this group as young, well-educated men who were Internet veterans (Pew Internet and American Life, 2005). Early adopters reported subscribing to syndicated content (e.g., RSS), which is a content distribution option on Web sites that lets users sign up to have site/page updates deliv-

ered to subscribers. Focusing on the use of blogs for political information during this time, Pew Internet and American Life (2005) found that Kerry voters were more likely than Bush voters to read politically orientated blogs. Furthermore, Bichard (2006) suggested that Election Day traffic rivaled use of traditional media sources for race information and updates. Although the overall number of blog readers during this time was still small in comparison to other media, blog readers are extremely loyal to and even cite blogs as being the most credible medium (Johnson & Kaye, 2004)—even above online news or television broadcasts.

Much work already examines the use of blogs as a campaign tool. Overall, it appears candidates used blogs for multiple reasons during the 2004 election: to inform readers of ideological or issue stance, to announce or discuss campaign-related events, to discuss the opponent, and to track the race (i.e., horserace; see Bichard, 2006; Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005; Trammell, 2006; Trammell et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005).

Bichard (2006) conducted a frame analysis of Bush and Kerry's blogs during the election. Results of this multidimensional framing study indicated Kerry focused on the past and future, whereas Bush focused on the present in regard to time. The study noted that Kerry's blog was significantly more likely to be negative than Bush's blog, confirming similar results in other studies (Trammell, 2006). Bichard noted that the descriptive results reported in that multidimensional framing analysis could not provide insight into audience influence. Before a traditional agenda-setting study is conducted, it might be helpful to take an intermediate step to investigate the relationship between blogs, other campaign-controlled media, and the mainstream media.

There is anecdotal support for a possible agenda-setting relationship between high-traffic blogs and the media. Indeed, blogs are credited with impacting the media agenda and causing the resignation of prominent people in politics and the media (Kurtz, 2003).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Drezner and Farrell (2004) posited that "under specific circumstances—when key blogs focus on a new or neglected issue—blogs can socially construct an agenda or interpretive frame that acts as a focal point for mainstream media, shaping and constraining the larger political debate" (p. 2). Rainie (2005) supports such claims, as he found evidence for blogs impacting the media agenda.

Drawing on Esrock and Leighty's (1998) work on organizational communication via the Web, blogs could be considered another tool by organizations (i.e., campaigns) to reach out to the public and "show they serve the general welfare as

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<sup>1</sup>Kurtz mentioned the cases where blogs impacted the media agenda as the racist comment made by then majority leader Trent Lott at Strom Thurmon's 100th birthday party in 2002; the call for Dan Rather's resignation after he endorsed the validity of false documents on 60 Minutes discrediting president George W. Bush's Texas National Guard service; and the coverage of Eason Jordan, a CNN executive, and his allegations that the U.S. military was killing journalists in Iraq.

well as the interests of their shareholders” (Esrock & Leighty, 1998, p. 307), or constituents in this case. Furthermore, blogs, with their built-in system that easily catalogue content into blogger-specified categories, can be seen as another way for organizations (i.e., campaigns) to tailor information to specific publics (Esrock & Leighty, 2000). From pictures of the Bush twins at campaign rallies in Ohio to the Kerry camp’s moment-by-moment rebuttals during the debates, blogs offered a wide-angle view of the campaign (Baker & Stromer-Galley, 2004; Trammell, 2004). Given the frequency of updating blogs with new content, or posts, blogs encourage visitors to return to the site, which only strengthens the organization–public relationship (Esrock & Leighty, 1998; Skuba, 1996).

Analyses of the 2004 campaign blogs find that the medium offers a much more personal view of the candidate by illustrating personal characteristics and character statements (Trammell et al., 2006). Even though candidate Web sites and blogs discussed similar issues (e.g., war, health care, economy in top 4 issues overall for each), blogs were more flexible and diverse, allowing for greater disparity coverage of specific issues (Williams et al., 2005). This diversity was evidenced from a lack of correlation between candidate overall Web site and blog posts. Presumably, because blog posts are published more frequently than new “issue” pages might be created on the general campaign Web site, blog posts enabled a more diverse discussion of issues to target specific publics. The rank order of the top 10 issues on a candidate’s Web site did not correspond with the ranked issues in the same candidate’s blog posts. This is not to say blogs covered more issues, but the campaign did not approach each tool with the same issue attention ratio strategy. Even with these differences in agendas within the candidate’s controlled message media, ranked issues for both Bush and Kerry correlated.

### Agenda Setting and Advertising

As scholars continue to explore the nature of media coverage and its agenda-setting effect on voters evaluations of political candidates (Kiousis, 2004; Kiousis & McCombs, 2004), scholars place much attention on the role of political advertising in shaping public opinion. Bowers (1973) analyzed the voters’ saliency of issues during the 1970 congressional and gubernatorial elections. He found significant correlations between the issue agendas in political advertisements and those of the public agenda. Atkin and Heald (1976) significantly correlated voter knowledge of candidates issue stands and radio and television advertising exposure. As noted by Roberts and McCombs (1994), political advertising directly targets the public agenda and serves as a clear indicator of the issue agendas that candidates wish to advance. Ghorpade (1986) analyzed political advertisements, television news, and public opinion during the 1984 senatorial race in North Carolina. The author significantly correlated the issue agendas of voters and those of the political advertisements from both campaigns. More recently, scholars examined the role of



political advertisements on public opinion by examining the second level of agenda-setting process (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997). They found that political advertising influenced voter agendas of both issues and attribute saliency during the 1995 Spanish elections. Golan, Kiouisis, and McDaniel (2005) examined the agenda-setting function of political advertisements on voters during the 2004 presidential elections. The authors found strong support for the agenda-setting process of these ads at the first level of agenda setting (issue saliency) and mixed evidence for such an effect at the second level of agenda setting (attribute agenda setting).

## Hypotheses

Based on agenda-setting research, which predicts that the issue salience of one medium may influence that of another, our study predicts the following:

- H1: The issue salience of blogs will show a significant positive correlation with issue salience of network television news programs.
- H2: The issue salience of blogs will show a significant positive correlation with issue salience of political advertisements.
- H3: The issue salience of political advertisements will show a significant positive correlation with issue salience of network television news programs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed three separate content analyses to assess the candidates' agenda (ads, blog posts) and the media agenda (television network broadcasts) to test for an intermedia agenda-setting effect. Candidate-controlled messages were examined to determine the agendas of each candidate. We analyzed advertisements ( $n = 116$ ) and blog posts ( $n = 1190$ ) during the general election period from Labor Day to Election Day to determine the candidate agenda, but we considered these two campaign-controlled messages separately. A review of broadcast news stories ( $n = 1,465$ ) on the election and campaigns determined the media agenda. The blog post, advertisement, and broadcast news story each served as a unit of analysis.

## Sample

The sample of our study incorporated three unique types of units: network television broadcast stories, campaign-produced televised advertisements, and official campaign blog posts. There were 2,771 items analyzed to determine the three agendas studied here.

We analyzed 116 political advertisements, with 54 advertisements from the Bush campaign and 62 from the campaign of John Kerry. We gathered all advertisements from the official Web sites of the candidates during the sample period. We chose political advertisements from candidate Web sites rather than from television because the Web site is the only "location" where most ads can be located. It is entirely possible that a coder that conducts a content analysis of candidate ads in California will be exposed to different ads than a scholar who did the same analysis in Texas. This is because political communication experts place different ads that target different audiences with different messages in different areas of the nation. Thus if Bush wanted to hit his core base of voters in South Carolina, he may have placed many ads that stress family values in that area. The same campaign may have placed ads in California that would stress the importance of energy reliance. Thus the candidate Web site is the one location where we could collect most of the ads produced by the two campaigns. In addition, because different political ads run in different frequencies and in different timing in different geographic locations depending on the strategic position of the candidate in that area, there is not necessarily a correlation between when ads are posted on the candidate Web site and when they are aired on television. As such, the release date of the ads would not necessarily specify the time in which the ad would be shown on television.

We downloaded all of the candidate blog posts manually from each campaign blog located on the candidates' official Web sites. Each candidate hosted a blog within his overall site, and only this content from the official blog section became used in the analysis. As such, we excluded any nonofficial campaign blog content (i.e., links to supporters' blogs) from analysis because we were interested in the campaign-controlled public relations messages. Kerry posted on the campaign blog more frequently ( $n = 694$ ) than Bush ( $n = 496$ ).

The sample for the newscasts included 1,465 news stories from the 6:30 p.m. evening news programs of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox from a randomly selected 90 days between March 3 and November 1, 2004. We used the Vanderbilt news archive for the broadcasts. All Vanderbilt news archive stories come from the ABC, CBS, and NBC (6:30 p.m. evening news shows) as well as the CNN and Fox News evening news shows. The 90-day period represents the last phase of the campaign in which the two candidates aimed to shape the public agenda and force their issue saliency on the media agenda through political advertisements and other campaign tools. Thus, we focused our analysis of the news on that period. Although our analysis does not focus on a specific time-series analysis in which specific dates or campaign periods for ads are correlated with campaign periods for media coverage, it does offer a general correlation between the two overall campaign issue agendas across the campaign periods. Similar studies on agenda setting and political campaigns have also offered such an analysis that did not include time specific ad or media coverage

periods (see Golan & Wanta, 2001; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

## Categories

Categories coded in this study included basic demographics of the item (e.g., date, unit type) and issues mentioned. Consistent with previous research, we operationalized issue agenda as media or candidate attention (as appropriate) to an issue (Kioussis, 2005; Tedesco, 2005). Coders recorded issues through a dichotomous variable, being either present (1) or absent (0). We use an exhaustive, standard list of issues from previous studies for the issues. The content analyses identified 10 issues that were the focus of the candidates' and the media's attention: war with Iraq, homeland security, terrorism, the economy, health care, taxes, jobs, education, moral values, and social security. We focused on these issues in the analysis as they were the top 10 issues occurring across the three samples analyzed here. Previous research uses 10 or fewer issues for an analysis. Efforts were made to simplify issue categorization (e.g., primary, secondary, and higher education collapsed into single parsimonious category of "education"). This concentration on a parsimonious selection of variables enabled us to focus on the intermedia agenda setting occurring between candidate-controlled communication and media.

## Coding Process and Reliability

Three trained coders conducted the analysis and discrepancies were reconciled in training. This process is in keeping with Kaid and Wadsworth's (1989) suggestions for properly implementing content analysis. Intercoder reliability for each of the separate content analyses was determined using Holsti's intercoder reliability formula, which measures the percentage of agreement.<sup>2</sup> Intercoder reliability for blog posts as .94 across all categories, .87 (for ads), and .92 (for newscasts). We established intercoder reliability separately for each sample by randomly selecting 10% of the items analyzed.

## Data Analysis

The five data streams were then analyzed in several ways. First, we computed Pearson correlations comparing the amount of attention devoted to each of the issues across the entire 8 weeks of the election campaign, as other intermedia

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<sup>2</sup>The formula used to compute reliability is a formula given by North, Holsti, Zaninovich, and Zinnes (1963). It is given for two coders and can be modified for any number of coders.  $R = 2(C_{1,2}) / C_1 + C_2$ .  $C_{1,2}$  = number of category assignments both coders agree on  $C_1 + C_2$  = total category assignments made by both coders.

agenda-setting research employed this statistic. The use of Pearson correlations has been widely applied as a standard measure used to compare issue saliency across media in previous studies on agenda setting in general (Ghanem & Wanta, 2001; Wanta & Hu, 1993; Winter, Eyal, & Rogers, 1982; Yang & Stone, 2003) and intermedia agenda setting in particular (e.g., Boyle, 2001; Golan, 2006; Tedesco, 2005). This test examined whether the news media and the two candidates' blogs and advertisements gave similar emphases to issues during the entire campaign.

Next, the blogs and news media were further examined through cross-lagged correlations based on the recommendation of Tedesco (2005). Here, the data sets for the two candidates' blogs and the news media were split into 4-week periods, consistent with other fourth-stage agenda-setting research. The early blog content was compared to the late media coverage to examine whether candidate issue emphasis preceded media coverage. The early media coverage was also compared to the late blog content to examine whether media coverage influenced subsequent blog responses.

Finally, we correlated blogs and media coverage each individual week of the campaign. This test, then, would suggest whether a candidate and media coverage were more likely to be emphasizing similar issues at certain points of the campaign.

The candidate advertisements were not included in the final two analyses. Because political advertisements can be run repeatedly throughout a campaign, it was difficult to determine time periods for the ads. In addition, the number of advertisements run by the candidates was much lower than the blog postings or news stories, making statistical tests difficult.

## RESULTS

Table 1 lists the results of the correlations comparing issue agendas across the entire presidential campaign. The largest correlation involved the comparison of the Kerry blog with media coverage ( $r = .921$ ,  $p .001$ ). Media coverage also correlated with the Bush blog. As such, the first hypothesis, which posited a correlation be-

TABLE 1  
Pearson Correlations Comparing Issue Agendas

|            | <i>Kerry Blog</i> | <i>Bush Ads</i> | <i>Kerry Ads</i> | <i>Media</i> |
|------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Bush blog  | .900***           | .596            | .168             | .819**       |
| Kerry blog |                   | .733*           | .428             | .921***      |
| Bush ads   |                   |                 | .711             | .518         |
| Kerry ads  |                   |                 |                  | .185         |

\* $p .05$ . \*\* $p .01$ . \*\*\* $p .001$ .

tween the media and blog agendas, received strong support. The two candidates' blogs also were strongly correlated ( $r = .900, p .001$ ).

The advertising agendas of the two candidates, however, produced few significant correlations. The correlation of the Bush advertisements and Kerry advertisements barely reached statistical significance. The second hypothesis posited that there would be a direct relationship between the blog and advertisement agendas. This was partially supported in that the Bush advertisements correlated with the Kerry blog. The media and advertising agendas were not correlated significantly. The third hypothesis was not supported. Although the candidates may have been posting messages on their blogs in reaction to media coverage, the candidates' advertisements apparently were not related to the issues covered in the news media.

The results of the cross-lagged correlations are shown in Figure 1. All six correlations were statistically significant. However, the media-to-candidate correlations were larger for both President Bush and Senator Kerry than the candidate-to-media

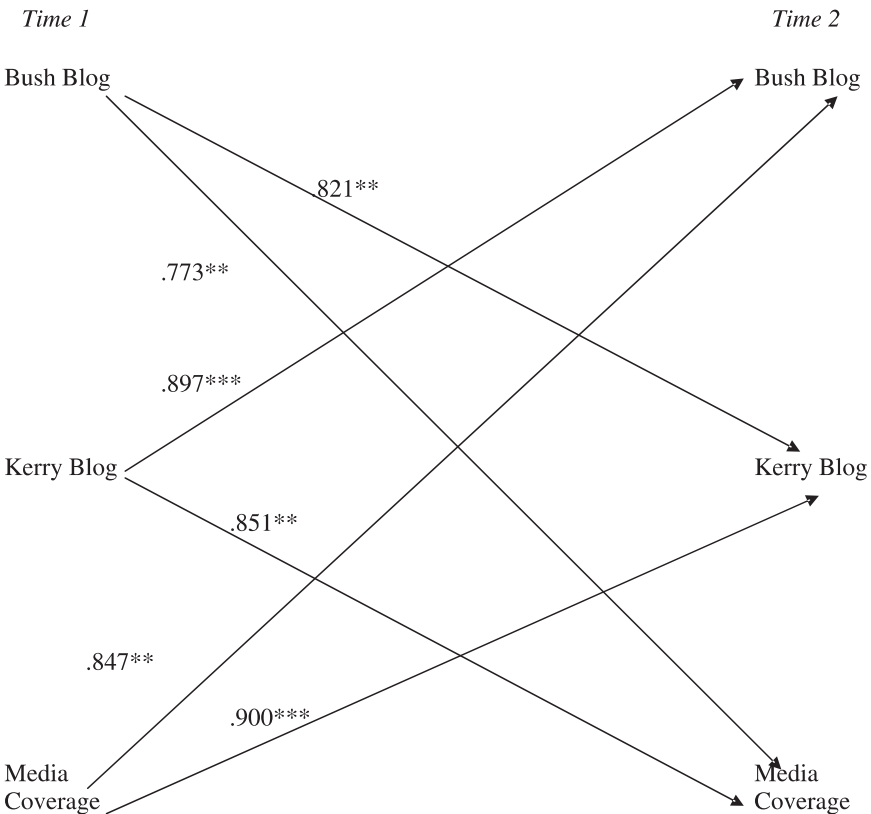


FIGURE 1 Cross-lagged correlations comparing issue agendas of blogs and the news media.  
 Note. \* $p .05$ . \*\* $p .01$ . \*\*\* $p .001$ .

TABLE 2  
Pearson Correlations Comparing Blogs and Media Content Week by Week

| <i>Week</i> | <i>Bush/Media</i> | <i>Kerry/Media</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1           | .766**            | .564               |
| 2           | .760*             | .868***            |
| 3           | .662*             | .828**             |
| 4           | .724*             | .609               |
| 5           | .712*             | .815**             |
| 6           | .944***           | .701*              |
| 7           | .714*             | .797**             |
| 8           | .626              | .906***            |

\**p* .05. \*\**p* .01. \*\*\**p* .001.

correlations, suggesting that the candidates were reacting to media coverage in their blogs rather than influencing media coverage.

The two weakest correlations were produced by the Bush blog. The correlation for the early Kerry blog and the late Bush blog was larger than the reverse.

Finally, Table 2 shows the week-by-week correlations for the candidate blogs and media coverage. Notable are the correlations for the final week of the campaign, when the Kerry blog and media coverage produced a correlation of .906 (*p* .001). The Bush blog, meanwhile, did not significantly correlate with media coverage in the last week of the campaign.

On the other hand, for Weeks 1 and 4, the Kerry blog agenda did not correlate with media coverage. The Bush blog, meanwhile, produced the largest correlation in the study: .944 (*p* .001) in Week 6.

## DISCUSSION

The integration of blogs into American campaigning during the 2004 presidential election cycle proved to be a theoretically interesting and significant opportunity to examine the agenda setting function of the media. Specifically, this research sought to investigate the presence—if any—of intermedia agenda setting. In doing so, the study examined two sets of candidate-controlled advertising communication pieces (advertisements and blogs) along with the media agenda of the major television networks. We found mixed support for an intermedia agenda-setting function. That is, blogs correlated with the media agenda, whereas television advertisements did not. Furthermore, data suggested what Tedesco (2005) called an intercandidate agenda-setting effect, in that candidates set the agenda for one another.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Bush's blog posts were correlated with Kerry's ads; cross-lagged correlation noted a strong relationship between the candidate blogs, but the correlation of Kerry's blog to Bush's blog was higher suggesting that Kerry's posts set the agenda for those on the Bush blog.

The results of our study provide evidence of the intermedia agenda-setting process and suggest that the news agendas of several leading broadcast news organizations were somewhat shaped by modern campaign tools such as blogs and political advertisements. Our study is one of the first to build on the Lopez-Escobar et al. (1998) study in analyzing the intermedia agenda-setting effect of political advertising and is the first to incorporate blogs as a tool for intermedia agenda setting.

After finding a correlation between the news and blog agendas, the next logical question to be asked is, Who set the agenda? Are blog posts, which are so highly correlated with the media agenda, setting the media agenda or are they merely reacting to the coverage of the issues? The data presented here in the cross-lagged correlation suggested that the media continues to set the agenda. Candidate blog posts simply react to that agenda, albeit in “real time.” In elections past, the lag time for a candidate response to the media agenda was dictated by television advertisement production time—however, blogs that are used as a “frequently updated” peek into campaign headquarters allow for instant published reactions to media coverage. Therefore, blogs arguably decrease salience time lag in regards to issues. Such assertions are in line with Roberts et al. (2002), who found a reduced agenda-setting lag occurred online.

In regard to intercandidate agenda setting, a concept identified by Tedesco (2005), we found evidence that candidate agendas can correlate across different media. Specifically, Bush’s television advertisements correlated with Kerry’s blog posts, signaling a direct relationship between these two candidate-controlled media. Such intermedia agenda-settings functions among candidates leads to questions regarding which medium is more effective for driving the relationship, the role of the incumbent versus challenger, and the question of whether one is setting the agenda for the other or if they are simultaneously reacting to the media and/or public agenda. In addition, these findings define a greater area of research opportunity for investigating a possible domino effect of intermedia agenda setting meaning that one dominant medium sets the agenda thereby triggering other media.

## Blogs

Blog posts displayed the highest signification correlation with the media agenda during the hot phase of the campaign. Furthermore, this research revealed that the media continue to drive the agenda by telling the public and campaigns what to think about.

Given the inexpensive production cost associated with blog posts, compared to that associated with creating a television advertisement, such findings are logical. Blog posts are known for being frequently updated, and both candidates posted fresh content several times a day around the clock. Whereas previous campaigns

would have to balance the importance of responding to the media's agenda with the available advertising funds, the modern campaign can quickly and inexpensively respond through a blog post. This was exhibited every day when campaign blogs reacted to media coverage. For example, each morning Bush's blog would contain a post titled "Morning Reads," which contained a roundup of media coverage with links to online versions of the articles. Kerry's campaign, on the other hand, would reference media articles throughout the day and post the full text of the article within the post. The blog format enabled campaigns to cover a wider array of issues because there are more blog posts than televised ads, supporting Williams et al.'s (2005) proposition for the diversity of blog issue coverage.

As the campaign wore on and entered into weeks with major events, such as debates, there were noticeable changes in the strength of association of the blog-media agenda. For example, there were presidential and vice presidential debates from Weeks 4 to 6, and Election Day occurred in Week 8. As the challenger, Kerry faced the largest hurdle in an effort to overcome the world's most influential agenda setter (i.e., president). After the first presidential debate in Week 4, Kerry's blog posts exhibited strong direct relationships with the media agenda through Election Day. Kerry's early performance can be attributed to the difficulty the challenger faced on the heels of a heated primary where he competed with nine other contenders.

## Ads

The findings here suggest that the issue saliency as presented in candidate political advertisements did not impact the issue saliency of the newscasts. This is inconsistent with previous studies that suggested political advertising had a strong intermedia agenda setting effect on the news media (Boyle, 2001; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998). One possible explanation for our finding was candidate John Kerry's attempt to shift the campaign and media agenda away from the war on terror and toward domestic issues.

Candidates appeared to use their television advertisements to discuss issues outside of the set media agenda. With such high correlations between the media agenda and blog posts, campaigns could possibly have used the advertisements in this way as a strategic maneuver to increase the breadth of the agenda. With campaign communication in blog posts actively addressing the media agenda, television advertisements offered an opportunity to reach a greater audience with a wider range of issues not necessarily part of the media's agenda. Inasmuch as this is true, this would signal a strategic command of the various media available to campaigns and distinct strategy behind deciding which medium should disseminate a particular message.



## Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. As a single examination of one election on the national level in the inaugural run of a specific technology in American politics, these findings should be interpreted as an early report of the potential of blogs. In addition, these findings are limited by sample, variety of candidate-controlled messages (only two here), and the use of a single media channel (broadcast news).

Even so, there are many directions for future inquiries. For instance, future research should investigate the variables studied here in more races. Campaign and media agendas should be compared with the public agenda to determine if a transfer of salience does occur and which medium is more successful in predicting the public's agenda. In addition, researchers should further examine the intermedia agenda-setting function between candidates. Finally, the proposed "domino effect" of intermedia agenda setting discussed here should also be investigated. That is, researchers should determine which medium sets the agenda and establish a hierarchy of adoption of that agenda. Based on the intercandidate agenda setting results reported here, such future studies should also incorporate candidate-controlled communication.

## CONCLUSION

Although the media continue to set the agenda for campaign communication, modern campaign communication tools such as blogs create opportunities to test the direction, time lag, and strength of correlation across multiple media. The evidence for intermedia agenda setting here supported the idea that television networks set the agenda for campaign communication. However, additional analyses suggested an intercandidate agenda setting effect across media. Such complex relationships suggest that the question of "who sets the agenda for whom" must continue to be asked as new communication technologies emerge.

This question of who sets the media agenda is of great importance as it allows campaigns to evaluate the salience of their message strategy. Scholars identified several key forces that shape the media agenda, including but not limited to the presidential State of the Union addresses (Wanta, Stephenson, Van Slyke Turk, & McCombs, 1989), government officials (Atwater & Fico, 1986), and political advertising (Roberts & McCombs, 1994). Our study added to knowledge of the sources of the media agenda and intermedia agenda setting by examining the role that campaign blogs and political advertising in shaping the media agenda. Both campaign tools are designed to push forward candidates' agenda of issues in an attempt to identify them as salient within the media agenda.

This study found evidence of a reciprocal intermedia agenda-setting effect between blogs and broadcast television news. Such findings reinforce the Lopez-

Escobar et al. (1998) results, which suggested intermedia agenda setting is not always unidirectional but may be multidirectional. As campaigns attempt to shape the media agenda of issue saliency, it often reacts to media coverage of different issues as evident by the findings of our study. Future studies should further investigate this complex relationship and should incorporate the potential influence of the intermedia agenda-setting process on public opinion at both the first and second levels of agenda setting.

As communication technology evolves and more people and campaigns adopt these tools for political information use, campaigns may be able to better segment audiences and target publics as Esrock and Leighty (2000) suggested. Use of blog categories and topic-oriented syndication feeds (i.e., RSS) tools like YouTube, and social media engagement as a platform to connect candidates and constituents, may create an opportunity for campaigns to better target audiences in a potentially more successful and viral way.

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