INTERMEDIA AGENDA-SETTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICAL BLOGS

AND LEGACY NEWS MEDIA: A STUDY OF THE 'OBAMA-IS-A-MUSLIM' RUMOR

By

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TITLE: INTERMEDIA AGENDA-SETTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICAL

BLOGS AND LEGACY NEWS MEDIA: A STUDY OF THE 'OBAMA-IS-A-MUSLIM'

RUMOR

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Dennis T. Lowry

   A number of incidents such as the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor during the 2008

presidential election suggest that influential political blogs are playing a major role in setting the

agenda of the legacy media. The power of the political blogosphere is forcing media

practitioners, communication scholars and political theorists to re-conceptualize how issues

arrive on the political and public agenda. This new phenomenon challenges the fundamental

assumptions of agenda-setting theory to the extent that the 42-year old model, including the

notion of a shared public agenda, should be reevaluated. By situating news agenda research

within a larger intellectual context of agenda setting, this dissertation explored the intermedia

agenda-setting relationship between political blogs and legacy news media, such as newspapers,

network TV, and cable TV channels.

   Analyzing the contents count data of political blogs and legacy media and Internet Search

Volume Index (SVI) data, this dissertation explored how coverage of a certain issue by top-

ranking and influential political blogs may predict the coverage of the same issue by legacy news

media. Employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the results of

the study revealed that political blogs significantly predicted the coverage of the legacy media on the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor over a period of five days. The results also showed that the coverage of the rumor by both the political blogs and legacy media significantly predicted the level of Internet searches related to the rumor on all five days. The study also found positive and statistically significant correlations between the coverage by the political blogs and legacy media on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor and the volume of Internet searches on that rumor. The correlation was high on day 1, and decreased on each subsequent day.

The study also found bi-directional agenda-setting relationships between the coverage of the political blogs and legacy media on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor. However, there was hardly any bi-directional relationship between the coverage of political blogs of the rumor and the volume of Internet searches related to the rumor. Although, the study found bi-directional relationship between the coverage of the legacy media on the rumor and the volume of Internet searched related to the rumor, the relationship faded away quickly.

However, the study findings suggest that the perceived power of political blogs should be seen as trivial and ephemeral while that of the legacy news media should be seen as substantial and indelible in setting the public agenda. These findings may broaden our understanding of intermedia agenda-setting.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Professor Md. Nawsher Ali and Mrs. Selima

Khatun, and my late mother-in-law, Mrs. Ayesha Akhter, for their sacrifices, selflessness, and

encouraging my education. I wish my mother-in-law, who died unexpectedly in 2012, could have

seen me finish this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Political blogs, in many instances, are now playing a major role in setting the agenda of the legacy news media (Heim, 2013; Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011; Pavlik, 2008). The power of the political blogosphere is forcing media practitioners, communication scholars and political theorists to re-conceptualize how issues arrive on the political and public agenda (Johnson, 2013; Wallsten, 2007). A number of incidents such as the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor during the 2008 presidential election, the resignation of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in 2002 and the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in 1998 suggest that influential political blogs are playing a major role in the process by which some issues become news in the legacy media, and consequently influence and affect the public agenda (Rutenberg, 2008; Fowler, 2008; Farrell & Drezner, 2008). In November 2012, New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez's alleged prostitution scandal went viral to the national media after a political blog, Daily Caller, published a story that was later proved wrong (ABC News, 2013).

This changed media landscape, where political blogs have enormous power (Davis, 2009; Boehlert, 2009), challenges the fundamental assumptions of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) to the extent that the 42-year-old model, including the notion of a shared public agenda, should be reevaluated. By situating news agenda research within a larger intellectual context of agenda setting, this dissertation explores the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs and legacy news media such as newspapers, television, and cable channels.

Several scholars in the mass communication and political science disciplines spent a considerable amount of time and energy to examine the hypothesis that blog agendas may predict

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the agendas of legacy news media (Enli, 2013; Drezner & Farrell, 2008). The findings in these studies revealed that blog agendas exercise strong power on the legacy news media agendas. There is growing evidence that journalists of legacy media take their cues from top political blogs, since these A-list blogs provide easily accessible and frequently updated information. As a result, "journalists are increasingly relying on them as a shortcut for determining whether an emerging political issue is worth discussing" (Wallsten, 2007, p. 567). In covering major political events, bloggers are frequently being cited as sources by the legacy media outlets (Hennessy & Martin, 2006).

Analyzing the contents count data of political blogs and legacy media and Internet Search Volume Index (SVI) data, this dissertation explored how coverage of a certain issue by top-ranking and influential political blogs predicted the coverage of the same issue by legacy news media.

Political Blogs

Political blogs appeared as a force in the new media landscape in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Meraz, 2011). Starting as personal online communication tools in the 1990s, blogs not only have grown in popularity with their on-demand content and ability to be shared and discussed with others (Papacharissi, 2009; Levy, 2008; Spigel, 2009), but have now become an important engine of media influence in the United States and around the world (Du, 2013). Such blogs now have a major impact on mainstream journalism and public affairs (Jensen, 2003). Top newspapers and other prominent legacy media organizations now prominently feature blog contents (Veenstra, 2009). Perhaps nothing illustrates the profound changes in the influence of the Internet today more than the use of social networks and blogs (Groshek & Groshek, 2013).

Blogs are simple to use but extremely powerful personal publishing tool (Boyd, 2006). As of February 2011 there were more than 156 million blogs (BlogPulse, 2011). Unfortunately, BlogPulse is no longer available, thus making it difficult to come up with an authentic figure related to the number of blogs that exist today worldwide. However, as of December 2013, in the United States, there were more than 10,000 political blog sites (Technorati, 2013).

Even the relatively new phenomenon of blogging is itself undergoing change. They have gone from an upstart to a medium having an influence on mainstream narratives, such that according to Technorati (2011), nearly half (48%) of all bloggers believe that the majority of consumers of news and entertainment will be getting their information from blogs in the next five years instead of from the legacy media. Technorati (2011) also reported that the lines separating blogs, micro-blogs and social networks are blurring, if not disappearing altogether, as bloggers' use of and engagement with various social networking tools grows.

More than 25% Americans read blog contents to get information concerning the U.S. presidential elections in 2008 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009). The number of people visiting some popular political blogs such as *The Huffington Post* and *Politico* (these two organizations have now became mainstream; however, during 2007-2008, they were purely political blogs) during the 2008 presidential election campaign rose dramatically, as some blogs gained readership by triple-digit percentage points compared to the number of visitors of those blogs in 2007 (comScore, 2008). In September 2008, *The Huffington Post* attracted 4.5 million visitors, which was 472% more than the numbers of visitors in the previous year. Releasing a study of visitation to political blogs during the 2008 presidential election season, a senior analyst at comScore, Andrew Lipsman, observed: "with each new election cycle, the Internet is playing a more significant role in shaping the stories of the day that are so crucial in formulating public

opinion on issues and candidates" (comScore, 2008). Lipsman went on to state that, in the 2008 election cycle, several political blogs unaffiliated with larger media outlets strengthened their influences, and were "beginning to enter the mainstream public consciousness" (comScore, 2008).

<div align="center">The "Opinion Entrepreneurs" and the "Cycle of Media Influence"</div>

For decades, it has been a given in scholarly research into the agenda-setting effects of the media that legacy media—newspapers, magazines, radio and television news, primarily—have played a major role in setting the public agenda (McCombs, 2004). However, now with the revenue, audience and other struggles of the legacy media industry, its needs and efforts to adapt to a changing media landscape as it strives to maintain its relevance and, more significantly, the explosion of the Internet media including political blogs, may be changing that role. Some media scholars are now questioning whether the Internet media are changing the dynamic of agenda-setting and whether a new model of agenda-setting is required in the digital age. Focusing upon one of the prominent and most passionate rumors of the 2008 presidential campaign, this study attempts to answer this fundamental question. The dissertation examined the agenda-setting impact of political blogs on the 2008 campaign's most widely-discussed and argued-about story, in fact a rumor, that then-candidate Senator Barack Obama was secretly a Muslim.

While most of the attention during the 2008 campaign was on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor, there were other stories during the campaign that also illuminated the role of the political blogs in setting the agenda for the legacy media. One took place when Obama, at an event in San Francisco, described working-class voters in Pennsylvania as "bitter" people who "cling to guns or religion." His remark was first reported by a blogger named Mayhill Fowler (2008) and soon was being reported in newspapers and on TV nationwide. Another story focused on former

Governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, when she was announced as the running mate of the Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain. A rumor surfaced that Palin did not give birth to her special-needs son Trig Palin; rather, he supposedly was born to her daughter, Bristol Palin. This story was also picked up by bloggers, and it forced the McCain campaign to deny the rumor but concede that Bristol Palin was pregnant. An angry advisor to the McCain campaign said: "It used to be that a lot of those smears and the crap on the Internet stayed out of the newsrooms of serious journalists. That's not the case anymore.… It goes right from the Internet, right to the newsroom and right to us, and we're compelled to respond to it" (Shear & Vick, 2008, para. 7). These stories and others illustrate how the growing acceptance of political blogs and low barriers to entry, coupled with the public's increasing tolerance of and appetite for unmediated news, have given rise to the power of alternative media to be agenda setters themselves. The incidents described above illustrate not only how agenda setting may have changed in the 42 years since McCombs and Shaw's (1972) groundbreaking study, but how political topics may originate from the political blogs and then progress via cable to the mainstream media and from there to the general public. Furthermore, especially for political bloggers, Internet media can guide the public indirectly by calling mainstream journalists' attention to issues in hopes the issues will receive attention in the press and, thereby, alter the public's perceptions (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; McCombs, 2005).

It is with this background that this dissertation investigated the concept of intermedia agenda-setting, that is, whether there is a relationship between political blogs and legacy media. The focus of this examination was what has come to be a textbook example of the agenda-setting role of the digital media: the rumor of Barack Obama's supposedly secret Muslim faith, which became a major story in the 2008 presidential campaign. In examining the rumor, the dissertation

examined role of "opinion entrepreneurs" and how the "conservative echo chamber" (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008) was used to reinforce and amplify an unfounded rumor and insert it into the mainstream media. This study also examined the role of the "liberal echo chamber" (Groseclose, 2011) in refuting the rumor.

For perhaps the first time, the campaign of 2008 offered a new set of media influences, which Dreier and Martin (2010) called "opinion entrepreneurs," who played a key role in originating the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' and advancing it into the embrace of the legacy media. As conceptualized, opinion entrepreneurs are akin to Entman's (2004) idea of elites (public officials and experts) who influence the mainstream news media. However, these opinion entrepreneurs are different in that they are non-elite individuals and semi-political organizations which, merely by using a web page or blog, and working outside the boundaries of more acceptable concepts of influence, bring their views into play with and for the legacy news media and public agenda. Furthermore, their collaborative style magnifies their influence. The result of this is that, being part of an informal network echoing the same message, they create an echo chamber whose overall impact is greater than its individual "parts" might otherwise have (Dreier & Martin, 2010).

Political Blogs' Roles on Legacy Media Agendas

As is widely acknowledged, the growth of digital technologies has brought about momentous changes in the media environment as well as shifts in the way public opinion is formed, in turn spawning critically important debates about the very direction of society. The dramatic changes in the media environment can nowhere be better illustrated than by explaining the original agenda-setting study, in which McCombs and Shaw (1972) needed to evaluate only five local and national newspapers, two television networks and two major news magazines to

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cover "nearly all of the sources used by Chapel Hill voters during the 1968 presidential election" (p. 63). Now, with the explosion of numerous media platforms brought about by the arrival of 24/7 cable and satellite television, cell phones, video games, and the Internet, some scholars are beginning to ask the once-heretical question of whether the concept of mass communication itself has ended (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Nevertheless, perhaps to the surprise of many, early experimental research on the effects of the Internet found that legacy mass media were still a major influence in agenda-setting. They also found that news on the Internet, similar to news in legacy media, could make issues salient (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002). Two studies that analyzed the 2004 U.S. presidential election showed that the mainstream media still had influence. In one of them, it was determined that the blog agenda, regardless of the blogs' political biases, was similar to the agenda of the mainstream news media because "limited resources for gathering information make blogs heavily dependent on reports from more legacy media" (Lee, 2007). The second study found that television networks, in particular, set the agenda for campaign blogs, as those blogs react to the media agenda (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008).

This dissertation, in contrast to the findings cited above, hypothesized that political blogs, on at least some occasions, might predict the legacy news media agenda. Brubaker (2008) emphatically stated that the assumption of agenda-setting theory that people are receiving a common media agenda, and thus acquiring a common public agenda, becomes questionable in a new media world. Another aspect of the news has also been influenced by the advent of new media, in this case, social media. According to Messner and DiStaso (2008), the news cycle has changed to what they define as a news source cycle, in which content is reciprocated from media to media. The researchers introduced their idea after examining the use of blogs as sources for

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the legacy media and the use of sources in blogs by analyzing 2,059 articles over six years in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. They found that there was an increasing tendency by the newspapers to give legitimacy to blogs as reliable sources and, in a separate analysis of 120 blogs, determined that the blogs relied on the legacy media as sources, hence creating the news source cycle. In turning agenda-setting theory on its head, researchers have noted that today the locus and role of the legacy media have changed, from the former "offensive" posture of placing items on the public agenda, to a "defensive" one in which they are required to report on certain issues or cover them in a certain way (McLeary, 2007) because those issues were first placed on the agenda by the political blogosphere (Messner & DiStaso, 2008). Even as these changes are occurring, political blogs are expanding the traditional agenda-building process by sending the legacy media content into the digital universe.

On numerous occasions, news coverage that was initiated by political blogs has found its way into the legacy media (Garrison & Messner, 2007), a phenomenon supported by many research studies and professional articles focusing on the political blogs' role on the legacy news media. Starting with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in 1998 (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004) and the resignation of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott in 2002 (Alterman, 2003) and to the sexting scandal involving New York Congressman Anthony Weiner that led to his resignation on 16 June, 2011 (CNN, 2011), the number of investigative "coups" by political blogs has steadily increased. To cite another important example of their influence, it was bloggers who called into question the report by CBS news on the military files of then-President George W. Bush that led the retirement of long-time news anchor Dan Rather (Pein, 2005). In another telling example, in 2005, CNN executive Eason Jordan resigned after making controversial comments on the war in Iraq—comments first reported on blogs. Also that year, the identity of White House

correspondent "Jeff Gannon" was exposed by bloggers, with the associated news exposure forcing him to return his accreditation (Kurtz, 2005a).

While it has been personal scandals involving the private lives of political figures such as Florida Congressman Mark Foley in 2006 or Weiner where the impact of political blogs has been most noticeable, blogs also influenced the reporting by newspapers and television networks during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Iraq War from its beginning in 2003 to the present and the South Asian tsunami in 2004 (Farhi & Wiltz, 2005). Today, it is expected that the legacy news media will often refer to the reporting or editorializing of political blogs (Messner & DiStaso, 2008). In the Weiner scandal, conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart on his BigGovernment.com blog first reported that the former member of the House of Congress sent sexually suggestive photos to different women via Twitter. The legacy media picked it up, and the story dominated the cable and mainstream news cycle for almost 10 days in early June 2011 (CBS News, 2011). In this incident, as in countless others, the legacy media relied on political blogs as source and reminded theorists and lay observers alike how blogs play a significant role as agenda-setters for the legacy media.

The affair between President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky that eventually led to the president's impeachment is generally considered to be the first incident in which blogs had a major impact on politics and the legacy news media (Bucy et al., 2007). In a study by Williams and Delli Carpini (2004), the publication of the scandal on the blog *The Drudge Report* was seen as the first breach in the dike of gate-keeping theory as developed by White (1950), in that, while the legacy news media (in the form of *Newsweek* magazine) acted as a gate-keeper in refusing to break the story, it was a blog that made the decision to report what were, at the time, only rumors. Soon the story was being picked up by the legacy media, which

cited *The Drudge Report* as a source and which covered the scandal on a daily basis through the spring of 1999 (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003).

<p style="text-align:center">The Relationship between Blog Agenda and Legacy News Agenda</p>

One of the most dramatic ways the Internet has changed contemporary life is in its ability to exponentially increase the amount of information available to the public and simultaneously ease the means of accessing that information, with Internet search engines—Google and Yahoo, for example—playing the major role. To gain access to information on the Internet, users simply enter the terms of their interest into the search engine and the results of their search appear virtually instantaneously. This technology and these terms provide a treasure trove of information and, at the same time, valuable insight into the public's interests (Jeong, 2008). Thus, this dissertation attempted to determine the relationship between the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor and the online searches related to it. Because Internet technology now makes provision for the results of online searches in rank order, it is possible to see not only those issues people are interested in but also the relative salience of such issues during a certain period of time, thus offering researchers a unique ability to look at the relationship of online search terms as compared to legacy media coverage of those search terms (Ragas & Tran, 2013; Ragas, Tran, & Martin, 2013).

It is important to note that Internet searches on a topic can be seen as actions that represent the degree of public importance of that topic. As cited in McCombs (2004), Evatt and Ghanem identified social salience, personal salience and emotional arousal as three dimensions of public salience. For an individual to conduct an Internet search about a topic, that topic would probably require relevance or importance (social salience), concern to the individual (personal salience), and interest or excitement (emotional arousal) in some combination. As a result, taking

into account the likelihood that media coverage of a topic can impact public salience, the investigation of Internet search behavior relative to agenda-setting theory can be seen as a worthwhile endeavor.

The use of search engines is all-pervasive in optimizing the value of the Internet, but even so, little empirical investigation on this topic has been carried out so far, leaving key questions unanswered, such as "what is the relationship between legacy media coverage and Internet search terms?" (Jeong, 2008). By analyzing the relationship between the Internet public agenda and the legacy news agenda in the context of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor, this dissertation attempted to fill in the gap in this aspect of agenda-setting research.

The Origin of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" Rumor

While a candidate for president in 2008, Barack Obama came under considerable questioning for his supposed Muslim background. Despite a storm of rebuttal by his campaign, including Obama's description of his Christian beliefs, polls showed a sizable percentage of Americans shared the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' misperception. Even though it is not definitely clear where or how the rumor about Obama's religion originated, its very existence, to say nothing of its all-encompassing spread, came about in large part through the political bloggers.

Most observers (Rutenberg, 2008; Turley, 2008) at the time said the rumor originated with Andy Martin, an Internet columnist and political blogger, who spun a complicated story that Obama was a Muslim who was hiding his religion. Martin made his allegation in August 2004, just weeks after then Senator Obama's widely praised speech at the Democratic National Convention, which raised his profile to a significant degree and set him off in pursuit of the presidency (Rutenberg, 2008). Even though Martin's press release was all but ignored by the

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legacy media, it gained considerable traction thanks to FreeRepublic.com, a conservative website, and, over the years, email messages, other websites, and books.

Perhaps the most widely noted—and, subsequently, discredited—work that attempted to elaborate on the rumor, *Obama Nation*, a book by Jerome R. Corsi (2008), begins by quoting Martin, whose rumor had previously gained traction in 2006 when a person named Ted Sampley wrote an article describing Obama as a "secret practitioner" of Islam. Sampley's article, relying to a great extent on Martin, went viral on the Internet, with its contents eventually finding their way into various e-mail messages, with the added assertion that Obama had attended "Jakarta's Muslim Wahhabi schools. Wahhabism is the radical teaching that created the Muslim terrorists who are now waging jihad on the rest of the world" (Rutenberg, 2008, p. A-1).

It turned out that was only the beginning. As Obama announcement his candidacy for the president, in February 2007, Internet chatter about his supposed religious history spiked. Conservative websites started publishing articles asserting that Obama attended a radical Muslim school as a child in Indonesia. Emails started arriving in voters' inboxes claiming that Obama would be the first Arab-American president (Rutenberg, 2008). On January 17, 2007, InsightMag.com reported that Obama attended a madrassa, or Islamic seminary, as a boy. Whether these and other bloggers knew it or not, the truth is that Obama was raised for the most part by his Caucasian mother, who was an atheist, and his maternal grandparents, who were Protestant, in Hawaii, and that he hardly knew his father, a Kenyan from a Muslim family who characterized himself variously as an atheist or agnostic (Rutenberg, 2008). While true that Obama lived as a young boy in Indonesia for a few years with a stepfather, Obama described his stepfather as casually following a liberal Islam. Obama (2004) also wrote in his book *Dreams From My Father* that for two of his years in Indonesia, he attended a Catholic school, learning

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about the Bible, and later spent two years at an Indonesian public school open to all faiths, where students were taught about the Koran.

In a circuitous route, InsightMag.com, an offshoot of a company controlled by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, publisher of *The Washington Times* and operator of the wire service United Press International, claimed that the "secret Muslim" rumor had been spread by then Senator Hillary Clinton's camp, which Clinton, soon to become a competing presidential candidate to Obama, firmly denied. Helped by the conservative media, InsightMag.com's report segued into 11 days of unfounded accusations against the two leading contenders for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. The InsightMag.com report, which was anonymously sourced, had, by January 19, been picked up by conservative media people and given major coverage on national cable networks, including CNN Headline News and Fox News. Twelve days after the original InsightMag.com posting, on Jan. 29, *The New York Times* reported that the InsightMag.com article "was able to set off a wave of television commentary, talk-radio chatter, official denials, investigations by journalists around the globe and news media self-analysis that has lasted 11 days and counting" (Rutenberg, 2008). There will be a detailed discussion in Chapter 3 about how the so-called news and commentaries on the websites, talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Fox News Channel, and conservative TV show hosts such as Glen Beck and Sean Hannity brought the Internet-based rumor to the "elite audience," which ultimately pushed the issue to the legacy media agenda.

The Internet and television coverage of this rumor about Obama seemed to have an impact on voters. According to Pew polls, by March 2008, 38% of polling respondents said they had heard ''a lot'' about the Obama rumor and 10% believed he was Muslim (Pew, 2008c). Later, as the presidential campaign moved from the primary to the general election season, the

mainstream media began paying attention to the rumor. From March 13 to April 12, 2008, media coverage of the rumor took up only about 0.4% of campaign coverage (PEJ, 2008b). However, after Obama gained the Democratic Party nomination, the media's coverage of the story erupted, as, from June 13 to July 12, stories that called into question Obama's patriotism or alluded to the Muslim rumor comprised 3.8% of campaign coverage (PEJ, 2008b). These numbers caused great concern in the Obama campaign, which, as a result, developed a Website to counter the untrue claims about the candidate's religion. Nevertheless, in spite of the campaign's efforts, by July the percentage of Americans who believed Obama was Muslim had risen to 12%, where it remained until Election Day (Pew, 2008b, 2008d).
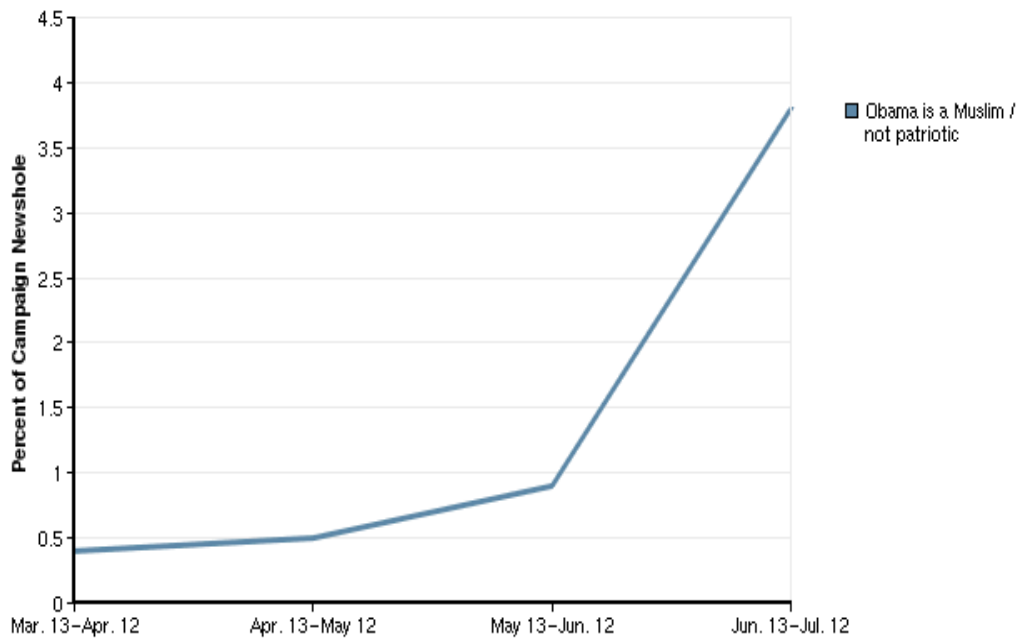
Figure 1. *Media coverage of "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor, March-July 2008*
Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

According to Manjoo (2008), the persistence of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor illustrates a growing vulnerability in contemporary culture of innuendo. While professional journalists ordinarily take it for granted that facts are critical—show the reading or viewing

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public that which is true, and they will make decisions accordingly—psychologists who study how we separate truth from falsehood say the process is not that simple. Add to that the facts that digital technology creates social networks that are both closely knit and far-flung, rumors are now able to travel widely within certain groups before they have to confront the truth of their content.

The Context of Rumor Transmission

Rumors have been the subject of scholarly study for over 100 years, mainly by psychologists and sociologists, but only relatively recently they have been the subject of inquiry by communication researchers, who have turned to the investigation of rumors with seriousness of purpose. There are many reasons for this interest. While rumors have traditionally been associated with face-to-face (or "mouth to ear") transmission, the mass media have become an increasingly important source of rumors because of the media's ability to reach immensely large numbers of people. Also, with the rise of the Internet, rumors can be disseminated more quickly and to a wider audience (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004). Historically, rumors have proven to be a longstanding problem for communication campaign efforts, especially efforts organized for public relations, political and health purposes, because they can hinder the flow of accurate information and allow misinformation to spread (Southwell & Yzer, 2007).

How should we define a rumor? There are many definitions, mostly from the social psychology literature. For example, Allport and Postman (1947) defined rumor as a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word-of-mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present. Rosnow and Kimmel (2000) defined a rumor as an unverified proposition for beliefs that bears topical relevance for persons actively involved in its dissemination while DiFonzo and Bordia (2007) described rumors as unverified and

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instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in contexts of ambiguity, danger, or potential threat and that function to help people make sense and manage risk.

Whatever else they are, rumors must, in the context of rumor transmission, be distinguished from news. Being unverified statements, rumors can be differentiated from news, which is supposed to be fact-based and centered upon details, which have been investigated and confirmed (Shibutani, 1966). However, the line of demarcation between rumor and news has become less and less distinguishable (Kimmel, 2004) as 24-hour news cycle and the rise of the Internet have fed a dramatically increased number of stories being reported without adequate, or even any, fact checking, leading to rumors being reported as facts or news (Kimmel, 2004). What are the dynamics of rumor belief and transmission? These are important concepts to investigate, as rumors are proven to affect people's attitudes and behaviors in many different realms, including, for example, the political, where rumors have altered the public's opinion of candidates and possibly affected voting outcomes (Garrett, 2010). Research on rumors proposes that they are aligned with personal relevance and uncertainty (Fine, 2005), lack of control (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007), and anxiety (Rosnow, 1991). In order for a rumor to be accepted as true and then spread, it must first have importance for the individual receiving it, for without such relevance, it is not likely to be accepted and disseminated (Fine, 2005).

As for the importance of uncertainty, rumors are seen as both cause and result of uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2006). It could be a result because people will try to reduce their uncertainty from lack of information from trusted news sources by seeking more informal sources in an effort to gain certainty. It could be a cause because, in turning to these informal sources, people will contribute to rumor transmission, even if the truth of their sources has not been verified (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). According to DiFonzo and Bordia (2007), people are

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more likely to believe rumors if the rumors are aligned with people's attitudes, a situation which obtains because people are "biased processors" of information. They are more willing to believe and accept what Taber and Lodge (2006) called attitude congruent information than attitude incongruent information. People desire beliefs that align with their worldview, and when those beliefs come under attack, people will tend to process new information—rumors—in a manner to keep their belief system whole. As Hawkins, Hoch and Myers (2001) pointed out, rumor belief can also be enhanced by repetition: the more frequently a rumor is recited, the greater are its chances to be believed.

Role of Media in Rumor Transmission

Where once rumors were mostly spread from person to person (Fine, 2005), they are now disseminated more and more by the mass media, including, increasingly, sources on the Internet, and, moreover, the media have become critical to the belief as well as the transmission of rumors. In disseminating rumors, the media's role falls into four general areas (Kimmel, 2004), functioning as rumor conduits, rumor instigators, rumor catalysts, and rumor combaters, with each role having its own influence on rumor transmission and belief. As rumor conduits—when, for example, they cover the events producing a rumor— the media, arrange for rumor dissemination. In instigating rumors, the media act as either source or creator of a rumor, or both, while as a rumor catalyst, the media can make a bad situation worse. Even by acknowledging a rumor, the media can bestow legitimacy and importance on it and camouflage its details. Making matters even more problematic, such news stories can feed on themselves in that by contributing to a certain state of affairs, that state of affairs then begets more rumors. Last, as rumor combaters, the media can expose the falsity of rumors. The risk is that in trying to dispel a rumor, the media may end up playing their role as rumor conduit or catalyst because, by their

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mere mention of the rumor, the media might be giving it legitimacy. Rumor dissemination and transmission, like a virus that thrives among an ever-larger population, are dependent to a growing extent on the media—particularly the national news outlets but also, more and more, the Internet (Ma, 2008)—because of their ability to send out rumors to so many receivers in such a brief amount of time. Adding fuel to the rumor fire is the fact that with the Internet and the proliferation of wireless devices, people can obtain information from virtually anywhere in the world, thus increasing their vulnerability to rumors. Search engines also make it easy for people to get information about a rumor quickly (Garrett, 2010).

<div align="center">The Changing Media Landscape</div>

The extent of change in how information is assembled and disseminated is much discussed but perhaps little appreciated, at least in a quantitative sense. Consider the following: Eric Schmidt, former CEO and current executive chairman of Google, estimated that humans now create as much information in two days as we did from the appearance of *Homo sapiens* through 2003 (Siegler, 2010). Or that Facebook did not exist in 2003—yet now reaches more people than all other major U.S. media outlets combined (FCC, 2011). As these observations demonstrate, the digital revolution has completely changed the ways and extent to which information is created, distributed, shared and displayed.

By most measures, today's media environment is more vigorous than ever. Consumers of news and information can avail themselves of faster and cheaper distribution networks, purveyors of information face fewer barriers to entry, and there are more ways to consume information than ever (FCC, 2011). The same digital means that have recently helped overthrow governments abroad (Tunisia and Egypt, for example) are providing Americans dynamic and inventive opportunities to consume, share and chronicle the news. But the changes brought by

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technology have not all been sanguine. Even as technology has offered people new opportunities, it has turned legacy news-industry business paradigms upside down, leading to enormous job cuts— 13,400 newspaper newsroom positions alone within four years (FCC, 2011). There were about 2,600 fewer full-time professional editorial jobs at newspapers in 2012, a 6.4% decline from 2011, leaving the industry at 38,000 full-time professional editorial employees (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013). According to industry figures, the newsroom workforce for daily newspapers in 1971 was in the neighborhood of 38,000 (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976). These numbers show newspapers employing approximately the same number of journalists today as before Watergate, some 40 years ago, even though the population of the US has grown by more than half since then.

Audience Key Findings
Percentage Change in Audience, 2011 to 2012

Source: Nielsen Media Research, comScore, Alliance for Audited Media and Arbitron⁴
PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA
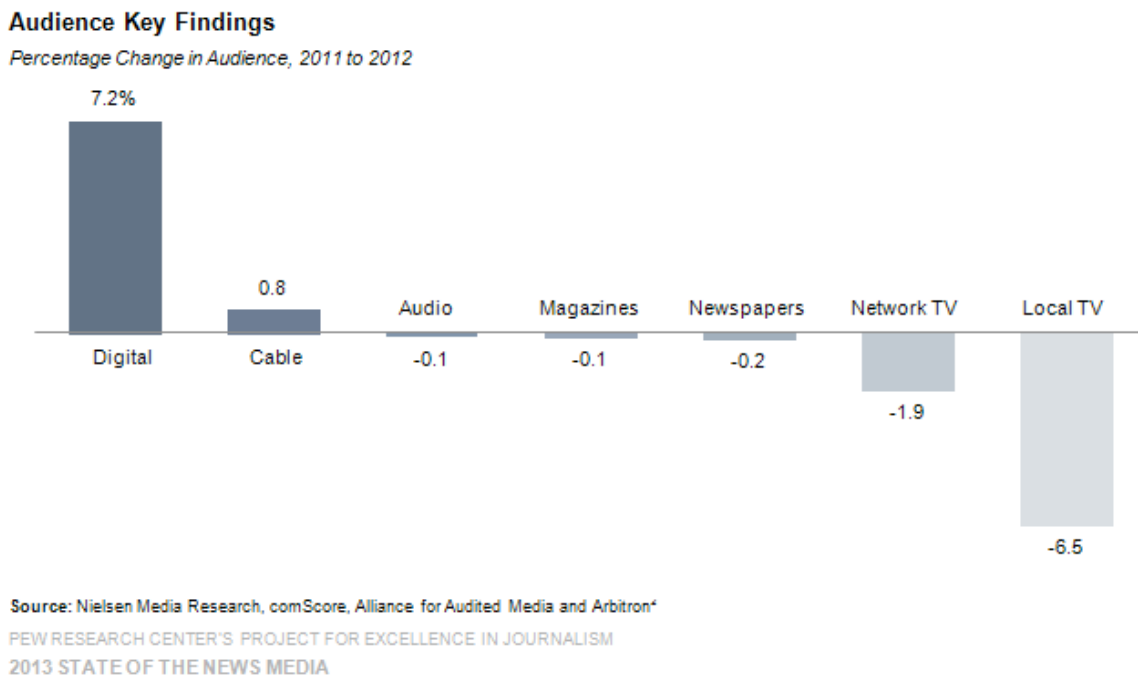
Figure 2. *Percentage change in audience of different media, 2011 to 2012*

As for the platform of preference, the Web is moving up quickly while other sectors—print, primarily—are losing, with digital media seeing audience growth (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013).

As surveys show, Americans are increasingly turning to the Internet for their news and information. When asked, 39% of respondents said they got news online or from a mobile device "yesterday," up from 34% in 2010 (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013).

Even though most legacy American newsrooms are considerably smaller than they were 10 years ago, investment in online "publications" such as AOL's Patch and Yahoo are seeing growth, as is Bloomberg Government, a new website covering government and aimed at audiences believing themselves no longer served by the legacy media.

When newspapers reduce their staff, according to a major report commissioned by the Columbia Journalism School in 2009, "What is under threat is independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs" (Downie & Schudson, 2009). The CJS report is buttressed by a few case studies conducted in U.S. cities that showed, for example, that *The Baltimore Sun* produced 32% fewer stories in 2009 than in 1999, and 73% fewer than in 1991.

<center>The Paradigm Shift in the News Media Industry</center>

Seismic changes are shaking up U.S. newsrooms, changes brought about, in large part, by an explosion of new media technologies (Christians et al, 2009), which are enabling an unprecedented increase of "citizen-journalists" using ubiquitous, relatively inexpensive media production devices to report the news (Filloux, 2009). Specifically, social-media platforms such as Facebook and the popular micro-blogging service Twitter, among others, offer people ever-greater opportunities for instant information access and interaction. The power and impact of such platforms has been seen in the "Arab Spring" uprisings in such countries as Tunisia and Egypt, revolutions that were partially organized and widely publicized by witnesses and participants using interactive media devices and services (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011). With the

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change in the news-media industry, the traditional producer/consumer relationship is no more; now, in the media's brave new world, it is the consumers of news who are empowered to create content and contribute news (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). A report from Oxford University's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism argues that the production order in the news industry has been turned upside down as the user is now the producer of news (Kelly, 2009). Matters have changed so dramatically that the old producers—the newspapers and TV news operations—are now users, as today the legacy media are in thrall to urging readers/viewers to let their views be known. Writing in 2009, Kelly insisted that henceforth the measure of the news product would be judged in part by its willingness and ability to empower users to contribute to, share and customize that product.

But citizen participation in and shaping of the news does not paint the entire picture. The changing environment has empowered people to create and share media contents, since the news media now encourage interaction by and contributions from their users (Boyd, 2007). The public is taking the initiative to create and produce news content, in essence circumventing the legacy media. Jay Rosen, New York University journalism professor, wrote that "the people formally known as the audience" now have the means to create and distribute media content that was previously the monopoly of the mainstream media due to their high cost (Rosen, 2006). Today, anyone with access to these means can "report the news" directly to the conversational communities on the social web (Bowman & Willis, 2003), and citizen journalists can challenge the news media's ownership of breaking news.

These same changes in the media landscape, exemplified by the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, have also produced widespread audience fragmentation, as the public now has an almost infinite number of options for availing itself of its preferred media content. Indeed,

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research confirms that audiences are more likely to seek out media content specific to their interests, given more options from which to choose (Atre & Katz, 2005). There is, however, a less than optimistic side of this tendency toward audience fragmentation. There is a fear that it might undermine a vibrant democracy, as many observers warn that greater selectivity in the new media environment will encourage fragmentation in the public, leading to a loss of social cohesion. These observers worry that fragmentation threatens democracy, in that it prevents citizens from sharing public issues and diminishes empathy for others (Sunstein, 2001). One thing seems clear. A fractured public will be unable to discuss common social problems in a constructive manner, much less agree on solutions to them. It has been further shown that changes in audience behavior lead to inequality in citizen involvement in such areas as news media use, knowledge and voter participation (Prior, 2005, 2007).

One of the most notable characteristics of the Internet media is interactivity. Digital technologies empower users to actively participate in the communication process. While researchers differ on their definition of interactivity (Kiousis, 2002; Bucy, 2004), their explanations are based on the two-way nature of the communication stream.

With new media technologies providing information availability that differs from what television exclusively provided in an earlier era (Havick, 2000), changes are being seen not only in communication volume and availability but also in communication diversity, the last directly related to people's opportunities to choose media content congruent with their beliefs or interests. This phenomenon has been found to have a measurable, important impact on the political process by allowing the public to choose entertainment materials over news content (Prior, 2007) and to be selectively exposed to partisan messages (Stroud, 2006).

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The Significance of the Study

Even though the emergence and influence of political blogs have brought about a new phase of agenda-setting (Aikat, 2000), the traditional agenda-setting proposition largely remains stuck in its earlier conclusions, due to its typically late move to add the Internet to its theoretical structure. The role of political blogs in the public agenda is not well comprehended. This dissertation attempted to overcome these shortcomings and to understand the most recent incarnation s of political blogs by employing intermedia agenda-setting theory.

That is not to say intermedia agenda-setting research is nonexistent; but rather that for the most part it has focused on the so-called elite media, such as *The New York Times*, and their influence on the news content of other outlets (Golan, 2006), or compared news and political advertising agendas (Boyle, 2001). This dissertation is significantly different from previous intermedia agenda-setting studies. The present study argued that the legacy media do not always influence the blog contents; sometimes political blogs may also play a major role in setting the agendas of legacy news media.

Does the traditional agenda-setting approach still apply in a fragmented media environment (Takeshita, 2005)? Scholars disagree, but many concede that changes in the media landscape have at the very least dramatically affected the dynamic of agenda-setting, and the original theory that the news media sets the public agenda needs to be revisited. Even McCombs (2005) argued that with a host of potential influences on the media agenda not well comprehended, intermedia agenda setting—how one medium influences another—remains an area of agenda-setting research that demands increased attention.

The role of the bloggers in setting the legacy media agenda is by no means unanimously perceived by scholars, whose conclusions generally fall into two camps. One camp contends that

blog contents lack originality, mainly foraging upon stories found in the mainstream media. In a 2005 study, Haas observed that "most weblog writers cover the same topics as mainstream news media and, perhaps more significantly, rely on them for information on those topics" (pp. 393-394). In the other camp, the argument goes that bloggers determine the news media agenda because mainstream journalists, for a variety of reasons, depend on their specialized knowledge and analysis. In a study backing up this hypothesis, Farrell and Drezner (2008) contended "when elite blogs concentrate their attention on a breaking story or an underreported story, the agenda-setting power of blogs may create focal points for general-interest intermediaries" (p. 17). For obvious reasons- among them, the fact they receive vast amounts of press coverage—presidential elections have long been a major focus for scholars investigating agenda-setting theories, as they have examined an array of topics related to the elections' agenda-setting effects (Weeks & Southwell, 2010). Nevertheless, several key elements in the realm of political reporting in the new century—particularly the element of unsubstantiated rumors and the role of political blogs—have yet to be explored. One of the goals of this study, as a result, was to investigate the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between the political blogs and the mainstream news media. Another goal was to analyze the trend of the coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor across different media platforms. We also wanted to know to what extent different media outlets followed their peers in covering the rumor. The other purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor by both legacy and blog media and the rumor's public salience as measured by online search activity.

<center>Core Assumptions of the Study</center>

Past studies investigating political blogs have shown that blog contents, similar to legacy news media contents, operate within the settings of agenda-setting theory (Lim, 2006). Many of

those same studies have also shown that legacy news media influence the agenda-setting of participatory media such as blogs and online discussion groups (Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002; Lee, Lancendorder & Lee, 2005; Wallsten, 2007). However, the author of this dissertation argued that political blogs sometime play a major role in setting the agendas of legacy news media.

The author also contended that this influence occurs when the mainstream media use cues from political blogs as a response to profound changes in the producer/consumer media landscape. It is further argued that intermedia agenda-setting between political blogs and legacy news media has manifestly altered the dynamics of traditional public agenda setting process. It is also argued that political blogs employ an entire cluster of media, including mainstream media, to collectively construct an agenda.

Finally, this study explored the role of the political blogs in constructing the public agenda by looking at the relationship between the legacy media's coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor and the rumor's public salience as measured by online search activity.

<div align="center">Purpose and Potential Contribution of the Study</div>

The purpose of this dissertation was to study the relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda. By definition, "media agenda" refers to a list of issues or events that attract news coverage. This agenda is often determined by how frequently and/or prominently an issue or event is covered in the news (Gormley, 1975; Williams & Semlak, 1978). "Public agenda" refers to the list of issues that are on the minds of the public at any given time. The public agenda is gauged, typically, by a survey of people's responses to the open-ended question "What is the most important problem facing our nation today?"

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This study examined the agenda-building role of the political blogs on legacy media agendas. It also explored the relationship between the public agenda and the media agenda by means of examining search terms on the Internet. The dissertation also offered a conceptual framework of the relationship between public agendas and media agendas.

The increasing role of political blogs in setting the agenda of legacy news media demonstrates the importance of the blogosphere in the current media environment. Conversely, understanding the impact of the public agenda on the Internet is important not only because of its inherent importance, but also because it offers an opportunity to investigate the impact of legacy media agendas on public agendas, and vice versa.

This dissertation was aimed at investigating two related set of research questions and hypotheses. The first set of research questions and hypotheses stemmed from the core assumption of this dissertation that political blogs, in many instances, play a significant role in setting the agenda of mainstream media. Political blogs have a major role in the agenda-building process by which some controversial issues become news in the legacy and mainstream media, which influence and affect the public agenda. To investigate the first set of research questions and hypotheses, the author of this dissertation generated the content count data of 10 political blogs and 10 legacy media outlets. The second set of research questions and hypotheses explored the relationship between online search behavior and the construction of public agenda by looking at the relationship between the coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor by both legacy and blog media and the rumor's public salience as measured by online search activity. A relatively new data set, Google Search Volume Index (SVI), was derived from the Google Trends to explore the second set of research questions and hypotheses. The data selection criteria have been explained in Chapter 4.

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This study's conclusions can be of significance to many, including theorists, researchers and practitioners in the field of mass communication inquiry. More specifically, this study benefits communication theorists by advancing an understanding of the intermedia agenda-setting phenomenon. For theorists of Internet media, this dissertation benefits by offering increased understanding of the interrelationship between legacy and Internet media. For researchers, the methods used in this study offer groundwork for replication for a further examination of the intermedia agenda-setting theory.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation comprises of six chapters. The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) is followed by Chapter 2, which is a review of the literature and findings in the area of agenda-setting theory. It also extensively reviews both the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the intermedia agenda-setting research in the context of political blogs and legacy media. This chapter also lists the research questions and hypotheses, and explains their connections with traditions in agenda-setting research. Chapter 3 presents the results of a qualitative study of contents and attributions for the first 15 days of the national media coverage of this rumor (January 17, 2007 to January 31, 2007). This chapter also explains how the qualitative content analysis was conducted. Chapter 4 introduces quantitative methods that are used in this dissertation to test hypotheses and answers research questions posited in Chapter 2 by analyzing two different data sets: content count data of blog posts and legacy media stories and Google Search Volume Index data. This chapter also gives justifications of different methods that are employed in this dissertation. It also details the analytical framework and the design of the study including data collection procedures, sampling methods, reliabilities and validities, and statistical measures. Chapter 5 presents the results of the quantitative part of the dissertation. Chapter 6

elaborates the results with a discussion on theoretical implications of the major findings of the study. This chapter also lists limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agenda Setting Theory

Over the course of mass communication research and journalism studies, scholars in the discipline have focused on the functions and effects of mass media and their impact on the public. Agenda setting, a keystone in mass-communication theory, argues that the most significant impact of the news media lies in their power to set the public agenda (McCombs, 2004). Agenda setting, first elucidated by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, is an area of research that has entertained a huge amount of interest from scholars of different disciplines (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Agenda setting theory has also been called the most worth pursuing theory (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). It is one of among a few theories that has arisen from mass communication, and has been adopted by other areas of academic study. For the last 42 years, agenda-setting theory has endured examination by multiple methods, across multiple issues and multiple types of news (Wanta & Ghanem, 2007), such that its premise is generally appreciated as one of the milestones of the theories of media effects on the audience empirically and systemically (DeFleur, 1998).

Starting with McCombs and Shaw's seminal study, a large body of scholarship has emerged spanning decades of research. For example, Bryant and Miron (2004) found that agenda setting, along with uses and gratifications, was the most cited theory in three major mass communication journals from 1956 to 2000, despite the theory's relatively late arrival.

Furthermore, although there have been many modifications to the theory, its main findings have been replicated several hundred times. By one account, since the seminal study by McCombs and Shaw (1972), more than 425 studies about agenda setting have been conducted

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(McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). Agenda setting theory brought a new focus to research, inspiring researchers to take a renewed look at attention and learning (Weaver, Graber, McCombs & Eyal, 1981). Even so, agenda setting theory is being challenged and its significance in the contemporary media landscape remains in question.

Not only is agenda-setting theory used to gauge and describe the effects of the media on the public, it can also offer a theoretical framework for examining how the relative preference that political blogs assign to particular topics might transfer to the news coverage of the legacy media. At its most basic, the agenda setting theory hypothesizes that while media messages may not change people's attitudes, they have indirect cognitive effects by making certain topics more salient than others in people's minds, salience being defined by Entman (1993) as "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (p. 53). A look at how agenda setting functions in the current media environment must begin with a brief overview of the theory's roots and its history of development.
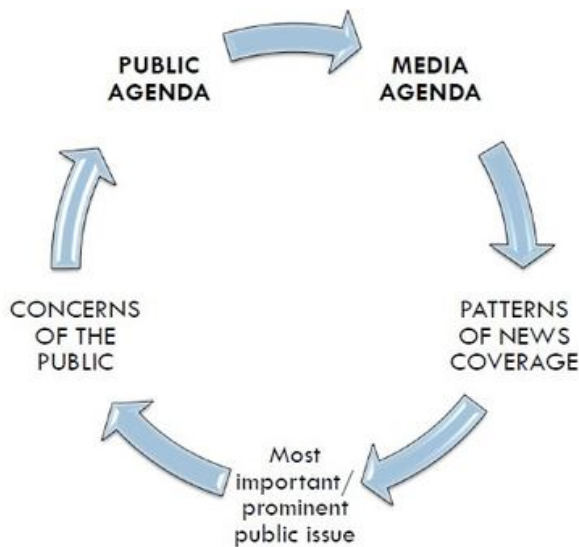
Figure 3. *The agenda-setting model*

Agenda Setting and Public Opinion

"Agenda setting" was not coined until 1972, but the notion of the agenda-setting function of the media has its origins in much earlier work, the book *Public Opinion,* written by Walter Lippmann in 1922. Thus, Lippmann, an illustrious figure in 20th century American journalism, is considered to be the intellectual father of the concept of "agenda setting" (McCombs, 2004). In the often-cited opening chapter of his book, *The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads*, Lippmann suggested that the news media operate as a window to the outside world beyond a person's direct experience and therefore facilitate to influence that person's cognitive map of this world. Lippmann asserted that public opinion reacts less to the existing environment than to what he called a pseudo-environment formed in large part by the news media. He proposed, furthermore, that public perception is constructed not in response to the world as it exists, but rather in response to the pseudo-environment created by the media (Lippmann, 1922), thus implying that public perception does not mirror reality or direct experience, but, rather, is shaped and formed by the knowledge gained via media to which the public is exposed.

Coming at a time when many mass communication scholars characterized the media as tools of persuasion and attitudinal change (McCombs & Bell, 1996; Severin & Tankard, 2001), Lippmann's writings ran counter to the so-called "hypodermic needle" model of influence —that is, that information flowed directly from the media to the people, instilling the audiences with opinions. Subsequent research also failed to support the "hypodermic needle,", and researchers started to focus on the media's power to inform rather than persuade (McCombs, 2004). In 1948, Lazarsfeld and Merton noted the press's ability to influence readers by presenting certain issues in a prominent way. Also noting that aspect of media influence were Long (I 958) and Lang and Lang (1959). Researchers working on various studies came to the conclusion that mass media

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had little effect on society (Wanta, 1997), a major shift in thinking about the media and agenda setting. Some scholars called it a time of the "limited media effects" paradigm because there was insufficient research data to conclude that the media had a major impact on the beliefs and attitudes of the public (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2009). This idea, however, was not accepted by a certain realm of scholars, many of whom began to look at new and different ways in which the media affect the public (Dearing & Everett, 1996). For example, a study by Harold Laswell in 1948 proposed three social roles of the mass media, which were surveillance of the larger environment, consensus building among the parts of society, and the transmission of culture. The role of agenda setting is a key aspect of surveillance as it offers major portions of our ideas about the larger environment. This process also plays a key role in social consensus and transmission of culture. Another study by Lowrey and Defleur (1995) is worth noting. Their study is considered one of the landmark studies in mass communication research which focused on the role the media play in news of politics as well as how those messages affect media consumers' ideas about what issues are salient. The researchers found that what candidates say during their campaigns allows the media to prioritize issues.

Following up on Lippmann (1922) forty years later, in a review of foreign policy in 1963, Cohen wrote the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and publishers of the papers they read" (p. 13). Based on many years of discussion and research, McCombs and Shaw in 1972 offered the initial and systematic approach to studying agenda setting, putting forth what is now an accepted methodology for testing the influence of media on public opinion.

The Theory Begins: The Chapel Hill Study

Some 50 years after Lippmann, agenda-setting theory began its voyage as a simple hypothesis by McCombs and Shaw (1972) about "the transfer of salience from the media to the public." The two researchers, who were the pioneers to formalize and test the theory, focused on the 1968 presidential race between Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, and their theory now offers one of the primary viewpoints in mass communication-effects research. McCombs and Shaw importantly directed Cohen's thoughts into a testable hypothesis and found a strong positive correlation between the public's most important issues and those most frequently mentioned in the news media (1972). Initially, basing their theory on Lippmann's idea of the mass media bridging "the world outside and the pictures in our heads", McCombs and Shaw (1972) predicted that if the media put more emphasis on some issues in their news presentation, those issues would be comprehended as important in the minds of the audience members (McCombs et al. 2000). From their base at the University of North Carolina, the two researchers used the city of Chapel Hill to analyze local and national media contents to find out the media agenda and then compared that agenda to the agenda of local voters. The two scholars hypothesized that the news agenda would set the public's issue agenda, "agenda" being defined as a list of issues at a given point in time, ranked in a hierarchy of importance (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). What McCombs and Shaw found was a stunningly high relationship between the two agendas, and as a result, agenda-setting theory was born (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Hester & Gibson, 2007).

Then McCombs and Shaw tested the hypothesis of salience transfer, that is, that "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues" (1972, p. 177), and supported the test with comparisons of the survey

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data with the media content. Once again, they chose the 1968 presidential election contest, interviewing 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill some 20 days before the election to ascertain the residents' thoughts on the most important current issues. To buttress their work, McCombs and Shaw also analyzed the content of four newspapers, two news magazines and two broadcasts of network evening news from the same 20-day period. They then compared the two sets of data—survey and analyzed news content—and found an almost perfect correlation (.96), concluding, "The judgments of the voters seem to reflect the composite of the mass media coverage" (p. 181).

As a result of this groundbreaking work, McCombs and Shaw (1972) shifted the paradigm of media research from the "limited power of the mass media," which was widely held until the 1960s, to the "powerful role of mass media" in forming the public agenda. Moreover, the agenda-setting hypothesis emerged during the dominance of the limited-effects model (Severin & Tankard, 2001; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002) about the effect of mass media on the public. According to the limited-effects model, the mass media were seen to have limited effects over the public as past researches had not observed sizeable proof about the media's effects on opinions and attitudes (Severin & Tankard, 2001; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). However, some researchers rebuffed the perception that the mass media had only limited effects and began re-conceptualizing the influence the mass media may have (Severin & Tankard, 2001). And so the agenda-setting hypothesis challenged the idea of the limited-effects model and returned the focus of research on the effects of media from an emphasis on attitude and opinion change to one of attention and learning (Weaver, Graber, McCombs & Eyal, 1981). Emphasizing that the agenda-setting effect "is not a return to a bullet theory or hypodermic theory of all-powerful media

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effects," McCombs (2004) said, rather, it assigns a central role to the news media in initiating the issues for discussion by the public.

<center>Expansion of the Chapel Hill Study</center>

Over time, McCombs and Shaw's (1972) methodological approach has been replicated and expanded by many researchers. In one example, Funkhouser (1973) analyzed news coverage of both issues and public opinion concerning the most important problems facing the United States across the 10 years of the 1960s. He concluded that there existed a significant relationship between the media and public agendas.

The genesis of agenda setting studies occurred during three consecutive U.S. presidential elections (1968, 1972, 1976). The occurrence of the elections provided researchers a natural laboratory, as campaigns featured consistent political messages over the course of time, consistent, that is, in terms of the messages were ongoing in a similar area of thought.

Following up their important study of the 1968 presidential campaign, Shaw and McCombs (1977) tested the agenda-setting hypothesis on a larger sample drawn from the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, for the 1972 election. For the Charlotte study, the researchers used a panel design to test the causal direction between the two agendas—media and public—to find out which agenda was influencing which. Using cross-lagged correlations to gauge two time periods, and establishing time order as the key to agenda-setting effects, they found that the newspaper agenda at Time 1 was affecting the voters' agenda at Time 2. A similar association between television news and voters' impressions was not found, however. To Shaw and McCombs, these results showed that the agenda-setting function of the press may vary by media, but that, overall, they believed their findings generally supported their initial agenda-setting hypothesis, at least for newspapers.

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The third portion of the study examined the 1976 election in its entirety in three cities – Lebanon, New Hampshire, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Evanston, Illinois -- and used nine sessions of panel interviews to find out the way in which voters gleaned information alongside content analyses of media messages. Voters in those areas were interviewed nine times from February through December (Weaver, Graber, McCombs & Eyal, 1981). At the same time, the election coverage of three national networks as well as local newspapers in the cities underwent content analysis, with the result that spring primaries were the most influential of times.

In addition to Shaw and McCombs, two other researchers, Palmgreen and Clark (1977), considered whether differences existed in the media's agenda-setting role for local and national issues. In devising their research, the most important problem was asked in the question designed to measure the public agenda of the study's respondents. Palmgreen and Clark measured the media agenda by content analyses of the three national network newscasts and local television news coverage. Their results showed that the media's agenda-setting impact was weaker at the local than at the national level, and they hypothesized that subjective factors, such as interpersonal communications and personal observation, at the local level might have lessened the media's agenda-setting function.

<div align="center">Key Concepts of Agenda-Setting Theory</div>

Issue Salience

At bottom, agenda-setting is the process by which the news media influence the public in assigning relative salience to different public issues or events. This influence is accomplished not by that media directly advise the public that a given issue is more important than any other, but media signal the importance of certain issues by assigning these issues preferential treatment.

In conducting their research, McCombs and Shaw (1972) were interested in and endeavored to measure an issue's salience (that is, whether something is perceived as important or prominent), salience being an important concept in the theory of agenda setting. It is generally accepted that agenda setting concerns the transfer of salience, or the prominence of an object in the media, from the media to the public (Weaver, Graber, McCombs & Eyal, 1981). To put it another way, agenda setting takes place when attention devoted to an issue in the media relates to a rise in the importance ascribed to that issue by the public (Dearing & Everett, 1996).

The Acapulco Typology

Agenda setting by the mass media has been examined by researchers all over the world and in a variety of ways. A four-part typology explaining these perspectives is often dubbed as the Acapulco typology. McCombs first offered this typology at a conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) in Acapulco, Mexico in 1981, which is why his four-part typology describing perspectives of agenda setting is called the Acapulco Typology. Invited by the then President of the International Communication Association (ICA), Everett Rogers, to give the presentation, McCombs' typology is offered in two parts. There are two dichotomous dimensions of the Acapulco typology. Part one examines the two ways of looking at agendas – on the whole agenda or a single item on that agenda. Part two examines the two ways of measuring the important of items on the agenda--either measurement of the entire population or measurement of individual responses.

From the first perspective, the entire agenda is utilized and aggregates measures of the population to ascertain the salience of these agenda items. For example, for the media agenda, issue salience is determined by the sum total % of news items on each issue, while public agenda salience is measured by the % of voters' perceptions about each issue. Using this perspective,

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researchers examine a multitude of issues competing for positions on the agenda. In examining the second perspective, attention shifts from the group to the individual, sometimes referred to as "automation" to reflect a negative view of human behavior, thinking individually the media agenda is never significantly reflected. In the third perspective, focus once again shifts to a single item, but it is a single item on the agenda and it makes use of aggregate measures to show salience. The fourth perspective, like the first, puts attention on the individual but limits observations to the perceived importance of a single item on the agenda.

Selective Perception

Researchers and scholars of mass communication make a distinction between the agenda-setting model and a popular alternative model known as selective perception. The latter model theorizes that individuals tend to avoid exposure to information that is opposite to their beliefs and expose themselves more to information that supports their beliefs (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Although selective perception is frequently referred to as the explanation for the belief that the media have only a limited effect on the public (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002), McCombs and Shaw (1972) found support favoring agenda setting over selective perception by demonstrating that for the majority of news outlets under study, a voter's agenda was more strongly correlated with the overall news agenda than it was with the agenda of stories only about the voter's preferred party. As a result of this study, not only were McCombs and Shaw (1972) able to show support for their hypothesis about the effect of news media on the public, they were able to show evidence against competing perspectives.

Issue Obtrusiveness

Concomitant with the growth of agenda-setting research, researchers have sought to single out the dependent factors that affect agenda setting, and aspects of issues have been

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explored to determine what factors can increase or limit agenda-setting effects. For example, Zucker (1978) investigated whether the media have a powerful effect on influencing public opinion for certain issues over others and introduced the notion of issue obtrusiveness, that is, the extent to which the public has experience with an issue. In his study, Zucker hypothesized that the "less direct experience the people have with a given issue area, the more they will rely on the news media for information and interpretation in that area" (1978, p. 227). With the Television News Index's monthly publication as his source, Zucker (1978) examined the frequency with which a given issue was mentioned on the network evening news each month, using Gallop polls to gauge public attention. Zucker then used Pearson correlation coefficients to test the relationship between the public and the months prior to the poll, the public and the month of the poll, and the public with the months following the poll. The results of the study showed that for issues identified as obtrusive—cost of living and unemployment—there was no significant correlation between public opinion and news coverage in the preceding months. Significant correlations, however, were observed for unobtrusive issues—for example, pollution and drugs. As a result of his study, Zucker (1978) observed that people live in two different worlds: the real world and the media world. In other words, the public has first-hand experience with or interpersonal communication about some issues and is therefore less influenced by the media concerning those issues while there are other issues for which the media is the public's primary information source.

Which aspects of issues mediate agenda-setting effects was also examined by Palmgreen and Clarke (1977). They hypothesized that agenda setting should be weaker for local issues than for national issues, given that local issues are more obtrusive and also expressed their belief that interpersonal communication networks could moderate the media's agenda-setting role and that

national issues were given more prominence than local issues in the news media (Palmgreen & Clarke, 1977). Conducting their research in a metropolitan area, the researchers interviewed 400 residents who were assigned randomly to a local or national questionnaire. Two weeks prior to the interviews, Palmgreen and Clarke carried out a content analysis of local newspapers and television news assessing issues at both the local and national level. (Some issues, such as crime, were categorized as both local and national.) The two then calculated media coverage of issues at both levels and the proportion of respondents at both levels who stated that an issue was "most important." Their results supported the hypothesized relationship: correlations at the national level ($r = .82$) were higher than at the local level ($r = .53$). It was also found that newspapers had a more influential agenda-setting role on local issues and local and network television had a more powerful agenda-setting role for national issues. In their conclusion, Palmgreen and Clarke (1977) declared that the agenda-setting role of the media varies depending on whether the issues or events are of local or national origin and through which media they are communicated.

Need for Orientation

Another important concept in agenda setting is "need for orientation," a concept that offers a more robust psychological explanation for variability in agenda-setting effects than simply classifying issues along the obtrusive/unobtrusive continuum. Based on psychologist Edward Tolman's general theory of cognitive mapping (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009), the need for orientation implies that "we form maps in our minds to help us navigate our external environment." Tolman's notion is similar to Lippmann's concept of the pseudo-environment. The concept of need for orientation suggests that "there are individual differences in the need for orienting cues to an issue and in the need for background information about an issue" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009, p. 8).

According to Tolman, each person feels a need to be familiar with his/her mental and physical surroundings. This addition of a psychological component of information-seeking to agenda-setting theory is owed to cognitive utilitarian theories of motivation, which are appropriate for explaining and emphasizing both political information search and cognitive effects because these theories emphasize the role of information in problem solving (Weaver, 1980). The need for orientation highlighted the rationale of the agenda-setting theory as a comprehensive explanation and avoided the drawbacks of both powerful and limited media effects.

Using McCombs and Weaver's typology, it can be seen that an individual's need for orientation is defined conventionally by two lower-order components: (1) relevance of the subject of the message and (2) degree of uncertainty concerning the subject of the message (Weaver, 1977). For example, low relevance (regardless of degree of uncertainty) results in a low need for orientation while high relevance and low uncertainty result in a moderate need for orientation and high relevance and high uncertainty result in a high need for orientation. McCombs and Weaver also suggested that individuals with a high need for orientation concerning political issues are more vulnerable to mass media agenda-setting influence than those with a moderate need for orientation, and, moreover, that persons with a moderate need for orientation are more susceptible to agenda-setting than are those with a low need for orientation.

<center>Time Factor for Agenda-Setting Effects</center>

A question often asked by scholars is, how much time does it take for the media to influence public opinion? Under the now-generally discredited hypodermic needle model, the influence was seen to occur almost instantaneously. Today, even as most media effects researchers have retreated from the older model, many agenda-setting scholars still debate how

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long it takes for the media to transfer the salience of an issue to the public agenda, with scholars using widely varying durations of time for news exposure (ranging from one day to several years) and for effects. While early investigations found that it can take several months for the media agenda to transfer to the public agenda (Stone & McCombs, 1981), studies conducted in the 1990's found shorter time lags, ranging from one week for network television news to eight weeks for a national news magazine (Wanta & Hu, 1994).

In a study of the civil rights issue, Winter and Eyal (1981) found that a period of four to six weeks was the typical length of time for an agenda-setting effect to develop, while in a related study, Salwen (1988) replicated the basic agenda-setting hypothesis with an emphasis on the length of time a set of issues must be in the news to have the biggest influence on the public agenda, concluding that agenda-setting effects built up quickly within five to seven weeks, leveled off after eight to ten weeks, and declined modestly, if at all, after this period of two-plus months. In a somewhat similar study, Wanta and Hu (1994) studied the time lags for five legacy news media: national network news, local newscasts, regional newspapers, local newspapers, and national news magazines. They found that, generally speaking, the media produced an optimal time lag of about three weeks.

Today, in an environment where news is posted to the Internet and debated immediately, agenda- setting may take place even more rapidly, as shown by Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002), who found lags of only one to seven days in the correlation between news coverage and online discussion, with day seven producing the most significant correlations.

<center>Agenda-Building</center>

Cobb and Elder (1971) coined the term agenda-building to convey their "concern with how issues are created and why some controversies or incipient issues come to command the

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attention and concern of decision makers, while others fail" (p. 905). They defined agenda building as the process by which the news media, emphasize, and/or select which events, issues, personalities or sources to cover over others. While research in this area is closely linked to "agenda setting," it is somewhat different from that tradition (Reese, 1991).

While the agenda-building literature contains numerous theoretical and methodological perspectives, it shares the belief that news coverage, far from being a reflection of reality, is instead a contrived or manufactured product, guided by a hierarchy of social influences—macro, mid-range and individual— that span levels of analysis. Such factors include, at the macro level, economic, cultural, and ideological dynamics along with ownership patterns and industry trends; at the mid-range level, determinants include organizational routines, professional practices, role perceptions of the journalists, and source strategies; individual-level factors arise from socio-economic, political, and psychological backgrounds of journalists (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Though he did not use the term agenda-building, Funkhouser (1973) was one of the first scholars to consider the connection between real-world events and the scope of media coverage of these events. With the Watergate scandal as their template, Lang and Lang (1981) were the first to explicitly refer to "agenda-building." They asserted that there is little or no "recognition of the process through which agendas are built or through which an object that has caught public attention, by being big news, gives rise to a political issue" (p. 448) or of how the public agenda is formed. In their four-step model of agenda-building, Lang and Lang (1959) offered that in the first step, the media emphasize events, activities, groups, or individuals. In step two, these elements are described as being part of a problem or concern. The third step has the issue linked to "secondary symbols, so that it becomes a part of the organized political landscape" (p. 465). In the fourth step, spokespeople and "spin doctors" advocate issues and symbols and establish a

feedback loop to increase coverage of the issue or at least to keep the issue alive. Thus, Lang and Lang (1959) assign a key role to the media for initially picking up an issue and to political actors for keeping an issue in the forefront of the media agenda or even intensifying its prominence.

Although not referring specifically to the term agenda-building, Behr and Iyengar (1985) offered one of the only empirical investigations of the agenda-building process. To explore the effect of the media agenda on the audience agenda, the researchers combined trend data from three broad-based surveys with a content analysis of the CBS Evening News. In addition, they aggregated barometers of existing conditions in the three issues of their study. They also recorded circumstances in which the U.S. president gave nationwide speeches relating to any of these issues. According to their analyses, "television news coverage is at least partially determined by real-world conditions and events" (p. 47).

<div align="center">Framing and Priming</div>

Framing is defined as "the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (Reese, 2001, p. 7), while "priming," as defined in political communication research, refers to "changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations'' (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). Priming takes place when the content of news stories implies to audiences that specific issues should be used as guidelines for determining how public officials and governments do their jobs.

Both agenda-setting and priming are predicated on memory-based models of information processing. These models propose that audiences shape attitudes built on the reflections that are most conspicuous when they make decisions (Hastie & Park, 1986). By ensuring that some issues are more conspicuous in people's minds than others (agenda-setting), the media can form the attitudes that people consider when judging political contenders or issues (priming).

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"Framing" significantly differs from these accessibility-based models in that it is predicated on the proposition that the way in which an issue is portrayed by the media can have an effect on how the issue is grasped by audiences. Framing is commonly associated with both psychology and sociology (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), with its psychological foundations lying in experimental work. The sociological foundations of framing were built by Goffman (1974) and others who conjectured that individuals are in a constant struggle to make sense of their life experiences and the world around them. In order to effectively deal with new information, Goffman argued, individuals employ ''primary frameworks'' (Goffman, 1974, p. 24) to classify data and give it meaningful interpretation.

Framing, therefore, can be seen as both a macro-level and a micro-level construct (Scheufele, 1999). As a macro construct, it is a manner of presentation that communicators exploit to pass along information in a way that echoes with existing, fundamental perspectives among their audiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This explanation does not necessarily mean that journalists are attempting to mislead their audiences. To the contrary, framing, for them, is a requisite tool for minimizing the intricacy of an issue, especially given the challenges of their particular media related to news space and airtime. "Frames," that is to say, become important means for presenting relatively difficult, and sometimes controversial, issues, such as global warming, professionally and in a way that makes the issues accessible to inexpert audiences because they address existing cognitive schemas. As a micro construct, according to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), framing sets out the means by which audiences use information and presentation features about issues as they form impressions about those issues.

The founding fathers of agenda-setting research, Maxwell E. McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David H. Weaver see the areas of agenda-setting, framing and priming as interconnected and

somewhat similar but not identical (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 1998; Weaver, 2007). They also suggest that priming and framing should be viewed as natural extensions of agenda-setting. However, all the scholars do not agree that second-level agenda setting is equivalent to framing (Weaver, 2007). For example, Scheufele (2000) contradicts the notion asserting that the theoretical premises of agenda setting and framing are different. Agenda setting and priming rely on the theory of attitude accessibility while framing is based on prospect theory. The theory of attitude accessibility argues that the salience of issues can be retrieved from memory, whereas the prospect assumes that "subtle changes in the description of a situation invoke interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information rather than making certain aspects of the issue more salient" (Weaver, 2007, p.145). Scheufele (2000) argues that McCombs and his colleagues attempted to combine agenda-setting, priming, and framing into a single theoretical framework on the assumption that "integrating theory is always desirable" (p. 298). He maintains that "…these three approaches to media effects should be taken for what they are: related, yet different approaches to media effects that cannot be combined into a simple theory just for the sake of parsimony" (p. 298).

<div align="center">Agenda Melding</div>

Agenda melding constitutes a comparatively new addition to the research literature. Agenda melding represents the process of social consensus in an age of media demassification marked by a plethora of multifaceted channels of Internet media content and social media, in sharp contrast to the limited channels of legacy media.

Agenda melding focuses "on the personal agendas of individuals vis-a-vis their community and group affiliations" (McCombs, 2004, p. 142). According to the agenda-melding hypothesis, when individuals join groups, they "meld" their individual agendas with those of the

group. Groups and communities, therefore, represent a "collected agenda of issues" and "one joins a group by adopting an agenda" (Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, & Hamm, 1999, p. 12). While agenda melding represents a departure from the more traditional agenda setting, the transfer of salience remains at its theoretical core.

By design and definition, the interactive potential of Internet media contents and social media seek to meld different groups in society. Thus "agenda-melding" happens when social segments discuss and debate, face-to-face or online, important social issues based on their exposure to the news media. Shaw and Martin's 1992 study provided seminal evidence of the effects of agenda melding in achieving social consensus among demographic groups. Agenda melding occurs when individuals increase their media use, agree or disagree on important public issues within the gender, racial and age groups to which they belong to. Shaw and Martin (1992) concluded that greater consensus in the public agenda among demographic subgroups corresponds to greater exposure to the mass media.

According to Shaw, McCombs, Weaver and Hamm (1999), agenda melding incorporates and adds to agenda-setting theory, shaping it into an assessment of how individuals hunt for and interact with groups and communities by merging or accommodating their assessments of salience based on that of the group. Researchers increasingly believe that audiences combine agendas from different media—"meld" them—and thus are influenced by this agenda blend. Agenda melding establishes a link between medium and audience.

The agenda-melding theory is analogous to the transactional model of interpersonal communication, which posits that individuals send and receive information about their perspectives and values, negotiating shared (melded) issue salience, suggesting the value of audience engagement to complete the communication. The audience "melds" personal feelings

associated with certain language elements with the actual message. Even as the media set the agenda, the audience melds with the agenda in compliance with their (the audiences') customary values and attributes. Agenda melding implies the critical role of the audience in blending, adapting, and absorbing messages.

In an age of "horizontal and vertical media," agenda melding provides a "new theoretical lens" to study diverse media innovations such as virtual brand communities, as Ragas and Roberts (2009) concluded. They found that agenda melding theory explained why the brand community, when divided by various demographic measures into subgroups, reflects attribute agendas that remain similar to the aggregate brand community agenda.

<center>Criticism of the Agenda-Setting Theory</center>

Like many scientific and sociological theories, agenda-setting theory brings with it several limitations. Efforts to prove a causal relationship between public salience and media coverage of issues have proved unsuccessful; however, the correlation is indisputable and the justification credible. This significant limitation aside, agenda-setting applies neither to very highly informed individuals nor to those who are apathetic (Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, & Hamm, 1999).

Criticism of earlier studies on agenda-setting falls into one of two major categories, with the first being that agenda-setting is an essentially causal theory. Studies in general revealed some form of positive association between the amount of media content assigned to an issue and the development of a place on the public agenda for that issue. The research designs and statistical methods used, however, are in few instances suited to make causal inferences. Therefore, "causal direction must remain an open question for now, at least in terms of most

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survey studies" (Kosicki, 1993, p. 106). Exceptions, such as Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) experimental research on agenda-setting and priming, however, do exist.

The second area of criticism of earlier agenda-setting studies concerns the measurement of the criterion variable, that is, the perceptions of issue salience by the audience. In their seminal study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) made operational issue salience among audiences as judgments about the perceived importance of issues. Later studies replaced perceptions of importance with terms such as "salience," "awareness," "attention" or "concern" (Edelstein, 1993).

Another limitation of agenda-setting research is that it too often ignores situations in which people have direct experiences with real-world indicators and events (Behr & Iyengar, 1985). Some researchers contend that agenda setting would carry less weight when people have direct experience with a given issue, although the empirical results for this research are mixed (Watt, Mazza, & Snyder, 1993). In addition, not every individual is equally susceptible to agenda setting; for example, susceptibility may be affected by generational differences (Coleman & McCombs, 2007).

Last, while agenda-setting theory claims that the media influence the public's awareness of and, to some degree, attitudes toward specific issues, there are possible limitations to this claimed influence. It may be tempting to use the agenda-setting theory to back notions of conspiracy by the mass media to deleteriously shape public attention and attitudes, but the depiction of an issue must resonate with the values and interests of the audience, or it will be rejected as irrelevant (Miller, 2007).

Challenges of the Agenda-Setting Theory in the Changed Media Landscape

Over the past two decades, the media landscape in the United States has changed dramatically with the growth of cable and satellite television, meteoric rise of the Internet, the emergence of integrated media companies, the explosion of smart-phones and handheld communication devices, and tablets, and so forth. As a result, the relationship between the news media and the public is not as clean-cut as the agenda-setting theory, which was developed when people relied primarily on a few mainstream news media choices to inform their understanding of issues (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001), historically held. Largely as a result of these technological changes, the abilities of the so-called legacy media to influence an agenda for the general public is challenged and threatened by the ever-increasing array of information sources made available by developments in new communication technologies (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; McCombs, 1993). With these changes, some mass communication researchers are calling into question the agenda-setting role of legacy news media outlets.

Since the early 1970s, the agenda-setting theory has been used to explain how issues not only become news but how that news shapes public priorities. Even though the theory has been the bedrock of studies and hypotheses for over 40 years, researchers readily acknowledge its limitations and the challenges to its hegemony put forth by scholars. A key challenge lies in the belief that a common news agenda and a common public agenda are incompatible with the advent of Internet-based media (Brubaker, 2008).

Several developments have marked the distinction of the new media: more information is available; the information can be gathered, retrieved and disseminated with increased speed; consumers have more "control" over the media; media audiences are more atomized and as a result can be more easily targeted; the media in some ways have been decentralized; and there is

more interactivity between senders and receivers of the media messages (Williams & Caprini, 2004).

As a result of these changes, many are questioning the very basis of the agenda-setting theory, including its claim to setting the public agenda as it once did. The changing media landscape throws into question the ability, through repetition of coverage to increase the salience of issues in the public's mind, of the media to set the public agenda. In addition, as Chafee and Metzger (2001) argued, "the key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about" (p. 375).

In the 1970s, when the agenda-setting model was set down, most Americans received their news from their local newspapers and the three network TV news bulletins. Now, in what many see as the biggest threat to the agenda-setting theory, fragmentation of the audience, in the form of 24-hour cable TV stations and literally countless websites, the public can shape a news agenda of their preference and choosing. Not only that, but as communications become more personalized, as they are forecast to do (Kroski, 2008), people will only increase their tendency to move in the direction of information that reinforces their beliefs.

In 2004, Williams and Caprini made the point that the existence of numerous news channels (on cable, radio and in print), such faux-news shows as the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and the Internet force the mainstream news media and public figures to respond (p. 1225). In their 1972 study setting forth the agenda-setting theory, McCombs and Shaw noted a powerful link between voter attitudes and mainstream media coverage, adding that while news professionals may not tell people what to think, they tell them what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the media environment some 40 years ago included neither nationwide

cable television nor the World Wide Web, which have come to be among the most influential media in today's world. More specifically, one of McCombs and Shaw's key assumptions can be seen as under direct challenge by the proliferation of these and other media: "For most, mass media provide the best—and only—easily available approximation of ever-changing political realities" (McCombs, 1972, p. 185).

While the two researchers' Chapel Hill (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and Charlotte studies (Shaw & McCombs, 1977) investigated how exposure to the media may influence the public's agenda, the reverse—how the public may alter the media's agenda—was not investigated, a shortcoming that has led recent scholars to explore how the public may be influencing the media by means of such interactive media as blogs. Examining the agenda-setting impact of blogs (professional as well as amateur) on the mainstream press in the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, Wallsten (2007) showed, through time series analyses, evidence that both types of blogs played a significant role in the issues covered by the *New York Times*.

The role of "citizen journalists" is changing the agenda-setting process by forcing mainstream journalists to change the way they gather and measure the value of news. Researchers have noted how blogs and microblogs like Twitter have gained legitimacy as story sources in an impressively short span of time. In 2008, in a poll by George Washington University and media research company Cision of more than 12,000 journalists, it was shown that fully 90% of the respondents considered the Web as a whole to be a primary news source; 79% used blogs, to track responses to stories; and 50% were users of social media (Arno, 2009).

On the public-agenda side, agenda-setting scholars have used polls and surveys to assess the public agenda (McCombs & Bell, 1996) by asking for the respondents' perceptions of the most important current issues or what issues respondents are most concerned about (McCombs

& Bell, 1996). Today, the growth of the Internet has given researchers additional methods to determine the public agenda, by, for example, measuring the online public agenda by assessing Internet users' commentary in online spaces (Lee, Lacendorder, & Lee, 2005).

In the traditional paradigm of agenda-setting theory, it was assumed that the legacy media played an offensive role. It was believed that legacy media's coverage routinely puts an item on the public agenda. Today, however, the legacy media are often seen to be defensive in that they are forced to cover issues they might have ignored in the pre-Internet age (McLeary, 2007) because political blogs placed it on the agenda (Messner & DiStaso, 2008). Simultaneously and somewhat counter intuitively, political blogs are broadening the traditional agenda-setting process by redistributing mainstream media content.

Occurring at any time during the news-accruing or production process, agenda setting can take place when journalists are identifying, choosing, and developing story ideas and when they are determining the value of using facts, sources and background research in a story (Len-Ríos et al., 2009).

Blogs are particularly important sources for journalists when covering breaking news, more or less so depending on the extent to which access to a news event may be restricted. Three recent major events in which so-called alternative sources were influential include the coverage of Hurricane Katrina (Xie, 2007), the election protests in Iran, and the terror attack in Mumbai (Heald, 2009). Most recently Internet media played a major role in covering the protests in Arab countries. In Egypt, Facebook and Twitter played such a big role that the uprising against the deposed government of Mubarak has been called as "revolution 2.0" (Ghonim, 2012). Often times coming seemingly out of nowhere, viral stories are nothing more than the buzz created by the media themselves, which allows the story or message to find a place on the agenda it might

otherwise not have found. An enormously popular video of a car crash conducted by a police department in Wales to discourage texting went viral and as a result prompted a closer look such driving hazards (Clifford, 2009).

The news cycle, according to Messner and DiStaso (2008), has been altered by the arrival and dramatic growth of social media. Looking at the use of blogs as sources in the legacy media and the use of sources in blogs in general, combined with a content analysis of 2,059 articles over a six-year period from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, Messneer and DiStaso (2008) found that the newspapers increasingly valued blogs as credible news sources.

As the media landscape has changed and will continue to change, agenda-setting scholars should be prepared to jettison certain basic beliefs, beginning with that the media and the audience are monolithic entities (Song, 2007). In addition, as an increase in user-generated content and citizen journalism reduces the distinction between producers and consumers of news, scholars and researchers should also be slow to categorize players into one group or the other.

It can be safely said that agenda setting no longer involves a passive public. News media could both guide and be guided by the public. In an ever more mediated world, agenda-setting scholars shall put more focus on intermedia agenda-setting research to learn more about the exchange between the news media and the public.

<center>Agenda Setting in the Internet Age</center>

Even as the explosive growth and use of the Internet has reached into more and more lives, and scholarly concepts have been influenced by the "high-tech" explosion, so too has this trend, coupled with the public's diminished reliance on legacy media, affected the theory of agenda setting itself. The question being asked more and more is this: Is the agenda-setting process as relevant and applicable to the Internet as it is and was for legacy media?

The overriding trend in the 18 years since Dearing and Rogers published their comprehensive review of agenda–setting research (1996) —when, for example, Internet Explorer was less than a year old—is that the growth of the Internet has exponentially fragmented communicative power. Blogs and, more recently, microblogs are only one of the most recent manifestations of this trend. At the same time this decentralization has taken place, legacy media have embraced the web, with newspaper and broadcast stories no longer transitory, being, indeed, archived, indexed, and technologically able to receive links.

Until recently, researchers on agenda-setting and Internet media have for the most part defined for purposes of study Internet media as websites, bulletin boards or online discussion groups. These same scholars have come to realize that Internet media encompass much more, as publishing on the Internet has been simplified, and individuals can now easily put information online. As noted, blogs, in particular, have seen untold growth and popularity.

As defined by Williams and his colleagues (2005), blogs are seen as regularly updated online journals that have posts or entries, usually listed in reverse chronological order (Herring et al., 2005). Appearing as early as 1999, when new software made them easy to maintain (Jensen, 2003), blogs have steadily proliferated ever since. Research indicates that fully 50 % of Internet readers have viewed blogs and that news and politics are two of the most often written-about subjects of blog discourse (Johnson, 2009).

As they increase in popularity, blogs have garnered the attention of academics, although there is no consensus in the academy as to whether what bloggers are doing is journalism or not (Lasica, 2002; Andrews, 2003; Blood, 2003). On one side of the divide are researchers who believe that blogs, and online sources in general, offer credible information. Among online users themselves, Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that Internet information is seen as more credible

than legacy media information. This conclusion was supported by the findings of Abdulla et al. (2005), who also measured the credibility of online information. Overall, the high credibility ratings for blogs have caused public relations practitioners, to name just one group of professionals, to give more attention to blogs (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006).

Today it is seen as a given that people will conduct Internet searches to gather information needed to deal with an issue (Spink & Cole, 2001), and millions of inquiries are processed daily by numerous Internet search engines (Ragas & Tran 2013; Ragas, Tran, & Martin, 2013; Spink & Ozmultu, 2002). Using Dearing and Rogers' definition of the public agenda as "the public's hierarchy of issues at a certain point in time" (1996, p. 40), one can conceive of Internet searches as a conceptualized form of public-agenda building in the sense that people carry out information searches in a hierarchical order of salience at a given moment, such as when they seek information that is salient to them but not information that is not or is less salient to them. Other researchers, such as Aikat and Frith (2003) and Frith and Aikat (2003) also implied search terms as the Internet users' agendas in their studies when they tried to measure the relationship between legacy media coverage and users' search trends.

How have existing agenda-setting and Internet media studies applied the agenda-setting theory? They have done so in many ways, rather than propose that an overall agenda for something as limitless and ever changing as the Internet can be constructed. In one group of studies, researchers investigated how agenda-setting works on the Internet, linking Internet usage (Wanta & Cho, 2004) as well as the nature of the medium itself (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) to factors that may shape or affect the agenda-setting process.

In examining the differences in the perceived importance of issues between audiences reading the print versions and those reading the online versions of three newspapers, Li (2003)

found a high correlation between issues perceived as important by readers of the print versions and those deemed a high priority by the same newspapers' editors. On the other hand, there was no significant correlation when comparing issues perceived important by readers of the online versions and issues believed to be a high priority by the newspapers' editors. Li (2003) theorized that the difference could be the result of variations in the delivery of news and access patterns of user-readers.

In another study, Ku, Kaid and Pfau (2003) compared Internet and print media by investigating the impact of the campaign websites of the Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2000 U.S. presidential election. They found that the campaign agenda of candidate websites in turn mirrored the news agenda of the legacy media. Furthermore, a path analysis showed that the websites also directly established the public's agenda (Ku et al., 2003), with the researchers noting that though the applicable relationships between the candidates websites and the public's agenda could not be specified, there was nevertheless clear evidence of the resemblance of the campaign websites' agenda to the public's agenda.

In studies on agenda setting and non-print media alone, Roberts, Wanta and Dwzo (2002) studied the online versions of *The New York Times*, The Associated Press, Reuters and *Time* magazine. They compared the content of these online news sources with electronic bulletin-board discussions at AOL. The researchers selected four issues, immigration, healthcare, taxes and abortion, for content analysis, and the investigation found significant correlation between the four news sources and the bulletin board for all issues except abortion. The authors suggested that the lack of correlation for abortion might be the result of the controversial nature of the issue, leading the topic to be discussed regardless of media coverage. They theorized that online

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news media might set the agenda for online users, as the legacy media have set the agenda for the public.

Examining the role of the Internet in the agenda-setting process, Wanta and Cho (2004) compared data from telephone interviews (the public agenda) with legacy news coverage (the media agenda) and found that Internet use can both diminish and increase agenda-setting effects, as those who remain online for longer periods may be self-selecting their exposure to issues, therefore reducing the salience of the media agenda (Wanta &Cho, 2004), while, conversely, users who go online motivated by information-seeking are probably doing so in ways that reinforce the media agenda, thus enhancing the agenda-setting effect.

In one of two other studies, Tremayne and Schmitz Weiss (2005) carried out an experiment to find out whether the look of a news website can influence the transfer of issue salience to readers. Their study revealed no difference in the strength of the agenda-setting ability between a website with just headlines and one with the same website design but with headlines and a blurb. They also found contradictory evidence for the question of transfer of issue salience, as one of the two most featured stories on the faux-news website—the war in Iraq—showed greater issue salience in the headline-only version, while the other prominent story—gay marriage—demonstrated a stronger issue salience in the headline-and-blurb version.

In the other study, Schiffer (2006) investigated the relationship of news coverage of the Downing Street memo controversy and the "blogswarm"—passionate and constant coverage by blogs—occasioned by the memo and which lasted over 60 days. The secret memo, leaked in 2005, concerned Britain's involvement in the Iraq war, with passages revealing that the Bush administration did not have an iron-clad case for the invasion of Iraq and had in fact massaged facts to justify the invasion (Schiffer, 2006). The "blogswarm" included ten leading blogs, five

television channels and twenty-eight American newspapers, all of which were examined for coverage of the dispute. As part of his findings, Schiffer reported that in their news reporting, large newspapers and television news tended to be more influenced by official sources, with stories appearing at those times when statements by government officials were made. Op-ed pages of newspapers were more consistent in their coverage, with Schiffer suggesting that the non-stop coverage of the issue by the "blogswarm" could have affected op-ed columns of newspapers more than official government pronouncements did.

Intermedia Agenda-Setting

It could never have been predicted at the time, but 42 years ago there appeared a scholarly article and a popular book that had a profound influence on how researchers and the public alike came to discern the media's role in and influence on public opinion. A 12-page article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and a best-selling book by Timothy Crouse about life for the "boys on the bus" covering the 1972 presidential campaign (Crouse, 1973) continue to reverberate in academic research. While he did not call it such, Crouse and his book, describing the pack journalism of a band of reporters who wrote almost identical news reports day after day, could be seen as an early look at intermedia agenda-setting (Golan, 2006).

Like a living being, the original agenda-setting theory has progressed during its long history as a line of scholarly research, with a new line of inquiry emerging in the 1980s that endeavored to discern what factors influenced the media's agenda (McCombs, 2004), to answer, in sum, the question "who sets the media's agenda?" (McCombs, 1993). Over the years, researchers have offered a number of possible influences on the media's agenda, including such important outside sources as the president, political campaigns and public relations (McCombs,

2004). A critical inside influence is "the interactions and influence of the various mass media on each other" (McCombs, 2004, p. 99). It is these interactions that comprise a phenomenon called intermedia agenda setting.

While most aspects of agenda-setting theory focus on the media's influence on the public, intermedia agenda setting centers on the relationship among the various media. As set out by McCombs (2000), intermedia agenda setting is defined as a medium's agenda-setting influence on other media's agenda, so that when one news outlet publishes a story, other media will mirror that outlet's content and present it in their publication with as much play as in the original medium.

Dating to the 1970s, when McCombs and Shaw (1972) first enunciated their theory, the belief that the news media influence the public agenda has been expanded upon by numerous scholars. Among the lines of inquiry is one that investigated dependent variables such as the need for orientation (Matthes, 2005, 2008) and the concept of media exposure (Wanta & Hu, 1996) which purport to describe why and under what circumstances so-called first-level agenda setting takes place. Moving beyond first-level agenda setting—that is, agenda setting that considers the transfer of salience issues —many scholars have investigated second-level agenda setting—that which considers the transfer of salience of the attributes linked to those objects (Craft & Wanta, 2004). Regarding intermedia agenda setting, which often seems to be a product of a much earlier time, numerous studies have shown a similarity of news content across media outlets (Lee, 2007), a trend which many say is derived from journalists' reliance on such sources as official press releases; their close attention to competing news media, particularly top-tier news entities such as *The New York Times*; and the basic norms and values the media practitioners have in common (McCombs, 2004).

Most agenda-setting research fits within the "effects" research paradigm by examining how the media influence public opinion. In their examination of agenda setting, Shoemaker and Reese (1996), in following the trend of most agenda-setting scholarship by considering the "effects" paradigm, noted that mass media scholars generally have studied the effects of the press on the audience, treating media content as an independent variable. Over the years, a distinctly fewer number of studies have treated media content as a dependent variable, examining, in other words, which factors may influence the creation of mass media messages. In their work, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) recognized the need for more research and theorizing about how media content is produced in order to cultivate broader knowledge of the mass media's role in society. Similarly, Gandy (1982) asked agenda-setting scholars to "go beyond agenda-setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purposes it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society" (p. 7). These and other questions have been addressed over the years through agenda-building and intermedia agenda-setting investigations, the former considering how issues originate and become topics of news coverage (Walters, Walters & Gray, 1996), the latter considering how the agendas of different media influence one another (Golan, 2006).

Among such media effects, Whitney and Becker (1982) demonstrated the influence of wire services on the agenda of local media. Wire services' effect on other media returned to the now classical White's (1950) gatekeeper study. Breed (1995) also demonstrated such impacts of the wire services' agenda and noted the tendency toward standardization of news stories among local media. Moreover, the effects were not limited to the wire services, as demonstrated by Reese and Danielian (1989), who identified *The New York Times*' agenda-setting role by showing how the newspaper's coverage of the drug issue was followed in coverage by *The*

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Washington Post and *The Los Angeles Times*. It was not just newspapers that emulated *The New York Times*, some television networks also followed the newspaper's lead. In another study, Semetko et al. (1991) demonstrated how political parties and media themselves affect American and British media election coverage.

While some highly regarded scholars identified the wellsprings of the media agenda in various ways (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), intermedia agenda setting is primarily concerned with assigning the source of the media agenda to other media, while leaving open the possibility that potential news agenda-makers like politicians, public relations firms and other influential elements may play a role, as a way to expand the theoretical underpinnings of the agenda-setting effects on the media. Some researchers, however, argue that the phenomenon in which the media, the public and the government simultaneously set the social agenda must be explained with another concept, "agenda building" (Lang & Lang, 1983; Tanner, 2004). Scholars acknowledge that the original theory of intermedia agenda-setting effects deals with the exchange of agendas among various media organizations, but also are quick to point out that the relatively new concept of agenda building broadens the concept of agenda formation to include society as a whole.

The locus of much agenda-building and intermedia agenda-setting research is to be found in theories of the sociology of news literature. These theories hold that journalists, through their individual and news-institutional routines and affiliations, filter and give shape to reality rather than simply reflect it. As Shoemaker & Reese (1996) explained it, news is a social construct, a false environment that exists in between "the world outside" and "the pictures in our heads."

However, to contend, as Shoemaker and Reese do, that news is socially constructed is not to contradict the fact that media issues often are dictated by real-world events. For example,

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Behr and Iyengar (1985) found television news coverage of energy, unemployment and inflation, coverage that was at least to some extent driven by here-and-now economic conditions. Johnson et al. (1996) found in a study of President Nixon's war on drugs that media attention rose concomitantly with drug arrests. Even so, real-world situations alone cannot offer the whole explanation for how journalists decide what to cover. For this reason, investigations of agenda building and intermedia agenda-setting have tried to identify other considerations that shape the media agenda, many of which have been located in the systemic culture of journalism and the very methods of gathering and reporting the news.

As McCombs showed (2004), journalists frequently observe the work of their peers to confirm their own sense of news, and it is content analysis that has added a practical basis to anecdotal accounts of the agenda-setting influence of the top-tier news organizations. For instance, Golan (2006) found that *The New* York *Times* influenced the agenda of evening newscasts of the three major broadcast television networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, in their coverage of international news. Moreover, Shaw and Sparrow (1999) found that in the 1992 presidential campaign, so-called inner ring, or prestigious, newspapers—*The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* —influenced coverage of the campaign and the economy by less-prestigious ("outer-ring") newspapers.

Even when they act independently, journalists still tend to make remarkably similar decisions, an inclination that can be attributed to the professional norms and values they tend to have in common. According to research by Dearing and Rogers (1996), mainstream journalists are likely to agree about the news value of a given issue because they have such similar backgrounds—the same college courses, journalism textbooks, and career trajectories— which results in shared norms and values, the monitoring of the work of their peers, and a uniformity of

news content across media outlets that has been at various times called standardization (Breed, 1955), consonance (Noelle-Neumann & Mathes, 1987), congruence (Shaw & Sparrow 1999), and homogeneity (Lee, 2007). Due to this high degree of standardization, agenda-setting researchers often combine the agendas of various news outlets to create a composite media agenda (McCombs, 2004).

With the growing diversity of information sources available to the public, scholars increasingly are asking whether it is logical to speak of a uniform news agenda, well documented as it is, or whether, in fact, each news outlet has its own individual agenda. To add to the profusion, scholars have become more and more interested in intermedia agenda setting in the Internet age, with some of their studies continuing to investigate the question of which form of media is the influencer and which the influenced (Lim, 2006). McCombs, in an essay reviewing present trends and future directions of agenda-setting research, contended that intermedia agenda-setting research is critical in the current fragmented Internet media landscape because there is scant knowledge about the relationship between legacy news media and the Internet media such as political blogs (McCombs, 2005).

What are the implications of a world in which the media are more specialized and fragmented, and target niche audiences rather than broader audiences? Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argued that the effects of mass media might be more difficult to produce or measure as message recipients exercise greater choice and enjoy an ever-increasing number of options. Still other researchers (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Sunstein, 2001; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Tewksbury, 2005) have noted their concerns about the consequences of such a new media world for democratic self-governance, cautioning that because the Internet permits people to find news sources that augment their own parochial interests and filter out the rest, society could splinter

into groups of people who know a great deal about a few topics but who possess very little knowledge about broader issues (Tewksbury, 2005). With these developments, some say, people eventually might have trouble communicating with one another (Sunstein, 2001) or taking collective action (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001) due to their no longer having a bond around a core set of issues or values.

To this point, however, these concerns have been minimized by the dominance of "establishment" sources such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and CNN (Horrigan, 2006) in the presentation of online news, to the point, in fact, where the concentration of online media may be even more pronounced than that of their print and broadcast counterparts. An analysis by Hindman (2009) of online traffic showed, for example, that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both have an online market share that is roughly 2.5 times their share of the print newspaper market, buttressing the belief that these newspapers are even more dominant online than in print. According to Hindman, "in a world where thousands of news sources are only a few clicks away, many assumed that organizations like CNN or *The New York Times* would become less important. For those concerned that the Internet will destroy general-interest intermediaries, the continuing strength of large, national, name-brand news outlets are welcome." (2009, p. 101)

Ku and his colleagues (2003), among other scholars, have found evidence of intermedia agenda-setting relationship between legacy media and various forms of Internet media. Ku and his colleagues' study (2003) considered the relationship between website campaigning and legacy news media in the 2000 U.S. presidential election, being interested not only in whether campaign-controlled messages could affect the public agenda, but also in whether campaign-controlled messaging could affect the media's agenda. In conducting their research, Ku and his

colleagues examined the evening news agendas for ABC, NBC and CBS as well as for *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

In addition, scholars have researched the intermedia agenda-setting role of the legacy news media on blogs (Wallsten, 2007), with, for example, a study by Sweetser, Golan and Wanta (2008) looking at the relationship between the official blogs of presidential candidates John Kerry and George W. Bush and those of television network news in the 2004 election campaign. Their study, focusing only on broadcast news as opposed to print or online news, used cross-lagged analysis to compare content analyses of blog posts and news stories to examine intermedia agenda-setting relationship in two four-week periods. The researchers tested for a positive correlation between blogs at Time 1 and news broadcasts at Time 2, which would suggest intermedia agenda-setting relationship between the candidates' blogs and the news media, and also measured correlation between news broadcasts at Time 1 and candidate's blogs at Time 2. Finding significant correlations, the researchers noted, nonetheless, that the correlation from broadcast news at Time 1 to blog posts at Time 2 was greater than that for the opposite direction and concluded that the primary direction of relationship was from the television news media to the candidates' campaign blogs. The findings of Sweetser, Golan and Wanta's (2008) study indicated that there was also a slight reciprocal relationship in which the television news media were influenced by the blogs.

The advent of political blogs has popularized a hybrid media form that includes elements of participatory journalism (Lasica, 2003) and those of other communication models, such as the personal diary (Herring, Scheidt, Wright & Bonus, 2005). There is no "right way" to blog, as some bloggers subscribe to the norms of traditional journalism (Fiedler, 2008) while others

practice a form of journalism not tied to its traditions and norms (Lasica, 2003), and nearly two-thirds do not consider their blogs to be a form of journalism at all (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). While journalists and bloggers are both inspired by a motive to tell a story, they are not necessarily inspired in the same manner. The essence of journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), is a discipline of verification (p. 71), and the Society of Professional Journalists' ethics code urges reporters to "test the accuracy of information from all sources" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2006). For bloggers, the approach to truth-telling is more in line with the "marketplace of ideas" notion described by John Milton: ideas are given a public airing before they have been fully vetted in the hope that truth will arise from the discussion that follows (Singer, 2003), a model characterized by Shirky (2003) as the process of "publish, then filter" rather than the traditional gate-keeping model of "filter, then publish." The most popular manifestation of this model can be found at Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, which invites readers to edit and correct its entries after they have been posted.

Journalists and bloggers display functional as well as normative differences from each other. Blood (2002), in a pioneering handbook for bloggers, reported several differences between what bloggers do and what journalists do, including the tendency of most bloggers to engage in little direct reporting, employ no fact checkers, and answer to themselves, not to an editor or publisher, concluding that, "What [blogs] do is impossible for traditional journalism to reproduce, and what journalism does is impractical to do with a weblog" (p. 19).

While accurate to a certain extent, Blood's points, however, may be more relevant for personal journal-style blogs than for the top-tier blogs that receive thousands of "hits" on a daily basis. To make matters even more convoluted, the line between journalism and blogging has blurred now that many of the most-visited bloggers have adopted gate-keeping practices similar

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to those of mainstream news outlets (Haas, 2005). In Ugland and Henderson's (2007) characterization, such bloggers are "second-level" journalists—that is, people who gather news on a regular, deliberate basis, even if they are not necessarily committed to all of the norms and values that have traditionally shaped the journalism ethos (p. 253).

Accordingly, such similarities between top political bloggers and traditional journalists could be expected to produce a likeness in the agendas of both media, and new studies on blogs and agenda setting have provided empirical support for such a thesis. For example, Lee's (2007) content analysis of posts on eight political blogs and of news items in four mainstream news outlets between Labor Day and Election Day during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign showed that the issue agenda was noticeably consistent across the various media, with most correlations exceeding +.80. In addition, Metzgar (2007), using a blog search engine to compare the number of blog posts discussing immigration with the number of immigration-related stories appearing in major newspapers and on the television networks' evening newscasts during a 179-day span, found a significant, though relatively weak, correlation of +.293 between blogs and newspapers, and a somewhat stronger correlation of +.453 between blogs and television news. Finally, Meraz (2009) compared the framing of three issues in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* with the framing of the identical issues in 18 political blogs across the ideological spectrum and found that the attribute agendas of the liberal and moderate blogs, although not those of the conservative blogs, were strongly correlated with the media's attribute agendas.

Although showing that significant positive correlations exist between the agendas of political blogs and the legacy media is a requisite step in understanding how agenda-setting works in the contemporary media environment, by themselves these correlations do not show that a given agenda determines or influences another, nor do the correlations help us learn how

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such agenda setting might work. "Blogs," McCombs said (2005), "are part of the journalism landscape, but who sets whose agenda under what circumstances remains an open question" (p. 549).

Wallsten (2007) examined the question of directionality by investigating daily *New York Times* coverage and blog discussion of 35 issues during the 2004 presidential election campaign. His conclusion, based on time-series analysis, was that the agenda-setting relationship is "a high-speed, two-way street rather than a slow-moving, one-way road leading from media coverage to blog discussion or vice versa" (p. 567). He found that for some issues news coverage preceded blog discussion by one or more day, while for others bloggers led the way, even as, for still others, no correlation was found.

While Wallsten's analysis of agenda setting as a "two-way street" is a critical insight, his study nevertheless seems to fuse events and issues, given that many of the 35 issues examined, such as "Mary Cheney," "missing explosives," and "Abu Ghraib," might arguably be described as events, events and issues being, in Rogers and Dearing's (1988) formulation "discrete happenings that are limited by space and time," and matters "involving cumulative news coverage of a series of related events that fit together in a broad category," respectively (p. 566). Agenda-setting, as it has customarily been thought of, appears more focused on broader issues and more sustained effects than on whether writers blog about a given event shortly before or after traditional journalists (which might be partly a function of nothing more than different publication schedules and/or writing habits). As shown in the literature, there is a strong correlation between the legacy news media and political blogs. In this context, the remaining of this chapter will enumerate the research questions and hypotheses of this study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This dissertation was aimed at investigating two related set of research questions and hypotheses. The first set of research questions and hypotheses stem from the core assumption of this dissertation: political blogs, in the current media environment, in many instances play a significant role in setting the agenda of legacy media (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011; Pavlik, 2008). Political blogs also play a major role in the agenda-building process by which some controversial issues become news in the legacy media, which influence and affect the public agenda. The dissertation explores the relationship between political blogs and legacy media in the context of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor. Therefore, we ask:

RQ1: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the legacy media's coverage on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

In addition, this study tried to understand specific relationship between political blogs and different segments of legacy media such as newspapers, network TV, and cable channels.

RQ2: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the newspapers' coverage on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

RQ3: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the network television channels' coverage on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

RQ4: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the cable television channels' coverage on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

Some scholars argue that conservative media create a self-protective enclave and reinforce the views of conservative media outlets' like-minded audience members (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Among the three all-news 24-hour cable TV channels, Fox News Network is

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perceived to be the far right and most conservative in its presentation of news and commentaries (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1: Conservative political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the conservative cable television channel Fox News Channel's coverage of the rumor.

Like the Fox News Channel, a few newspapers including *The Washington Times* and *New York Post* are considered as conservative newspapers that echo the coverage of other conservative media outlets (Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2010).

H2: Conservative political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the conservative newspapers' coverage of the rumor.

Among the cable TV channels, MSNBC is perceived to be the far left and most liberal in its presentation of news and commentaries (Whitlock, 2011).

H3: Liberal political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the liberal cable television channel MSNBC's coverage of the rumor.

Conservative critics of the media argue that there exists liberal bias within a broad spectrum of media outlets including major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (Groseclose, 2005). So, we hypothesize:

H4: Liberal political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the liberal newspapers' coverage of the rumor.

The following research question and hypotheses stem from the results of the past studies that show that political blogs often create a virtual community of shared interest and opinion (Leccese, 2009). Both liberal and conservative blogospheres that are successful and high-ranking are capable of playing a major role in the broader political debate. Interestingly these top ranking

blogs often follow each other either to support the positions of the blogs that they are sympathetic to, or to refute a claim or position by other blogs belonging to their opposite ideological and political spectrums.

We are also interested to know the extent to which different media outlets followed their peers in covering the rumor. By peers, we mean media organizations belonging to the same category in terms of their form and political ideology/leaning. For example, Fox News Channel will be considered as a peer of MSNBC as both of them are cable television channels. Political blog *Hot Air* will be considered a peer of another political blog *Red State* because both of them share conservative political values. Therefore, we ask:

RQ5: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the coverage of their peers on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

H5: The volume of the coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor by the conservative political blogs will be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

H6: The volume of the coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor by the liberal political blogs will be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

The second set of research questions and hypotheses explores the relationship between online search behavior and the construction of public agenda by looking at the relationship between the coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor by both legacy and blog media and the rumor's public salience as measured by online search activity. When are the agenda-setting effects most likely to occur? McCombs (2004) and others suggest the psychological concept of a "need for orientation"—defined in terms of relevance and uncertainty which takes place sequentially, meaning an issue must be relevant before it can become uncertain —arguing that some individuals (journalists as well as the public) have a more enhanced need for orienting cues

and require more background information on a given topic or issue. According to McCombs (2004), low relevance equates to a low level of certainty or orientation, while with a high level of relevance the level of uncertainty must also be determined. When individuals have everything they need to know about a given topic or issue, their level of uncertainty will be low, though in cases where individuals consider an issue to be relevant and they require more information about that issue, their need for orientation will be high, and they will be more susceptible to an agenda-setting effect.

Using these benchmarks, this study argued that a large segment of the American public had a high need for orientation regarding the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor inasmuch as with any presidential aspirant, information about candidate Obama was highly relevant for many Americans. In fact, surveys indicate interest in election news was at a 20-year high in the 2008 election cycle (Pew, 2008a). To add to the need for orientation, according to McCombs (2004), unfamiliar candidates for public office create uncertainty with the American people, and Obama unquestionably was such a candidate, rising as he did from a virtual unknown to the Democratic Party nominee for the president. Uncertainty about his background, coupled with his having spent childhood years in Hawaii and Indonesia, only seemed to add to people's confusion. Then-current polls showed how difficult it was for many voters to identify with Obama's background, and more than 50% of the public believed Obama was the riskier choice for president (NBC News & *The Wall Street Journal*, 2008). These findings seem to show that much of the public was unclear about who Obama really was and therefore had a notably high need for orientation, which can lead us to expect the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor to produce an agenda-setting effect. With this in mind, we ask:

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RQ6: To what extent does the political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor statistically predict the volume of Internet searches about the rumor?

To understand the relationship between online search behavior and the public agenda, we also hypothesize:

H7: The volume of the conservative political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about the rumor.

H8: The volume of the liberal political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about the rumor.

RQ7: To what extent does the legacy media's coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor statistically predict the volume of Internet searches about the rumor?

H9: The volume of the newspapers' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

H10: The volume of the network television channels' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

H11: The volume of the cable television channels' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

If we use the (now-outdated) hypodermic needle theory of mass communication, a media effect occurred almost immediately, and, while most media effects scholars have distanced themselves from that theory, agenda-setting researchers continue to debate how long it takes for media salience of an issue to transfer to the public's salience. In studying salience, scholars have employed varying time frames to allow for news exposure (ranging from a single day to several years) and have found variances for effects. With the way people search the Internet, it seems likely that the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor would have a rather immediate effect—that is, the

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news-reading, -viewing or -listening public would take in coverage of the Obama rumor and more or less immediately conduct an Internet search to gather more information—meaning that the transfer of media salience to public salience would occur very quickly. Moreover, for those who consume their news online, the effect could be virtually instantaneous, given that they would likely conduct their search on the same computer from which they received the news. However, those same instantaneous online effects also are fleeting. Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo (2002) found that the online effects dissipated quickly, in some cases after only two days. Based on these findings, we hypothesize:

H12: The correlations between the coverage of political blogs and legacy media on the volume of Internet searches about that rumor will be higher on the same day (day 1) and lower on each succeeding day (2 through 5).

Weeks and Southwell (2010) conducted a study, in which they posed somewhat similar hypotheses (e.g. H7a and H7d). However, our study is significantly different than theirs. They explored the relationship among newspapers, television, and Internet searches. Whereas, we looked at a broader perspective examining the relationship among three different segments of legacy media (newspapers, network TV and cable TV), and most importantly, political blogs.

The results and method of a qualitative study of contents and attributions for the first 15 days of the national media coverage of this rumor (January 17, 2007 to January 31, 2007) are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

QUALITATIVE STUDY

This dissertation used a combination of methods, quantitative and qualitative, to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. A quantitative content analysis was conducted to test most of the hypotheses and research questions. The results of the quantitative study are reported in Chapter 5. This chapter explains how the qualitative content analysis was conducted and reports the results obtained.

The 2008 presidential campaign was unique in many ways, including having Sarah Palin as the first-ever female Republican vice-presidential candidate, in Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first woman with a chance to win a major party nomination, and Barack Obama, the country's first African-American presidential nominee, who ultimately won the presidency. At the same time, the campaign was significant for disseminating the rumor that then senator and Democratic nominee for president Barack Obama was secretly Muslim. Prior to the presidential campaign, few Americans knew Barack Obama; however, during the campaign, he was placed front and center and was the focus of countless stories and profiles in the national media, including major newspapers and magazines and on television and radio news and talk shows, as well as on political blogs and websites.

When and how did the rumor about Obama's faith originate? The first chapter of this dissertation tried to answer this question with a detailed discussion about the origin of the rumor. In this qualitative portion of the dissertation, we explored the genesis of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor for the first 15 days of the national media coverage of this rumor: January 17, 2007 to January 31, 2007. Our goal was to pinpoint and track how the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor emerged in the news media agenda.

In this chapter, we take a close look at a prototypical case of how the news media can set the public agenda, turning a rumor into the subject of a major news story in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign and beyond. Specifically, we examine how a virtually unknown Internet-based news organization was able to propel its agenda onto the legacy news media agenda with the aid of right-leaning media organizations (the "echo chamber") to reach a broader reading, listening and viewing public.

Research Questions

The qualitative part of this dissertation has two goals: a) Locating the timeline of how a rumor originated by a website's (InsightMag.com) anonymously sourced report turned into nearly two weeks long national media coverage of unfounded accusations against the leading contender for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, and b) Identifying the tone of the national media coverage of that period. With these two goals in mind, we ask the following research questions:

1: How did the mainstream US media report the rumor and the political stir over Obama's faith in the run-up to the 2008 presidential elections?

2: What was the tone of the national media's first two week's coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor? Did they separate truth from rumor?

To answer the research questions mentioned above, we employ "qualitative content analysis" method. The analyses go beyond simply counting words or digging out "objective content" from the newspaper articles and the transcripts of radio and television broadcasts on the rumor. Rather, we explore the "themes and patterns" manifested in those articles and transcripts to understand the tone of the national media's initial coverage of the rumor.

Qualitative Analysis of Content

As in related areas, in mass communication discipline, the quantitative research method has been used for content analysis. Given its perceived weaknesses, however, this method has been somewhat supplanted by qualitative content analysis (QCA) as the latter is able to address some of the weaknesses of the quantitative approach. Typically, qualitative content analysis has been defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). In lay terms, qualitative content analysis constitutes a method in which researchers allow themselves latitude in the interpretation of data—the "text"—to arrive at its meaning. Moreover, QCA emphasizes a view that combines texts along with their precise contexts. It goes beyond the simple computation of word counts or the extraction of objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be apparent or concealed in a particular selection. During the long course of literary analysis, the supposition was that meaning was inherent in a text, but that assumption was challenged when the psychologist Frederic Bartlett, in 1932, posited that the recipients take an active part in constructing the meaning of a text (Schreier, 2012).

It can be salutary to compare QCA with its opposite approach, quantitative content analysis. To begin with, each method was developed from different research spheres. Quantitative content analysis, in wide use in mass communication, can be an effective method for denoting evident textual elements, but is an approach criticized for neglecting structure and meaning embedded in the text (Weber, 1990). By contrast, QCA, first used for studies in anthropology, qualitative sociology, and psychology, has the capacity to delve into the meanings underlying textual messages. In addition, while quantitative content analysis is useful for testing

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hypotheses or addressing questions generated from theories or earlier research, QCA is primarily inductive, basing the assessment of topics, themes, and inferences extracted from them, in the data. Finally, the results of the two methods differ. The numbers produced by the quantitative approach can be manipulated using various statistical methods. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, commonly produces descriptions or typologies, together with observations from subjects signaling how they view societal milieus, thus allowing the viewpoints of the creators of the text to be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of a given study's results (Berg, 2001). In sum, QCA values distinctive themes that show the variety of the meanings of the observable facts rather than the statistical significance of particular texts or theories.

Method

Qualitative content analysis is an inductive process in which data is condensed into groupings based on sound reasoning and conjecture, which materialize from the data by means of the researcher's attention to detail. While qualitative analysis is an inductive process, it need not exclude deductive reasoning (Patton, 2002). For example, engendering perceptions or quantities from a premise or a previous study can be fruitful for qualitative research, especially when data analysis gets under way (Berg, 2001).

The fact that qualitative content analysis often begins during the initial phase of data collection assists the researcher in switching between concept development and data collection and may in turn help steer the subsequent data collection in directions that are more beneficial for addressing the questions being researched (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It should be kept in mind that qualitative content analysis, even as it supports accurate and authoritative inferences, comprises a set of methodical and clear operations for measuring and processing data and that

certain steps may intersect with long-established quantitative content analysis operations, while other steps may remain singular to this approach.

Our methodology follows the steps identified by Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth (2009): 1) prepare the data, 2) define the unit of analysis, 3) develop categories and a coding scheme, 4) test coding scheme on a sample of text, 5) code all the text, 6) assess coding consistency, 7) draw conclusions from the coded data, and 8) report findings.

The data for the qualitative part of this study was drawn from the legacy news media for the period of January 17, 2007 to January 31, 2007. A total of 58 relevant texts were identified through LexisNexis and Google searches. Similar search term and search procedure for the quantitative part of the study was used for this qualitative portion of the dissertation. The final search term was "BODY (obama w/50 Muslim and rumor or secret or secretly or secretly Arab or he is an Arab or he is Arab or Muslim name or false rumor)." Using this search term, LexisNexis yielded a total of 72 results. However, only 30 articles and transcripts were found relevant. From the LexisNexis search, we found stories published in some British newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* of the UK and one Canadian newspaper. We did not include those articles for our qualitative content analysis. The remaining 28 articles and transcripts used for the final analysis were found through Google searches. The 58 texts represent the coverage of 37 national and regional legacy media outlets.

Following the standard method of qualitative content analysis, we used individual themes as the unit of analysis. An instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire "text." When using theme as the coding unit, we primarily looked for the expressions of an idea. We analyzed the articles by reading them and looking for

themes and patterns, then developing a coding system to describe the data. These procedures are typical steps in content analysis.

Results

The qualitative content analysis of the texts revealed six major themes: (1) Obama was raised as a Muslim and is being deceptive about his religion; (2) he was educated in a Madrasha (Islamic seminary) for between two and four years, where he was taught Wahhabism, a radical form of Islam; (3) he was sympathetic to terrorists and/or does not consider terrorists to be the enemy to the United States; (4) he still was a practicing Muslim; (5) he was anti-American and would harm America if elected president; and (6) that the Hilary Clinton campaign was the source of these claims.

In this section, we examine a selection of the most important news transcripts/texts and observe which of these themes are contained within each one.

We begin with first transcript, which was the first mention of this rumor in the mainstream media after the publication on the Insight article.

"…Why didn't anybody ever mention that that man right there was raised- spent the first decade of his life, raised by his Muslim father- as a Muslim and was educated in a madrassa?..." *Fox & Friends First*, <u>Fox News Channel</u>, January 19, 2007.

Here we clearly observe the claims that Obama was a Muslim and trained in a Madrassa. The commentator continued, further emphasizing and elaborating upon the alleged significance of the madrassa:

"…And the thing about the madrassa, and you know, let's just be honest about this, in the last number of years, madrasas have been, we've learned a lot about them, financed by

Saudis, they teach this Wahhabism which pretty much hates us." *Fox & Friends First*,

Fox News Channel, January 19, 2007.

The commentator then moved further and extrapolates upon the "dangerous political implications" of Obama secretly being a Muslim, now raising the possibility of his pro-terrorist sympathies, and potential danger to America:

"…I mean, you think that would possibly give him better insight on the enemy, maybe

he doesn't consider terrorist the enemy." *Fox & Friends First*, Fox News Channel,

January 19, 2007.

Such statements cast doubts upon the credibility and fitness of Obama to be the president of the United States, suggesting that anyone who was raised by Muslims and indoctrinated while still a child into a form of radical Islam might still (presumably) harbor Muslim sympathies, and if so, might therefore still be sympathetic to Islamic terrorists, and might even be a terrorist himself who will harm America. These themes further reinforced in subsequent sentences by saying that Obama:

"….was over in Indonesia for five years, or roughly five years, went to a

madrassa and there is some reports that Wahhabism was the curriculum there, which is a

problem because they start with "We hate America" and work their way back. *Fox &*

Friends First, Fox News Channel, January 19, 2007.

Other claims within the story further reinforced and repeated these same major themes in various ways, all raising fears and doubts about the credibility and trustworthiness about Obama as a presidential candidate.

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Five hours later, at 5PM, the beginning of prime time, Fox News Channel then aired a second story on the same subject. The same themes were included as in the earlier broadcast, with the additional theme of attributing the story to Senator Clinton:

"…The New York senator has reportedly outed Obama's madrassa past. That's right, Clinton team reported to have pulled out all the stops to reveal something Obama would rather you didn't know – that he was educated in a Muslim madrassa." *The Big Story with John Gibson*, Fox News Channel, January 19, 2007.

This next broadcast, made about an hour later on January 19, also from Fox News, repeated and further reinforced the same basic themes:

"…Americans have a visceral reaction to the word madrasah. In our world a madrasah is where zealots train your Muslim kids to hate America, to hate the west and to be killers. Saying Obama attended a madrasah is tying Obama's name to terrorism. And that is real political hardball in action. Especially when Obama himself said in his own book, that he attended a predominantly Muslim school as a youngster in Indonesia. The people who want to slime him are going to say translation, madrasah." *The Big Story with John Gibson*, Fox News Channel, January 19, 2007.

Later that same evening, on a CNN broadcast made at 7 PM by Glenn Beck, although he expressed great doubts about the truth of the rumor, nevertheless cleverly used the story to depict the Democrats in a very negative light:

"…Now, I saw this on FOX News this morning and it is an outrageous claim that Barack Obama spent at least four years studying at a madrassa, which is a Muslim seminary in Indonesia. The report goes on to suggest that the information was leaked by a political opponent within the Democratic Party. I wonder if the name rhymes with Killery Hinton.

It`s widely known that most madrassas are funded by Saudi Arabia. Experts agree that the variety of Islam taught in these Muslim schools is Wahhabism. This is the most radical, extreme and anti-American form.

Before I go any further, it was a little misleading the report I heard today. I want to be very, very clear. The source of this story is a conservative blog. So, the odds of this being true pretty darn close to zero.

Here`s the point tonight. There is no confirmation, no evidence, nothing, that Barack Obama attended a madrassa. We contacted his office for a definitive answer. We were told, no comment.

However, what is confirmed by this report is just how dirty the political candidates -- on both sides -- are prepared to play. I can`t help but get the feeling, and I`m not connecting it to this story, but if you live in Chappaqua, New York, and you hear a strange grinding noise coming from the Clinton estate, it could be Hillary Clinton sharpening her knives in the basement." *Glenn Beck*, <u>CNN</u>, January 19, 2007.

From Fox News and CNN, the rumor soon spread from cable TV to numerous regional newspapers. The first of these was *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Utah), on January 19. The article basically debunked the claims, but nevertheless did so in a way that exposed the story to a wider audience:

"…While mainstream media have seemed intrigued by, but not obsessed with, the senator's heritage, the same, unfortunately, cannot be said of the extreme right blogosphere. There, one seldom reads any reference to Obama that does not make pointed reference to his middle name: Hussein. Then there are those who observe that

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only a single consonant separates his surname from the first name of the al-Qaida leader who launched the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

It is such nakedly puerile slander that your first response is to laugh. Then you remember how that same blogosphere managed to turn the war hero John Kerry into a "traitor" and the Texas Air National Guardsman, George W. Bush, into a war hero - and it seems much less funny.

Barack Obama is a black man with a Muslim name who would be seeking the presidency in a historically racist nation currently at war against Muslim extremists. One wonders if there is enough handsomeness, intelligence and charisma in the world to overcome all that." _The Salt Lake Tribune_, January 20, 2007.

The same day, January 20, the syndicated column was published in various other regional newspapers, including the _Buffalo News_ of New York, _San Antonio Express-News_ of Texas, _The Charleston Gazette_ of West Virginia, _The Times Leader_ of Pennsylvania, and _American News_ of South Dakota.

Also on January 20, another story was broadcast on Fox News. In this case, without taking a position on the truth or falsity of the claims, the commentator nevertheless justified making the personal religious views of a candidate an issue of public inquiry, saying that reporters do have a right to ask these questions and the public has a right to receive accurate answers to them:

"…CAL THOMAS, SYNDICATED COLUMNIST: Not quite. I think there are suggestions out there that it might be, a bunch of stories and rumors and things floating around. A lot of questions about he spent two years in a Muslim school in Indonesia before he later attended a Catholic school. A lot of people are going to wonder about that.

They start off these schools, if it was a madrassa, with a reference to God and his only prophet is Muhammad. People want to know about his conversion story.

And that's a fair question, by the way, before anybody writes about religious bigotry. Because they asked the same questions about George W. Bush and Pat Robertson and other people with a strong faith. I think these are legitimate questions." *Fox News Watch*, <u>Fox News Channel</u>, January 20, 2007.

The following day, January 21, Fox News ran yet another story that touched briefly on the matter, implying that the rumor was now an established fact:

"…WILLIAMS: And I think in terms of Obama and race, I still think that there's -- and don't forget the idea that, you know, comes from a father who was a Muslim and all that. I mean, I think that given we're at war with Muslim extremists, that presents a problem, and I think there's a lot of -- for all the openness to Obama and the whole idea of a fresh new start, I think race continues to be an issue." *Fox News Sunday*, <u>Fox News Channel</u>, January 21, 2007.

Also on January 21, the *Chicago Sun-Times* ran an article further embroidering upon the subject, embellishing it in a somewhat flippant fashion:

"…He's young, gifted and black, and white, and Hawaiian, and Kansan, and charismatic, and Congregationalist, and Muslim... He was raised in an Indonesian madrassah by radical imams…

But look at it from a Democratic primary voter's point of view… world view is based on the belief that deep down we'd all rub along just fine and this neocon fever about Islam is just a lot of banana oil to keep the American people in a state of fear and paranoia. What would more resoundingly confirm that view than if the nicest, most non-bitter,

nonpartisan guy in politics turns out to have graduated from the Sword of the Infidel

Slayer grade school in Jakarta?

To be sure, the imams always knew young Barack was not your typical novitiate. No

doubt when he was late for Friday prayers they stood around singing "How Do You

Solve a Problem Like Obama?" <u>Chicago-Sun Times</u>, January 21, 2007

The next morning, January 22, Fox News ran another story, this one intending to

"clarify" their earlier reports about the rumor:

"…One other thing we want to clarify something. On Friday, of last week, we did the

story from the Insight Magazine where we talked about how they were quoting that

Barack Obama, when he was a child, growing up in Indonesia, had attended a Madrassa.

Well Mr. Obama's people called and said that that is absolutely false. They said the idea

that Barack Obama went to a radical Muslim school is completely ridiculous." *Fox &*

Friends, <u>Fox News Channel</u>, January 22, 2007

Later the same day, on January 22, CNN first broadcast a story, which completely

debunked the original rumor. This was centered among information collected by CNN

correspondent John Vause, who had been sent to Indonesia, located the specific school Obama

had attended as a child, and made a thorough inquiry about the school and its educational

program:

"…And CNN did what any serious news organization is supposed to do in this kind of a

situation. We actually conducted an exclusive firsthand investigation inside Indonesia to

check out the school that Barack Obama attended as a little 6-year-old boy.

We sent our correspondent John Vause to Jakarta -- John.

JOHN VAUSE, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Wolf, I came here to Barack Obama's elementary school in Jakarta looking for what some have been calling an Islamic madrassa like those that teach violence and hate in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Well, Wolf, I've been to madrassas in Pakistan, and this school is nothing like that.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE (voice over): In the quadrangle of this elementary school, boys and girls age from 6 to 12 neatly dressed in uniform, playing together, just as a young Barack Obama would have done almost 40 years ago. Here they're taught science and math and practice traditional Indonesian dance.

(Besuki) elementary follows a national curricula, just like it did in the '60s and '70s. Take a close look at Obama's teachers, women and men all in Western-style dress.

There are religion classes once a week. Most of the 450 students are Muslim and are taught about Islam. The handful of Christians learn that Jesus is the son of God.

The deputy headmaster tells me he's unaware that his school has been labeled an Islamic madrassa by some in the United States and bristles at the thought. "This is a public school. We don't focus on religion," he told me. "In our daily lives we try to respect religion, but we don't give preference to one or the other."

Bandung Winadijanto attended Besuki with Obama. Back then was known as Barry. They were in Boy Scouts together. And he says in all these years, not a lot has changed at his old elementary.

BANDUNG WINADIJANTO, BESUKI ALUMNI: No, it's not an Islamic school. It is common -- I mean, it's general, because there's also a lot of Christian students, Buddhism students, also (INAUDIBLE) students.

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(END VIDEOTAPE)

VAUSE: And Wolf, in almost every way this school is typical of all state-run schools in Indonesia, except this is probably one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Jakarta. The U.S. ambassador lives just up the road, and this school is probably better off than most -- Wolf.

BLITZER: All right. John Vause in Jakarta for us. An excellent, excellent report. Glad we could bring that to our viewers." *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, <u>CNN</u>, January 22, 2007

For all practical purposes, this story effectively demonstrated the falsity of the main element of the rumor in a very graphic and definitive way. CNN then replayed the same exclusive report in its 7 PM, 8 PM and 10 PM prime time news broadcasts.

Nevertheless, the following day, more stories appeared which continued to discuss the rumor. For instance, the *Washington Times* ran the following story on January 23:

"…Then a lurid account of Obama's schoolboy days appeared in an Internet journal, detailing how young Obama, the son of a Muslim father and an atheist mother, became a Muslim in a radical Islamic school in Indonesia. Here was sensation suggesting that Barack Hussein Obama was this season's Manchurian candidate, programmed by sinister agents abroad to explode once he became the first Muslim president of the United States. …Or maybe Obama himself was behind such a "leak," to get the story out where his spinmeisters can cut off the story's legs now, while there's time and opportunity." <u>The Washington Times</u>, January 23, 2007

Also on January 23, another story appeared in *National Review,* which seemed to have little concern about the fact the main features of the rumor had been debunked, but focused further attention on the notion that Clinton was behind the rumor, despite her denials:

"…Insight's story was not thinly sourced," the posting said. "Our reporter's sources close to the Clinton opposition research war room confirm the truth of the story. The Clinton camp's denial has as much credibility as the 'I never had sex with that woman' statement." National Review, January 23, 2007

On January 24, Obama appeared in person on CBS, and directly confronted the rumor:

"…MR. SMITH: Since you're now actually in this race, it doesn't come without some rough edges. There's a report in an online site that you actually attended a madrassa. That has then been reported by other cable news outlets. Do you want to clear the air of that or explain it?

SEN. OBAMA: Well, I mean, CNN did a great job. Sorry to mention your competitor, but they actually went to the school that I attended for two years when I was seven and eight in Indonesia, and it showed that it was an ordinary public school. So, yeah, these kinds of scurrilous attacks are going to be out there. Unfortunately, they get repeated. And fortunately some good journalists showed that they were complete fabrications."

Early Show, CBS, January 24, 2007.

Also on January 24, ABC News interviewed Obama regarding the same subject:

"…Sensing a need to respond to an untrue allegation that he had been educated during his childhood in an Indonesia madrassa, Sen. Barack Obama and his staff have aggressively launched a campaign to debunk the story, perhaps indicating a fear that some may believe it.

'When I was six, I attended an Indonesian public school where a bunch of the kids were Muslim, because the country is 90 percent Muslim,' the Democratic presidential hopeful told ABC's Chicago affiliate WLS-TV. 'The notion that somehow, at the age of 6 or 7, I was being trained for something other than math, science and reading, is ludicrous.' Obama described the allegation as indicative of the 'climate of smear' associated with presidential campaigns and called on the press to make sure 'stories are substantiated.'" ABCNews.com, January 24, 2007.

The same day, *Associated Press* also carried a story by one of its reporters who was sent to Indonesia to investigate the school, which Obama had attended:

"…Interviews by The Associated Press at the elementary school in Jakarta found that it's a public and secular institution that has been open to students of all faiths since before the White House hopeful attended in the late 1960s." The Associated Press, January 24, 2007.

Like the earlier CNN investigation, this one further disproved the core elements of the rumor that this school was a training camp for Islamic militants. Even so, the story did confirm the existence of such radical Islamic schools in the general region. This, in a subtle way, could be taken to suggest the rumor, while false in its particulars, was not entirely beyond the realm of possibility:

"…Indonesia is home to several of the most radical Islamic schools in Southeast Asia, some with alleged terrorist links. But Solichin, who proudly pointed to a photo of a young Barry Obama, as he was known, said his school is not one of them." The Associated Press, January 24, 2007.

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The next day, January 25, a story was broadcast on ABC. Like CNN and Associated Press, ABC had also sent their own reporter to Jakarta to investigate the school, further disproving the claim it was a training center for Islamic terrorists:

"…Today, ABC News sent a producer and a crew to government elementary school number four in Jakarta, Indonesia, where Obama attended school from ages 6 to 8. There, we found pretty much what you'd find at any school. Boys and girls. Basketball. Computers. Sponge Bob Square Pants. "Here, I learn about science, math and English," says this sixth-grader, Alisa, who is 12 years old. "I am proud to go to this school because it is a prestigious school." We saw some Muslim worship. But we also saw a class in Christianity. A painting of Jesus on the wall. And a framed copy of the lord's prayer. "We're a regular public elementary school," said the headmaster. "Children of all religions are welcomed here." "These rumors about our school being an Islamic extremist school are completely incorrect," said the assistant headmaster. When the false reports about the school first appeared, the Obama campaign did not seem to know much about Obama's years in Indonesia. It was not until ABC and other media outlets went to the school that the charge was debunked. Obama's team seemed unprepared for that attack, even though the charge was not entirely new to the Senator." *Nightline*, <u>ABC</u>, January 25, 2007.

On January 26, *Salon* published a story noting the similarity of the "smear" tactics used against Obama to those used during the Watergate scandal of the 1970s:

"…Performing a dirty trick on one Democratic presidential candidate in a way that would reflect blame on another Democrat was the specialty of the Watergate crew led by Hunt, which back in the early '70s included G. Gordon Liddy and Donald Segretti, as well as a

host of lesser goons and spies such as the ingénue Lucianne Goldberg." <u>Salon.com</u>,

January 26, 2007.

Despite what most reasonable people might consider evidence of having thoroughly

discredited the story, Insight.com still refused to acknowledge its original set of claims had been

inaccurate. This persistent refusal was remarked upon in a story in the *Washington Post* on

January 28:

> "…When the madrassa story was debunked by CNN and the Associated Press, Insight
>
> didn't even have the decency to slink away. "The media uproar over our reporting reveals
>
> a media establishment choosing not to ask the tough questions about Obama's Muslim
>
> past: If he was raised in a secular household (as he claims), why does he have -- or
>
> retain -- Muslim names, Barack and Hussein?" the magazine asked in a posting on its
>
> Web site. "Were his father and step-father as secular as he says? What is the exact nature
>
> of Obama's current religious affiliation and what are the beliefs and teachings of his
>
> current church in Chicago, the Trinity United Church of Christ?" <u>The Washington Post</u>,
>
> January 28, 2007.

Perhaps even more incredibly, an entire week after the rumor had been entirely debunked,

on January 29, Fox News continued to run stories about the rumor. Despite acknowledging the

falsity of the rumor, the commentator nevertheless continued to use the story as a vehicle to

attack the character of Democratic candidates:

> "…MORRIS: Yes. You are going to a see an avalanche of negative stories about Obama.
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> I believe that that Insight magazine story that was inaccurate, that he went to a Muslim
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> school, was indeed planted, as Insight magazine said, by somebody close to the Clinton
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> war room." *Fox Hannity & Colmes*, <u>Fox News Channel</u>, January 29, 2007.

Likewise, InsightMag.com editor Jeffrey Kuhner, in a story published in the *New York Times*, on January 29, still refused to accept the falsity of the rumor:

"…Mr. Kuhner said he was not yet convinced by reports from officials of the elementary school that Mr. Obama attended in Indonesia about its secular history. "To simply take the word of a deputy headmaster about what was the religious curriculum of a school 35 years ago does not satisfy our standards for aggressive investigative reporting," he wrote."" *The New York Times*, January 29, 2007

Discussion

Based on the qualitative content analysis of the texts, perhaps the closest general description of the tone of the national media coverage about Obama having been educated at a school operated by Muslims would be a set of terms such as "sensationalistic," "malicious," and "hostile." This was especially true of the earlier stories in the conservative national media. The intention seemed to have been to depict both the Democratic candidates Obama and Hillary Clinton in as negative a way as possible. In the conservative media, there was an effort to present Obama as someone who was lying about his past, his religious beliefs, and who was quite possibly a traitor to the American public, American values, and perhaps even as a foreign agent intending to do harm to America. However, it is worth noting that there were some definite exceptions to this pattern, with even some extremely conservative commentators, such as Glenn Beck, expressing strong skepticism about the veracity of the key elements of the story. However, even so, the general tone was quite sensationalistic and hostile.

There seems to have been a definite effort to play upon the fears that Islam is, by definition, something sinister, foreign, dangerous, and evil. For example, no scandal was made of the claim that Obama might have been a Catholic but was now claiming to be a Protestant.

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Though Obama has officially represented himself to be a mainstream Protestant Christian, the same key passage in his book (Obama, 1995) that seems to have served as the seed for this entire episode also mentioned that he spent two years in a Catholic school, the same amount of time he says he spent in the Muslim school. However, none of the commentators seemed to feel this was grounds for concern. This suggests the emotional power of the issue derived its force specifically from fears about *Islam*—not merely the possibility the candidate's private religious beliefs might not be quite as he had been officially representing them to be (Ogan, Willnat, Pennington. & Bashir, 2013).

Regarding the question of whether there was an effort to separate facts from rumor, this is a somewhat more complex matter. Even so, a cursory examination of the texts analyzed makes the general pattern fairly clear. The answer to the question whether the commentators were making an effort to separate fact from rumor varies depending on the point in time under consideration. The first step in the process is arguably the publication of the book by Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, in 1995. In this book, he mentions some basic facts about his youth, saying that while a boy in Indonesia, he spent two years in Catholic school and two years in a Muslim school. Obama relates this as a simple fact, as if it is nothing of particular importance or anything he seems to feel is embarrassing or of any political significance.

This was followed by an undocumented phase of the rumor, when only anonymous emails were being circulated. This phase seems to have several discernible stages. We might infer that some unknown reader, examining Obama's book, referred to it in an email to someone else. We have no direct evidence about who this person might have been, or when this might have happened, so we must be careful. Perhaps they merely misread it, read into it some sinister

possibility, or something of the sort, which equated any association with Islam during a person's formative years to be dangerous. This notion was apparently relayed to other people via email, probably without any critical examination of the facts. This view seemingly became exaggerated, intensified, and distorted in to the idea that Obama had been raised with many years of extremist Islamic indoctrination, and this might bode ill for his political career. Since we do not have the content of these emails for examination, there is little that can be said with confidence about what was in them, who was spreading them, how many different versions there may have been, or what motives may have inspired them. However, at this stage (undocumented phase of the rumor) there does not seem to have been any serious efforts at evaluating the evidence or determining the veracity of this rumor.

The end of the "undocumented phase" and beginning of the next phase is generally considered to have been the first concrete and documented record of the claim that Obama was secretly a Muslim. This concerns the writings of Andy Martin, who, in 2004, began making the allegation in his blogs and Internet columns (Rutenberg, 2008). Whether Martin drew his inspiration directly from Obama's book, from emails, or other sources is not possible to say. Martin's initial press release attracted little or no attention from mainstream media, but apparently was noticed by the conservative website FreeRepublic.com, and from there, seems to have inspired a small but steady trickle of emails and other mentions, which apparently accepted the claims more or less uncritically. Seemingly in response to Martin's earlier press release, combined with a variety of other sources, including a person referred to as Ted Sampley, writing an article in 2006, also repeats the claim that Obama was secretly a Muslim, and trained in a extremist Islamic school in Indonesia (Rutenberg, 2008). At this stage, there still does not seem to have been any significant efforts to critically analyze the claims, nor verify any of the alleged

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facts they were supposedly based upon. At some later point in 2006, emails containing and repeating the material from Sampley "went viral" and began to be widely spread throughout the Internet. The chatter continued to slowly accelerate over the ensuing months, but even at this point, the story still seems to have been effectively ignored by all significant and mainstream news organizations.

However, something new seems to have occurred late in the year, when on December 13, 2006, Jason Zengerle, editor of the *Plank*, the weblog of the liberal magazine *The New Republic*, (Dietz, 2007) predicted that the Republicans were going to launch a savage and despicable "whispering campaign" against Obama, and "blame it all on Hillary." Zengerle was apparently responding to some of email and Internet chatter that had been circulation for several months. What specific information he had based the prediction upon and what prompted him to make it is not clear, but this prediction matched what actually did happen a few weeks later remarkably well. Did Zenergle have factual information? Had he seen something on the Internet or received a malicious email, which represented an effort to initiate the type of smear campaign he described? Is it possible that someone actually read what Zengerle wrote, decided it was a great idea, and followed his claim as if it was a good idea? However, more likely, we should consider Zengerle's published claim to be the earliest formal documentation of an email campaign that approximated the content of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor.

Without all the details, both of the two key elements seem to have already been present even at this stage: (a) a concerted hostile effort to "smear" Obama with false rumors, and (b) the attempt to blame the false rumor on the Clinton campaign. The hostility, maliciousness, and sensationalism already seem to have been present. It could be argued that Zengerle's written account represented an attempt to warn the public about the false content of the rumors that were

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then beginning to spread via emails, as thus to first public efforts to examine these claims in a critical fashion.

The next phase could be said to have began on Jan 9, 2007. This was the day Columnist Eric Zorn of the *Chicago Tribune* published a report of having received some emails being circulated containing the allegation that Obama was a Muslim, and that he was raised in a school run by "Islamic terrorists" (Dietz, 2007). His account presupposes that he knows of many other people in addition to himself having received various versions of this email, which he believes has not even the slightest credibility. Whatever the content of the version he had examined, he dismissed as nonsense—the work of "crazies." However, he further implies the documents are written in a serious tone, as if the authors claim to be reporting factual information, and expect the readers to take the matter seriously. At this stage, Zorn seems be taking the position of a responsible journalist, trying to warn readers about what he feels is a malicious and false rumor that should not to be taken seriously. This could be a further attempt to critically evaluate the claims being made, and to encourage the public to do so as well.

The next phase occurred on January 17, 2007, when InsightMag.com published a version of this same "Obama-is-a-Muslim" story, reporting it as factual information (Dietz, 2007). We do not know precisely what happened between Jan 9 and Jan 17, but presumably, some member of the InsightMag.com staff had received a version of the same (or similar) email Zorn (and apparently Zengerle) had previously received and dismissed. The InsightMag.com staff, however, seems to have taken the story in the email *very* seriously. What motives or circumstances may have caused them to take this position is difficult to determine. However, they responded as if they felt the information was true, and that it came directly from someone on Clinton's staff. Whether the email had made this claim, or whether this detail was added by

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the InsightMag.com staff cannot be determined. The fact that Zengerle had said the information to which he was previously exposed contained this attribution to Clinton as the source suggests this detail probably *was* included in whatever communication InsightMag.com had initially received. InsightMag.com did not have a wide exposure, and probably only a small number of people were exposed to the story through this source.

However, it seems clear enough that at this stage, there were no serious efforts by InsightMag.com staff to evaluate the veracity of the claims. InsightMag.com staff did not attempt to contact the school Obama had supposedly attended, did not contact the Obama campaign for their comments, nor attempt to communicate with the leaders of the Clinton campaign, but merely passed the story on uncritically.

The next important step occurred about 48 hours later, when numerous much larger media organizations responded to the story in InsightMag.com. Most of these were what Jamieson and Cappella (2008) refer to as the "right wing echo chamber," primarily conservative talk radio shows and affiliated publications. Many, but not all of these outlets, seem to have simply passed the story as reported in InsightMag.com in an uncritical fashion. There seems to have been no serious efforts to identify or evaluate the accuracy of the information or the credibility of its source, nor to contact the school in question, or discuss the matter with Obama or with the Clinton campaigns. Many of these "news programs" have several hundred thousand or even millions of listeners or viewers, so the exposure of the story had now expanded drastically within a very short time.

It cannot be said *all* of these right wing outlets presented the story uncritically as verified truthful information. For instance, Glenn Beck, an extremely right wing commentator, on his *CNN Headline News program,* expressed his opinion that the possibility it was true was "damn

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close to zero." However, he nevertheless seemed to accept the claim that the story was being spread by the Clinton campaign. Even at this point, there seems to have been no serious efforts to identify the source or evaluate the credibility of the information or the source of it, nor to contact the school in question, nor to discuss the matter with Obama or with the Clinton campaigns.

At this point, Zorn (the person who mentioned the matter back in January, 2007), continued to express great doubt about the facts of the story. Zorn continued to frame the story as malicious, politically motivated, and sensational. Therefore, even at this point, there were *some* serious efforts to separate fact from hearsay, in at least *some* news outlets. However, sources like Fox News continued to run stories that suggested this was all true, and these uncritical voices seem to have greatly overpowered the more restrained and skeptical voices.

By Jan 21, 2007, there were beginning to be serious efforts by more mainstream media such as *CNN* and the *Washington Post*, which s*everely* criticized various other reporters for uncritically accepting the story without examining the sources and the validity of the facts. Nevertheless, other conservative outlets, as Mark Steyn of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, still continued to present the story as if it represented authenticated facts.

The most effective and decisive attempt at evaluating the claims were the actions of CNN correspondent John Vause, who actually travelled to Indonesia and visited the specific school Obama had attended as a child. Vause discovered it to be a rather ordinary public school, which, though primarily Muslim in character, nevertheless admitted students of all religions, and was by no means any kind of extremist training camp for radical Islam or indoctrination center for terrorists. These facts were duly reported on Jan 22, 2007, and represented a clear and very concrete effort to separate fact from rumor. This presentation of the facts by Vause effectively debunked the story in the minds of even most of the very conservative commentators.

Even so, InsightMag.com still insisted the story came from Hilary Clinton's staff, thus further fueling the notion of the Democrats as malicious rumormongers, an interpretation of the incident, which seems to have only slowly faded away over the subsequent weeks. Despite these debunking efforts, approximately 12% of the US population continued to express the belief that Obama was a Muslim even as late as the election in November 2008 (Pew, 2008b; 2008d).

The general pattern regarding the efforts to separate factual material could be described this way: Even early in the "documented phase," there was already *some* serious skepticism and criticism regarding the supposed facts, and some efforts to counteract the malicious and sensational frame of the story. However, these activities were soon dwarfed and overshadowed by the actions of other massive news outlets to the point where the critical efforts were virtually ignored and unknown to most of the public. There was an extreme conflict between the sensationalistic efforts and the attempts to honestly evaluate the evidence. However only well *after* the story had reached the entire US population the critical efforts to ascertain the real facts managed to *finally* gain some traction.

One of the articles that seems to appear late in the game, while acknowledging the apparent groundlessness of the initial claims seemed to still press this hostile agenda, implying the Democrats were treacherous, deceptive and dishonest. The Fox News reports of Jan 29 (Dick Morris) were still framing the issue in terms of a false dichotomy. One possibility was the initial rumor *was* true, in which case Obama is a treacherous, deceptive and dangerous person, and therefore treasonous and unfit to be the president, and therefore people should vote for the Republicans. The only alternative was that the rumor was *actually* false, in which case it obviously had been planted by Clinton, another Democrat, which still supposedly proved the

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Democrats were bad, treacherous people, and the voters should therefore vote for the Republicans.

Even though the commentator now seemed willing to admit the claims in the original story were apparently groundless, there was still a determination to get as much anti-Democrat mileage out of this as possible. This all seems to ignore another obvious possibility, which was what Zengerle and Zorn had suggested at the beginning – that it was planted by some anti-Democratic, pro-Republican entity.

Conclusion

In terms of the two theoretical perspectives, (agenda setting, and framing), this incident seems like an excellent example of a case in which someone other than the large media outlets were setting the agenda, calling the shots in terms of what was deemed an issue worthy of national attention and what was not. This is an prime example of a story that emerged somewhere else among the anonymous population of Internet users, and gained momentum to the point where the mainstream players such as CNN were essentially forced to respond with attention - whether they wanted to or not. In terms of framing, the issue is less clear cut. In the initial phases, the framing was determined by the unspecified anonymous emailers in the "new media" who framed it in terms of their hostility towards the Obama and the Clinton candidacies. Presumably because it served their agenda, this same framing was maintained by the "conservative echo chamber" and was initially preserved when handed off to the mainstream media such as CNN. However, the mainstream media subsequently gave it a different frame – that of a false rumor that had been uncritically accepted to create a scandal, but this new framing was only a relatively late feature. This framing was established by the "new media" and by

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minor players, not the mainstream old media outlets, and was something the established outlets were only able to change as a result of very strong, intense, and sustained efforts.

The next chapter discusses the quantitative research methods employed to conduct the study. There are detailed discussions regarding the data selection procedure and the criteria, operationalization of key variables, sampling procedures, reliability, and validity.

CHAPTER 4

QUANTITATIVE METHOD

This dissertation used a combination of methods, quantitative and qualitative, to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. A quantitative content analysis was conducted to test most of the hypotheses and research questions. The qualitative content analysis was conducted to explore the genesis of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor for the first 15 days of the national media coverage of this rumor: January 17, 2007 to January 31, 2007.

A combination of methods does have some advantages. Although quantitative and qualitative methods carry competing frameworks, the combination of these two methods can strengthen a study and serve as a continuum of research (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2006). It also provides a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study. There are some questions, such as the genesis of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor, may not be answered using a single method. That is why this dissertation used mixed methods to assess different facets of the complex questions examined in this study.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are not only mutually exclusive but can be used in connection with each other. Weber (1990) suggested that the best content-analytic studies use the two procedures. The author believes the combination of method yielded more breadth, depth, and width in the findings of the study, which might not have been possible by employing one method alone.

In this chapter, we solely focus on the research method and design used for the quantitative part of the study. Chapter 3 discussed the qualitative method and research design along with presenting results of the qualitative part of the study.

This dissertation primarily explored the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs and legacy news media, furthering an area of research that continues to have an impact on agenda-setting research in mass communication (McCombs, 2005). While existing intermedia agenda-setting research has focused on the elite legacy news media that heavily influence the news agendas of other media, this subset within the agenda-setting paradigm has recently been broadened to include emergent Internet media including political blogs. Because research in this relatively new area has only recently been carried out and is in its relative infancy, this dissertation not only tested hypotheses, but also posed research questions to further explore and define this new area of research.

Along with a qualitative content analysis, this study employs a quantitative data analysis of blog posts and legacy news media contents related to the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor during the 2008 presidential election campaigns in the United States. Among other related issues to the design and method of the dissertation, this chapter articulates the definitions and selection criteria of key variables, sampling techniques, statistical procedures, reliability, and validity.

Unit of Analysis

The sampling frame for this study was the entire political blog or the legacy media outlet, while the unit of analysis was individual stories from the legacy media or blog posts. Stories include hard news, editorials, and opinion pieces that center on the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor. "The inclusion is based on the rationale that blog posts, which have much less formulaic and editorial constraint than do newspaper articles, need to be compared with the full spectrum of traditional news pieces" (Xie, 2009). However, blog posts that have fewer than 100 words were not analyzed because they usually fail to carry serious discussion and therefore have little analytical value.

Political Blogs

Blogs provide an excellent avenue for research of various kinds. One difficulty in defining blog is that there is no hard and fast rule for what constitutes a blog (Veenstra, 2009). Blogs are commonly described as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Schmidt, 2007). Moreover, blogs are a combination of a diary, a web site, and an online community. Schmidt (2007) lists various types of blogs, including: political blogs, corporate blogs, expert blogs, and personal knowledge blogs. There are also educational blogs, creative writing blogs, journalism blogs, medical blogs, drug blogs, abortion blogs, car blogs, travel blogs, and the list continues. In fact, any subject that generates interest among a reasonably sized group of people has the potential to become a blog. For this study, we were only interested in political blogs. We have designed a data collection protocol to correctly identify the political blog posts (see Appendix A).

Legacy News Media

Legacy media are generally comprised of newspapers, magazines, radio, and broadcast and cable television. However, for this study, the legacy news media contents constituted reports and analyses published in newspapers or broadcast on network TV and cable TV channels.

Sampling Procedure

Because previous intermedia agenda-setting studies have compared an equal number of one media type to an equal number in another media type in a specified time frame (e.g. Lee et al., 2005), this study compared an equal number of legacy news media types to an equal number of political blog media types: 10 mainstream news media outlets (four top national newspapers, three network television channels, and three 24/7 cable news channels) to 10 top or A-list

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political blogs (five conservative and five liberal). It should be noted that the sample for political blogs and legacy news media was not representative for all legacy media and political blogs. For legacy media, the sample did not include magazines, local newspapers, local TV or radio stations; for political blogs, the sample only considered the most influential political blogs. However, given that scholars have pointed out that the elite national media have an intermedia agenda-setting influence on regional and local media and, further, that previous researchers have identified that filter blogs as having a strong influence within the blogosphere and as being monitored by the legacy news media (Bucy, Gantz, & Wang, 2007; Haas, 2005; Lowrey, 2006), this study focused only on national media (McCombs, 2004).

Sample Period

The sample for this study was drawn from political blogs and legacy news media for the period of January 17, 2007, to November 4, 2008. January 17, 2007 was selected as the starting date because Internet chatter about Obama's religion gained momentum during this time, the month before Obama declared his candidacy for the US presidency. The origin of the Obama/Muslim rumor was described in detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

Sampling of Blog Posts

The dynamic nature of blog posts poses considerable challenges to probability sampling (McMillan, 2000). Previous studies used defined groups of blogs as samples in order to investigate discourse in the blogosphere (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). Methodologically, the focus on topic-based A-list blogs necessitates the use of cluster sampling, which is prone to sampling bias due to interclass correlation (Riffe et al., 2005). Despite methodological difficulties, a number of studies accomplished blogs sampling by using blog aggregators and search engines specialized in searching blogs (e.g. D. Li & Walejko, 2008). However, there are a

few assumptions that must be agreed upon before using blog search engines as a sampling tool. First, if the term "blogosphere" refers to a comprehensive population of all the blogs available on the Internet, probability sampling of blogosphere is practically impossible. This is primarily because a master list of all the blogs, if its existence is theoretically recognized, cannot be found even if the scope is narrowed to blogs within certain cultural barriers. Second, probability sampling becomes feasible when the population is tailored carefully to fit the research purposes. For this study, we define our population as "all blog posts on Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor that are tracked, indexed, and made searchable by specialized blog search engine, Google Blog Search." Random sampling techniques then can be applied to the search results. Third, if limited types and numbers of blogs may be deemed representative of the entire blogosphere (Haas, 2005), then search results generated by blog search engines that track millions of blogs are equally qualified to speak for the blogosphere.

Google Blog Search was chosen for several reasons. First, it offers advanced search options that allow for searches within a time frame, a feature missing in Technorati, another blog search engine. Second, as opposed to Technorati's inclusion of the legacy news media that appear in a blog form, Google Blog Search does not index those sources. Third, Google Blog Search excels at searching blog archives, whereas Technorati focuses on "what's new" blog posts updated within hours and days (Xie, 2009).

A matching sample of 10 influential or filter blogs that are not affiliated with legacy news media has been drawn from the political blogosphere. Top blogs, sometimes referred as filter blogs and similar to the elite media, have emerged as extremely influential within the blogosphere. Legacy news media, consequently, pay attention to these filter blogs to assess the discourse within the blogosphere. The list of top blogs was drawn from David Karpf's

Blogosphere Authority Index (BAI), a new system for tracking online influence. The weekly

index combines four measures of authority to produce comparative rankings of the elite blogs

(Karpf, 2008). For this study, the BAI from the week of November 9, 2008 was chosen. Details

of the BAI calculations can be accessed at the BAI website

(http://www.blogosphereauthorityindex.com/).

Table 1. *The Blogosphere Authority Index (BAI) for the week of November 9, 2008*

	Liberal Top-Blogs	**Conservative Top-Blogs**
1	Daily Kos	Hot Air
2	Huffington Post	Michelle Malkin
3	Talking Points Memo	Newsbusters
4	Eschaton	Little Green Footballs
5	Crooks And Liars	Instapundit
6	Firedoglake	Ace Of Spades HQ
7	Think Progress	Volokh Conspiracy
8	America Blog	American Thinker
9	Washington Monthly	Townhall
10	My DD	Hugh Hewitt
11	Talk Left	Powerline Blog
12	Digby	Gateway Pundit
13	Glen Greenwald	Jihad Watch
14	Open Left	Red State
15	Feministing	Wizbang Blog
16	Pandagon	Ann Althouse
17	Truthdig	Right Wing News
18	Juan Cole	Jawa Report
19	Shakespeares Sister	Patterico's Pontifications
20	The Moderate Voice	PoliPundit
21	Matt Glesias	Belmont Club
22	Swing State Project	IMAO
23	Sadly, No!	Outside The Beltway
24	Taylor Marsh	Anti-Idiotarian
25	Crooked Timber	Dean Esmay

Out of these top 25 conservative and top 25 liberal political blogs, a sample of five

conservative and five liberal political blogs were chooses. A nonprobability based purposive

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sampling was used, as it is thought to be appropriate for agenda-setting research (Baxter & Babble, 2004). Blog contents related to the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor published in these 10 sample political blogs were retrieved by conducting searches via Google Blog Search, a relatively new service of Google to "help users to explore the blogging universe more effectively" (Google Blog Search, n.d.). The author wanted to retrieve data from the top five conservative and top five liberal blogs mentioned in Table 1; however, Google Blog Search did not produce enough results for every blog mentioned in the BAI. Out of the first 14 conservative blogs mentioned in the BAI, the Google Blog Search could retrieve enough data for the following blogs: Hot Air, Michelle Malkin, Newsbusters, Volokh Conspiracy, and Red State. These five political blogs comprised the sample for the top conservative political blogs. The same problem happened to the liberal political blogs. The Google Blog Search could retrieve enough results for the following blogs that constituted the sample for the top liberal political blogs: Daily Kos, Huffington Post, Talking Points Memo, Crooks And Liars, and Firedoglake.

The search term "Obama Muslim" was found to be the most useful search term to retrieve the most relevant blog posts related to the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor. The Google Blog Search was not an easy choice to find out the most relevant blog posts that constituted part of the "content data" for quantitative analysis of the dissertation. At the beginning of the search, Google Blog Search provided many irrelevant results. For example, when searching for the relevant blog posts from the conservative blog Red State, a total of 427 results were first shown. When the author of this dissertation started reviewing every entry, the Google Blog Search automatically omitted very similar entries in order to show the most relevant results. Finally, a total of 290 posts were displayed. Of them, 233 blog posts were found relevant. Similarly, for the liberal blog Huffington Post, at first 869 blog posts were shown. During the review process,

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Google Blog Search omitted similar entries to show the most relevant results. Finally, a total of 417 blog posts were displayed. Of them, 304 blog posts were found relevant. Similar procedure was followed for the rest of the sample blogs.

For the blog posts sample, this study excluded the blogs of the legacy news media, as very little impact of those blogs on their readers had been shown in previous research (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2008). However, the sample for this study included an equal number of both conservative and liberal blogs so as to analyze possible differences, which were also pointed out in previous research (Tremayne et al., 2006), with the classification as conservative or liberal being based on the self-description of the bloggers on their blogs.

This study measured the number of unique blog posts and legacy news media articles/broadcasts on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor as an indicator of intermedia agenda-setting relationship.

Google Trends Data

Google Trends, a relatively new indicator of issue salience, was used to conduct part of this study, which investigates online search behavior as a measure of public salience of a given topic. By analyzing Google to compute how many searches have been done for a certain term or phrase relative to the total number of searches conducted over a distinct period, Google Trends offers a relevant indicator for work in the agenda-setting arena and taps aggregate search behavior, a presumably crucial manifestation of a public agenda (Ragas & Tran, 2013). Using Google Trends data comes in the wake of the need for a more specific conceptual definition of agenda-setting outcomes by prominent scholars, such as Shaw, Stevenson, and Hamm (2001), who have suggested that agenda-setting theory must more fully incorporate ''contemporary social behavior'' (p. 9), leading to some agenda-setting researchers turning to public

information-seeking behavior on the Internet as a way of measuring salience (Ragas, Tran, & Martin, 2013; Hester & Gibson, 2007; Roberts, Wanta, & Tzong-Horng, 2002), a move consistent with recent changes in media use. According to the latest survey of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 85% of American adults ages 18 and older are using the Internet (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2013). Another survey of the Project, entitled "The Internet and Campaign 2010," revealed that more than half of all American adults were online political users in 2010. Surprisingly, a total of 73% of adult Internet users, representing 54% of all US adults, went online to get news or information about the 2010 midterm elections, or to get involved in the campaign (Smith, 2011). It was the first time 58% of adults Internet users went online for news about politics or the 2010 campaigns.

Google has become the most-used search engine in the United States, capturing a more than 71% market share, compared to 14% for Yahoo! (SEO Consultants Directory, 2010), indicating the importance of Google searches and the extent to which they can be useful measures of public interest in topics that cannot otherwise be assessed using means from traditional agenda-setting studies.

Traditionally and typically, one of the most relied-upon ways to measure public salience has been to use polls asking, in one form or another, the question, ''What is the most important problem facing the country?'' (Japerson, Shah, Watts, Faber, &Fan, 1998; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Winter & Eyal, 1981). Such method of measurement, unfortunately, is not available retroactively to assess the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor, given that Obama's purported religion was not mentioned as one of the most important issues confronting the country in any major poll conducted over regular intervals of time. Not only that, but there were surprisingly few reliable polls that even mentioned the Muslim rumor (Pew 2008c, 2008d). Confronted with similar

situations in which time-tested methods are unable to measure public salience for a topic over an extended period of time, researchers have turned to alternative methods to gauge the effects of agenda-setting, such as when Hester and Gibson (2007) successfully employed the Yahoo! Buzz Index to measure national and local public salience on the issue of gay marriage in 2004. Although Yahoo! Buzz could provide a gauge of public salience for the Obama rumor, Google Trends is a more appropriate measure in this particular situation.

There are several reasons for Google Trends' appropriateness (Hester & Gibson, 2007). First, Google Trends provides a measure of an individual's information-seeking behavior in that, if he or she lacks interest in a given topic, or lacks awareness that the topic exists, it is unlikely that the individual will seek out more information on the subject (Hester & Gibson, 2007). Also, unlike traditional measures of public salience, which can prime responses and are subject to possible measurement problems, (Hester & Gibson, 2007; Mutz, 1998; Wlezien, 2005), Google Trends data offer a "pure" picture of public salience. Last, Google Trends assesses public salience by computing how many Google searches for a particular term have been conducted relative to the total number of searches done on Google over time, the result of this computation being known as the Search Volume Index (SVI). The SVI provides a numerical measure of searches conducted on Google for any term on any given day, and the data are scaled to the average search traffic for the search term (represented as 1.0) during the period chosen. Thus, if June 2008 were selected as the period, the SVI for every day in June would be the average number of searches carried out on that day relative to the total number of searches carried out in June 2008. For example, if June 10 had an SVI of 2.5, that would indicate that the date had search traffic that was 2.5 times greater on average than for all of June 2008. Conversely, SVI levels below 1.0 represent days in which the search traffic was below the average for the period.

In attempting to find the most accurate marker of interest for the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor, (and with only searches conducted in the United States included in the results), several different Google search terms and combinations were assessed. Finally the term "Obama Muslim" was chosen. The choice of this term was based on the fact that it had the highest overall SVI compared to the other tested terms, meaning it was the most popular search term on the topic. To cite one example, the search term *Is Obama Muslim* had only one-fifth of the searches, as did *Obama Muslim*.

Sampling of Legacy News Media Contents

To draw a sample from the legacy news media, this study opted for four major newspapers (*The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Washington Times*), three network TV channels (ABC, CBS and NBC), and three 24/7 all-news cable TV channels (CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC). *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are known as liberal newspapers while *New York Post* and *The Washington Times* are generally perceived as conservative newspapers (Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2010). These newspapers ranked in the top tier in the Pew News Coverage Index, which tracks news agendas in the legacy media (Pew Research Center, 2011). These four newspapers were also chosen because of their large circulations and considerable social influence. These newspapers have also been consistently used for agenda-setting research (Jones, 2006). Several others factors dictated the selection of the above-mentioned sources. They were all available for the entire period in question, these sources offered a gamut of ideologies with ''liberal'' news entities such as *The New York Times* and MSNBC along with such presumably conservative outlets as *The Washington Times* and FOX News. A broad and deep body of research indicates that large national media outlets such as the ones chosen for this study set the agenda for other media

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outlets (Breed, 1955; Danielian & Reese, 1989). If, for example, the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor were on the agenda of larger national media outlets, it would also likely be on the agenda of smaller outlets. Finally, prior research measuring the media agenda used a similar number and variety of sources (Domke et al., 1998; Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002).

All the newspapers network TV and cable channels included in our sample are systematically archived by LexisNexis, the most widely used news archive (Deacon, 2007). Stryker, Wray, Hornik, and Yanovitzky (2006) provided procedures used by this dissertation to devise a search term that would return only articles germane to the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor. The final search term was "BODY (obama w/50 Muslim and rumor or secret or secretly or secretly Arab or he is an Arab or he is Arab or Muslim name or false rumor)." Using this search term, the same television transcript was returned more than once, which indicated a rerun of a program. To cite one example, "Hardball with Chris Matthews," on MSNBC, was broadcast at both 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. CST. In such cases, duplicate transcripts were treated as separate programs, and both the original and rerun broadcasts were counted. In addition, any relevant item appearing in the news entities was included, from news stories, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces to editorials, and all were counted as part of the final tally. Such an approach accords with previous studies utilizing newspaper content analysis that have included all of these items, the acknowledgment being that they comprise the entirety of newspaper discourse and could potentially affect public opinion (Shah et al., 2002).

As a means to determine the search's precision, a random sample of 50 news stories was reviewed. Fully 91 % of the items reviewed determined to be relevant, with relevance based on whether or not items specifically mentioned the rumor that Obama was secretly Muslim. This

Table 2. *Distribution of Sample*

Media Type			N
Blogs			
	Conservative	Hot Air	92
		News Busters	125
		Michelle Malkin	202
		Volokh Conspiracy	164
		Red State	233
		Total	**816**
	Liberal	Daily Kos	301
		Huffington Post	304
		Talking Points Memo	227
		Crooks and Liars	161
		Firedoglake	84
		Total	**1,077**
Total Blog			**1,893**
Legacy Media			
	Newspapers		
	Conservative	The Washington Times	29
		New York Post	21
		Total	**50**
	Liberal	The New York Times	58
		The Washington Post	51
		Total	**109**
	Total Newspapers		**159**
	Network TV	ABC	25
		CBS	3
		NBC	9
		Total	**37**
	Cable TV	CNN	214
		Fox	53
		MSNBC	70
		Total	**337**
	Total Television		**374**
	Total Legacy Media		**533**
Grand Total			**2,426**

study made no difference between news items that insinuated that the rumor was true and those that attempted to dismiss it, since both were likely to increase public salience.

<div align="center">Reliability and Validity</div>

A person with similar experience and training helped the author of this dissertation to collect data from the political blogs and legacy media outlets. A pretest was conducted to assess the external validity of the Data Collection Protocol for Blog contents (Appendix A), Data Collection Protocol for Newspaper Articles (Appendix B), and the Data Collection Protocol for Television News Transcripts (Appendix C). Based on the results of the pretest, amendments were made to the protocol before the actual data collection process began. The first data collector then retrieved all the relevant blog posts (n=1,893) from the 10 political blogs, television news transcripts (n=374) from the three network TV and three cable TV channels, and newspaper articles (n=159) from the four newspapers. The second data collector retrieved approximately 10% of the blog posts (n= 190), television news transcripts (n=38), and newspaper articles (n=16) to establish intercoder reliability. Such 10% sub samples for intercoder reliability have been considered adequate by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) and Neuendorf (2002). The intercoder samples were drawn with a systematic random sampling technique using every 10th blog posts, every 10th television news transcripts, and every 10th newspaper articles. The random starting point was 1. This method allowed intercoder assessment throughout all categories of the data collection protocols. Intercoder reliability was calculated with the Program for Reliability Assessment of Multiple Coders (PRAM) as suggested by Neuendorf (2002).

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The overall intercoder reliability for the blog contents was .97 for Scott's pi (1955). Individual categories had the following coefficients: media category (1.0), blog (1.0), political orientation (1.0), year (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), and relation to overall context (.82).

The overall intercoder reliability for the newspaper articles was .99 for Scott's pi (1955) with individual categories as follows: media category (1.0), newspaper (1.0), political orientation (1.0), year (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), and relation to overall context (.92).

The overall intercoder reliability for the television news transcripts was .98 for Scott's pi (1955) with individual categories as follows: media category (1.0), television network (1.0), political orientation (1.0), year (1.0), month (1.0), day (1.0), relation to overall context (.89). According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998), each of the coefficients was acceptable.

The next chapter presents the results of the quantitative part of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

The sample for this study was drawn from political blogs and legacy news media (newspapers, network TV and cable TV) for the period of January 17, 2007, to November 4, 2008. A total of 2,426 blog posts and new stories constituted the sample drawn over 658 days.

Descriptive Statistics

We begin with an overview of descriptive statistics presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics*

	N*	Mean Story/Day	Std. Deviation	Variance
Network TV	658	.06	.29	.08
Cable TV	658	.51	1.20	1.46
Conservative Newspaper	658	.07	.30	.09
Liberal Newspaper	658	.17	.46	.21
Political Blogs	658	2.85	3.81	14.55
Conservative Political Blogs	658	1.24	1.94	3.77
Liberal Political Blogs	658	1.62	2.26	5.11
Newspapers	658	.24	.62	.38
Legacy Media	658	.81	1.66	2.76

Note. N= number of days in study period

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Among all the media segments, liberal political blogs had the highest number of stories per day followed by conservative political blogs; and network television had the least number of stories per day.

Statistical Analyses

RQ1 asked to what extent the coverage of the political blogs statistically predicted the legacy media's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

Regression analysis and time series analysis were conducted to answer RQ 1. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4. *Regression analyses with legacy media as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 1	.041	.063	.645	.519
Political Blogs Day 1		.271	.013	20.256	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 2	.132	.066	1.984	.047
Political Blogs Day 1		.173	.017	9.693	.001***
Legacy Media Day 1		.228	.040	5.581	.001***

Table 4 continued

Intercept	Legacy Media Day 3	.237	.071	3.307	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.165	.019	8.650	.001***
Legacy Media Day 1		.125	.043	2.861	.004**
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 4	.258	.072	3.583	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.148	.019	7.687	.001***
Legacy Media Day 1		.153	.044	3.471	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 5	.352	.075	4.693	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.120	.020	5.998	.001***
Legacy Media Day 1		.135	.046	2.938	.003**

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

There is an estimate for three parameters, intercept and coefficients of legacy media day 1 and political blogs day 1. The general equation for a straight line for legacy media day i can be written as:

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$Y_i = a + b1*\text{political blogs day 1} + b2*\text{legacy media day 1}$

Where Y_i= legacy media day i, (i=1,2,3,4,5); a=intercept, b1=coefficient of political blogs day 1 and b2=coefficient of legacy media day 1.

In subsequent tables related to regression analyses we used the model described above where dependent variables come from the variables in column two of the respective tables.

As Table 4 indicates, the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by political blogs- day 1 statistically predicted the coverage of legacy media- day 1 [$F(1, 656) = 410.30$, $p < .001$; and political blogs- day 1 and legacy media- day 1 jointly predicted the coverage of legacy media-day 2, [$F(2, 655) = 156.24$, $p < .001$]; day 3, [$F(2, 655) = 92.43$, $p < .001$] day 4, [$F(2, 655) = 84.74$, $p < .001$], and day 5 [$F(2, 655) = 54.04$, $p < .001$]. The coefficient of political blogs is positive in all the regressions, which indicates that a higher number of stories in political blogs is accompanied by a higher number of stories in legacy media on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling for legacy media-day 1.

R^2 for the model were .385 (day 1), .322 (day 2), .220 (day 3), .205 (day 4), .141 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .384 (day 1), .320 (day 2), .217 (day 3), .203 (day 4), .139 (day 5). These values suggest political blogs on day 1 explains 38.5% of the variation for legacy media on day 1, and together with legacy media - day 1 jointly explains 32.2% variation for legacy media on day 2 and so on. The fall in R^2 indicates that the number of stories in political blogs explains less and less of the variation in the number of stories appearing in legacy media as the number of days between the two increases. So one might claim that the role of political blogs on legacy media in terms of the number of stories dies down on subsequent days.

For all legacy media days, the Durbin-Watson statistics for the OLS regression was 1.755 (day 1), 1.734 (day 2), 1.553 (day 3), 1.381 (day 4), 1.412 (day 5) suggesting

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autocorrelation among residuals. As a result, we ran a 1,0,0 ARIMA (Auto Regressive Integrated Moving Average) model with political blogs as predictors. Trend and prediction of time series are usually performed using ARIMA model. Results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *ARIMA model (1,0,0) for predictors of legacy media*

X	Y	Coefficient	Standard Error	Sig.
Political Blogs Day 1	Legacy Media Day 1	.198	.018	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.145	.039	.001***
Constant		-.026	.074	-.350
Political Blogs Day 1	Legacy Media Day 2	.157	.020	.001***
AR (Lag1)		.184	.041	.001***
Constant		.133	.084	.117
Political Blogs Day 1	Legacy Media Day 3	.092	.020	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.293	.039	.001***
Constant		.224	.098	.022*
Political Blogs Day 1	Legacy Media Day 4	.132	.020	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.332	.038	.001***
Constant		.347	.104	.001**
Political Blogs Day 1	Legacy Media Day 5	.027	.020	.166
AR (Lag 1)		.348	.038	.001***
Constant		.349	.106	.001**

Note. For Day 1, R^2=.347; Liung-Box Q = 20.508, *df*= 15, p=.153. For Day 2, R^2 = .325; Liung-Box Q=28.822, *df*=17, p=.036. For Day 3, R^2=.299; Liung-Box Q = 33.593, *df*= 17, p=.009. For Day 4, R^2=.279; Liung-Box Q = 41.175, *df*= 17, p=.001. For Day 5, R^2=.280, Liung-Box Q=28.880, *df*=17, p=.036.

The tested model garnered an R^2 of .347 (day 1), .325 (day 2), .299 (day 3), .279 (day 4), .280(day 5), which suggests political blogs continued to be a significant predictor of legacy media on day 1, day 2, day 3, and day 4 in the ARIMA model (p<.05).

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the coverage of the legacy media statistically predicted the political blogs' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below in Table 6.

Table 6. *Regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 1	1.70	.129	13.06	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		1.422	.070	20.26	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 2	.087	.132	6.567	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		.420	.081	5.187	.001***
Political Blogs Day 1		.577	0.035	16.322	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 3	1.058	0.145	7.298	.001

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Table 6 continued

		.151	.089	1.697	.009*
Legacy Media Day 1		.151	.089	1.697	.009*
Political Blogs Day 1		.584	.038	15.063	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 4	1.341	.158	8.463	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		.095	.097	.979	.328
Political Blogs Day 1		.498	.042	11.752	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 5	1.397	0.160	8.693	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		.159	.099	1.616	.107
Political Blogs Day 1		.460	.043	10.706	.001***

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

As Table 6 indicates, the coverage of legacy media-day 1 well predicted the coverage of political blogs- day 1 [F (1, 656) = 410.30, p < .001]; and legacy media- day 1 and political blogs- day 1 jointly well predicted the coverage of political blogs- day 2 [F (2, 655) = 323.76, p < .001] and day 3 [F (2, 655) = 212.535, p < .001]. It *did not predict* day 4 [F (2, 655) = 124.64, p < .001] and day 5 [F (2, 655) = 112.73, p < .001]. Mostly positive coefficients indicate that a

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higher number of stories in legacy media is accompanied by a higher number of stories in political blogs on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling for political blogs - day 1.

R^2 for the model were .385 (day 1), .497 (day 2), .393 (day 3), .275 (day 4), .256 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .384 (day 1), .495 (day 2), .391 (day 3), .273 (day 4), .253 (day 5). We see that the value of R^2 decreases on each subsequent day, except day 2, indicating that the responsiveness of the political blogs' reporting to the legacy media reporting reduces over time.

RQ2 attempted to find out the statistical predictability of the extent of the coverage by the political blogs on the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by newspapers.

Regression analysis and time series analysis were conducted to answer RQ2. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 7.

Table 7. *Regression analyses with newspapers as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Newspapers Day 1	.035	.027	1.300	.194
Political Blogs Day 1		.072	.006	12.807	.001***
Intercept	Newspapers Day 2	.042	.027	1.570	.116
Political Blogs Day 1		.062	.006	9.788	.001***

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Table 7 continued

Newspapers Day 1		.085	.039	2.159	.031*
Intercept	Newspapers Day 3	.060	.027	2.180	.029
Political Blogs Day 1		.056	.006	8.696	.001***
Newspapers Day 1		.081	.040	2.028	.042*
Intercept	Newspapers Day 4	.072	.028	2.578	.010
Political Blogs Day 1		.052	.006	8.042	.001***
Newspapers Day 1		.075	.040	1.861	.063
Intercept	Newspapers Day 5	.088	.028	3.094	.002
Political Blogs Day 1		.051	.006	7.711	.001***
Newspapers Day 1		.027	.041	.673	.500

Note. $*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$

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As Table 7 indicates, political blogs-day 1 well predicted the coverage of newspapers-day 1 [F (1, 656) = 164.01, p < .001]; and political blogs- day 1 and newspapers- day 1 jointly well predicted newspapers- day 2 [F (2, 655) = 74.61, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 59.70, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 50.95, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) =40.35, p < .001]. Positive coefficient indicates that more stories in political blogs are associated with more stories appearing in newspapers on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling for newspapers day 1.

R^2 for the model were .200 (day 1), .185 (day 2), .154 (day 3), .134 (day 4), .109 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .198 (day 1), .183 (day 2), .151 (day 3), .132 (day 4), .106 (day 5). We see that the value of R^2 decreases on each subsequent day indicating that the responsiveness of the newspaper reporting to the political blogs dissipates over time.

For all newspapers days, the Durbin-Watson statistics for the OLS regression was 1.869 (day 1), 1.930 (day 2), 1.864 (day 3), 1.795 (day 4), 1.801 (day 5), suggesting autocorrelation among residuals. As a result, we ran a 1,0,0 ARIMA with political blogs as predictors.

Table 8. *ARIMA model (1,0,0) for predictors of newspapers*

X	Y	Coefficient	Standard Error	Sig.
Political Blogs Day 1	Newspapers Day 1	.048	.008	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.059	.039	.131
Constant		.005	.029	.875
Political Blogs Day 1	Newspapers Day 2	.047	.008	.001***
AR (Lag1)		.049	.040	.216
Constant		.023	.029	.436
Political Blogs Day 1	Newspapers Day 3	.040	.008	.001***

Table 8 continued

AR (Lag 1)		.086	.040	.031*
Constant		.042	.031	.172
Political Blogs Day 1	Newspapers Day 4	.040	.008	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.103	.040	.010*
Constant		.061	.032	.058
Political Blogs Day 1	Newspapers Day 5	.019	.008	.016*
AR (Lag 1)		.119	.039	.002**
Constant		.054	.032	.095

Note. For Day 1, R^2=.228; Liung-Box Q = 37.064, df=17, p=.003. For Day 2, R^2=.198; Liung-Box Q = 32.537, df=17, p=.013. For Day 3, R^2=.172, Liung-Box Q = 31.160, df=17, p=.019. For Day 4, R^2=.151; Liung-Box Q = 29.982, df=17 p=.026. For Day 5, R^2=.164; Liung-Box Q = 32.301, df=17, p=.014.

The tested model garnered an R^2 of .228 (day 1), .198 (day 2), .172 (day 3), .151 (day 4), and .164 (day 5). Political blogs day 1 continue to be a significant predictor of newspapers on day 1, day 2, day 3, day 4, and day 5 in the ARIMA model (p<.05).

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., find out the statistical predictability of the extent of the coverage by the newspapers on the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by political blogs. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below in Table 9.

Table 9. *Regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)

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Table 9 continued

Intercept	Political Blogs Day 1	2.186	.142	15.296	.001
Newspapers Day 1		2.762	.215	12.806	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 2	.873	.134	6.490	.001
Newspapers Day 1		.306	.194	1.571	.116
Political Blogs Day 1		.668	.031	21.176	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 3	1.060	.145	7.293	.001
Newspapers Day 1		.104	.210	.496	.619
Political Blogs Day 1		.617	.034	18.118	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 4	1.331	.158	8.406	.001
Newspapers Day 1		.389	.229	1.699	.089
Political Blogs Day 1		.496	.037	13.355	.001***

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Intercept	Political Blogs Day 5	1.392	.160	8.652	.001
Newspapers Day 1		.313	.233	1.344	.179
Political Blogs Day 1		.480	.037	12.742	.001***

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

As Table 9 indicates, the coverage of newspapers- day 1 statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs *only on day 1* [F (1, 656) = 164.01, p < .001]. *It did not predict* the coverage of day 2 [F (2, 655) = 300.43, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 210.37, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 125.98, p < .001]; and day 5 [F (2, 655) = 112.19, p < .001].

R^2 for the model were .200 (day 1), .478 (day 2), .391 (day 3), .278 (day 4), .255 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .198 (day 1), .476 (day 2), .389 (day 3), .276 (day 4), .253 (day 5).

RQ3 inquired the extent of the coverage by the political blogs to statistically predict the network television channels' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

Regression analysis and time series analysis were conducted to answer RQ3. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 10.

Table 10. *Regression analyses with network tv as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Network TV Day 1	-.014	.014	1.006	.315

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Table 10 continued

Political Blogs Day 1		.025	.003	8.718	.001***
Intercept	Network TV Day 2	.023	.014	1.681	.093
Political Blogs Day 1		.009	.003	3.150	.002**
Network TV Day 1		.093	.040	2.311	.021*
Intercept	Network TV Day 3	.027	.014	1.952	.051
Political Blogs Day 1		.011	.003	3.730	.001***
Network TV Day 1		-.069	.040	1.708	.088
Intercept	Network TV Day 4	.019	.014	1.381	.167
Political Blogs Day 1		.014	.003	4.632	.001***
Network TV Day 1		-.064	.040	-1.575	.115
Intercept	Network TV Day 5	.022	.014	1.592	.111

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		.013	.003	4.252	.001***
Political Blogs Day 1					
Network TV Day 1		-.059	.040	1.452	.146

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As Table 10 indicates, political blogs-day 1 well predicted the coverage of network TV-day 1 [F (1, 656) = 76.0, p < .001]; and political blogs- day 1 and network TV-day 1 jointly well predicted network TV- day 2 [F (2, 655) = 11.13, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 7.103, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 10.74, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 9.05, p < .001]. Positive coefficients indicate that more stories in political blogs are associated with more stories broadcast on network TV after controlling for network TV day 1.

R^2 for the model were .104 (day 1), .033 (day 2), .021 (day 3), .032 (day 4), .027 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .102 (day 1), .030 (day 2), .018 (day 3), .029 (day 4), .024 (day 5).

For all network TV days, the Durbin-Watson statistics for the OLS regression was 1.857 (day 1), 1.834 (day 2), 1.788 (day 3), 1.780 (day 4), and 1.799 (day 5), suggesting autocorrelation among residuals. As a result, we ran a 1,0,0 ARIMA with political blogs as predictors.

Table 11. *ARIMA model (1,0,0) for predictors of network tv*

X	Y	Coefficient	Standard Error	Sig.
Political Blogs Day 1	Network TV Day 1	.031	.004	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.062	.039	.114
Constant		-.005	.015	.741
Political Blogs Day 1	Network TV Day 2	.008	.004	.062

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Table 11 continued

AR (Lag1)		.092	.041	.024*
Constant		.024	.016	.143
Political Blogs Day 1	Network TV Day 3	.002	.004	.672
AR (Lag 1)		.110	.039	.005**
Constant		.020	.016	.220
Political Blogs Day 1	Network TV Day 4	.010	.004	.018*
AR (Lag 1)		.107	.039	.006
Constant		.017	.016	.312
Political Blogs Day 1	Network TV Day 5	.005	.004	.246
AR (Lag 1)		.097	.039	.013
Constant		.016	.016	.325

Note. For Day 1, R^2=.115; Liung-Box Q = 31.686, *df*=17, p=.016. For Day 2, R^2=.034; Liung-Box Q = 43.967, *df*=17, p=.001. For Day 3, R^2=.040; Liung-Box Q = 45.672, *df*=17, p=.001. For Day 4, R^2=.042; Liung-Box Q = 42.347, *df*=17, p=.001. For Day 5, R^2=.043; Liung-Box Q = 33.282, *df*=17, p=.010.

The tested model garnered an R^2 of .115 (day 1), .034 (day 2), .040 (day 3), .042 (day 4), and .043 (day 5). Political blogs day 1 continue to be a significant predictor of network TV on day 1 and day 4 in the ARIMA model (p<.05).

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the network television channel's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below.

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Table 12. *Regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 1	2.614	.143	18.217	.001
Network TV Day 1		4.143	.475	8.718	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 2	.896	.134	6.680	.001
Network TV Day 1		.891	.382	2.331	.020*
Political Blogs Day 1		.667	.029	22.457	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 3	1.063	.145	7.313	.001
Network TV Day 1		-0.079	.414	.191	.848
Political Blogs Day 1		.627	.032	19.470	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 4	1.325	.157	8.418	.001

Table 12 continued

Network TV Day 1		-1.459	.448	3.252	.001***
Political Blogs Day 1		.560	.034	16.074	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 5	1.387	.160	8.656	.001
Network TV Day 1		-1.168	.456	2.558	.010**
Political Blogs Day 1		.532	.035	14.998	.001***

Note. $*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001$

As Table 12 indicates, the coverage of network TV– day 1 well predicted the coverage of political blogs –day 1 [$F (1, 656) = 76.01, p < .001$]; and network TV –day 1 and political blogs day 1 jointly well predicted political blogs - day 2 [$F (2, 655) = 303.26, p < .001$]; day 4 [$F (2, 655) = 131.27, p < .001$]; day 5, $F (2, 655) = 115.36, p < .001$]. The coverage of network TV-day 1 *did not predict* the coverage of political blogs – day 3 [$F (2, 655) = 210.19, p < .001$]. However, mostly positive coefficients indicate that a higher number of stories in network TV is accompanied by a higher number of stories in political blogs on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling for political blogs – day 1.

R^2 for the model were .104 (day 1), .481 (day 2), .391 (day 3), .286 (day 4), .260 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .102 (day 1), .479 (day 2), .389 (day 3), .284 (day 4), .258 (day 5).

RQ4 asked to what extent the coverage of the political blogs statistically predicted the cable TV's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

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Regression analysis and time series analysis were conducted to answer RQ4. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 13.

Table 13. *Regression analyses with cable tv as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Cable TV Day 1	.020	.049	.401	.689
Political Blogs Day 1		.173	.010	16.691	.001***
Intercept	Cable TV Day 2	.069	.050	1.374	.169
Political Blogs Day 1		.117	.012	9.306	.001***
Cable TV Day 1		.211	.039	5.288	.001***
Intercept	Cable TV Day 3	.148	.053	2.755	.042
Political Blogs Day 1		.114	.013	8.477	.001***
Cable TV Day 1		.074	.042	1.760	.078

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Table 13 continued

Intercept	Cable TV Day 4	.168	.054	3.093	.002
Political Blogs Day 1		.103	.013	7.639	.001***
Cable TV Day 1		.086	.042	2.010	.044*
Intercept	Cable TV Day 5	.243	.055	4.347	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.069	.014	4.985	.001***
Cable TV Day 1		.126	.044	2.870	.004**

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

As Table 13 indicates, the coverage of political blogs-day 1 well predicted the coverage of cable TV- day 1 [F (1, 656) = 278.58, p < .001]; and political blogs – day 1 and cable TV- day 1 jointly well predicted cable TV - day 2 [F (2, 655) = 119.91, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 65.0, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 56.40, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 34.70, p < .001]. Positive coefficients indicate that more stories in political blogs are associated with more stories broadcast by cable TV on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling cable TV – day 1.

R^2 for the model were .298 (day 1), .268 (day 2), .166 (day 3), .147 (day 4), .096 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .297 (day 1), .266 (day 2), .163 (day 3), .144 (day 4), .093 (day 5).

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For all cable TV days, the Durbin-Watson statistics for the OLS regression was 1.751 (day 1), 1.696 (day 2), 1.559 (day 3), 1.411 (day 4), and 1.423 (day 5) suggesting autocorrelation among residuals. As a result, we ran a 1,0,0 ARIMA with political blogs as predictors.

Table 14. *ARIMA model (1,0,0) for predictors of cable tv*

X	Y	Coefficient	Standard Error	Sig.
Political Blogs Day 1	Cable TV Day 1	.120	.014	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.149	.039	.001***
Constant		.028	.058	.630
Political Blogs Day 1	Cable TV Day 2	.108	.015	.001***
AR (Lag1)		.188	.040	.001***
Constant		.072	.064	.261
Political Blogs Day 1	Cable TV Day 3	.060	.015	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.273	.039	.001***
Constant		.134	.072	.064
Political Blogs Day 1	Cable TV Day 4	.090	.015	.001***
AR (Lag 1)		.309	.038	.001***
Constant		.225	.076	.003**
Political Blogs Day 1	Cable TV Day 5	.011	.015	.444
AR (Lag 1)		.324	.038	.001***
Constant		.238	.078	.002**

Note. For Day 1, R^2=.336; Liung-Box Q = 27.483, *df*= 17, p=.051. For Day 2, R^2= .269; Liung-Box Q = 22.205, *df*= 17, p=.177. For Day 3, R^2=.239; Liung-Box Q = 28.661, *df*= 17, p=.038. For Day 4, R^2=.220; Liung-Box Q = 31.606, *df*= 17, p=.017. For Day 5, R^2=.212; Liung-Box Q = 25.337, *df*= 17, p=.087.

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The tested model garnered an R^2 of .347 (day 1), .325 (day 2), .299 (day 3), .279 (day 4), and .280 (day 5). Political blogs day 1 continue to be a significant predictor of cable TV day 1, day 2, day 3, and day 4 in the ARIMA model (p<.05).

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the cable television channel's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below.

Table 15. *Regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 1	1.969	.135	14.534	.001
Cable TV Day 1		1.722	.103	16.690	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 2	.873	.131	6.616	.001
Cable TV Day 1		.537	.104	5.150	.001***
Political Blogs Day 1		.597	.033	18.053	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 3	1.059	.144	7.316	.001
Cable TV Day 1		.225	.114	1.969	.049*

Table 15 continued

Political Blogs Day 1		.586	.036	16.152	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 4	1.342	.158	8.474	.001
Cable TV Day 1		.154	.125	1.231	.218
Political Blogs Day 1		.497	.039	12.535	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 5	1.398	.160	8.714	.001
Cable TV Day 1		.261	.126	2.057	.040*
Political Blogs Day 1		.458	.040	11.399	.001***

*Note. *p* < .05, **p* < .01, ***p* < .001

As Table 15 indicates, the coverage of cable TV-day 1 well predicted the coverage of political blogs – day 1[F (1, 656) = 278.58, p < .001]; and cable TV - day 1 and political blogs – day 1 jointly well predicted political blogs - day 2 [F (2, 655) = 323.40, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 213.35, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 113.82, p < .001]. It *did not predict* on day 4 [F (2, 655) = 125.03, p < .001]. Positive coefficients indicate that a higher number of stories in cable TV is accompanied by a higher number of stories in political blogs on day 1 and subsequent days after controlling for political blogs – day 1.

R^2 for the model were .298 (day 1), .497 (day 2), .394 (day 3), .276 (day 4), .258 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .297 (day 1), .495 (day 2), .392 (day 3), .274 (day 4), .255 (day 5).

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H1 predicted that conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the conservative cable television channel Fox News Channel's coverage of the rumor.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H1. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 16.

Table 16. *Correlation analysis between conservative political blogs and FOX*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conservative Political Blogs	1	.268**	.233**	.184**	.088*	.145**
Fox– Day 1	.268**	1	.161**	.120**	.083*	.142**
Fox– Day 2	.233**	.161**	1	.161**	.125**	.085*
Fox– Day 3	.184**	.120**	.161**	1	.168**	.127**
Fox–Day 4	.088*	.083*	.125**	.168**	1	.148**
Fox– Day 5	.145**	.142**	.085*	.127**	.148**	1

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$

In this listing, we see the correlation between the conservative political blogs and Fox day 1 (r= .268, p < .01), Fox day 2 (r= .233, p< .01), Fox day 3 (r= .184, p< .01), Fox day 4 (r= .088 p< .05), and Fox day 5 (r= .145 p< .01). Correlation for day 1 is the strongest and generally weakens on each subsequent day. The results suggest that conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the conservative cable television channel Fox News Channel's coverage of the rumor on all five days, supporting H1.

H2 forecasted that conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the conservative newspapers.

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Correlation analysis was conducted to test H2. The results of the correlation analysis are

presented below in Table 17.

Table 17. *Correlation analysis between conservative political blogs and conservative*
newspapers

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conservative Political Blogs	1	.271**	.248**	.186**	.162**	.186**
Conservative Newspapers Day 1	.271**	1	.103**	.053	.020	.103**
Conservative Newspapers Day 2	.248**	.103**	1	.103**	.053	.020
Conservative Newspapers Day 3	.186**	.053	.103**	1	.103**	.053
Conservative Newspapers Day 4	.162**	.020	.053	.103**	1	.103**
Conservative Newspapers Day 5	.186**	*.103**	.020	.053	.103**	1

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*

In this listing, we see the correlation between the conservative political blogs and

conservative newspapers day 1 (r= .271, p < .01), conservative newspapers day 2 (r= .248, p <

.01), conservative newspapers day 3 (r= .186, p < .01), conservative newspapers day 4 (r= .162,

p < .01), and conservative newspapers day 5 (r= .186, p < .01). Like h1a, correlation for day 1 is

the strongest and generally weakens on each subsequent day. The results suggest that

conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated

with the conservative newspapers on all five days, supporting H2.

H3 postulated that liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would

be positively correlated with the liberal cable TV MSNBC's coverage of the rumor.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H3. The results of the correlation analysis are

presented below in Table 18.

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Table 18. *Correlation analysis between liberal political blogs and MSNBC*

X	1	2	3	4	5	6
Liberal Political Blogs	1	.363**	.313**	.219**	.197**	.112**
MSNBC Day 1	.363**	1	.200**	.132**	.093*	.054
MSNBC Day 2	.313**	.200**	1	.200**	.132**	.093*
MSNBC Day 3	.219**	.132**	.200**	1	.200**	.132**
MSNBC Day 4	.197**	.093*	.132**	.200**	1	.200**
MSNBC Day 5	.112**	.054	.093**	.132**	.200**	1

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

In this listing, we see the correlation between the liberal political blogs and MSNBC day 1 (r= .363, p < .01), MSNBC day 2 (r= .313, p < .01), MSNBC day 3 (r= .219, p < .01), MSNBC day 4 (r= .197, p < .01), and MSNBC day 5 (r= .112, p < .01). The strength of correlation becomes weaker as days progress. The results suggest that liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the liberal cable television channel MSNBC's coverage of the rumor on all five days, supporting H3.

H4 predicted that liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the liberal newspapers.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H4. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 19.

Table 19. *Correlation analysis between liberal political blogs and liberal newspapers*

	1	2	*3*	*4*	5	6
Liberal Political Blogs	1	.392**	*.361***	*.375***	*.369***	*.335***

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Table 19 continued

Liberal Newspapers Day 1	.392**	1	.220**	.269**	.184**	.149**
Liberal Newspapers Day 2	.361**	.220**	1	.220**	.269**	.184**
Liberal Newspapers Day 3	.375**	.269**	.220**	1	.220**	.269**
Liberal Newspapers Day 4	.369**	.184**	.269**	.220**	1	.220**
Liberal Newspapers Day 5	.335**	.149**	.184**	.269**	.220**	1

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

In this listing, we see the correlation between liberal political blogs and liberal newspapers day 1 (r= .392, p < .01), liberal newspapers day 2 (r= .361, p < .01), liberal newspapers day 3 (r= .375, p < .01), liberal newspapers day 4 (r= .369, p < .01), liberal newspapers day 5 (r= .335, p < .01). Following the earlier patterns, the strength of correlation becomes weaker on each subsequent day. The results suggest that liberal political blogs' coverage of the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor is positively correlated with the liberal newspapers' coverage of the rumor on all five days, supporting H4.

RQ5 asked the extent to which the coverage of the political blogs statistically predicted the coverage of their peers on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

Trend analysis was conducted to answer RQ5. Trend analysis is one leg of the analytic triangle, and was used for investigation of relationships between the coverage of the political blogs and the coverage of their peers on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor. By conducting trend

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analysis, we can project the potential number of future cases. This can aid in defining corresponding resource requirements.

Hot Air (HA) and its peers – Day 1

We are interested in determining if there is any nonlinearity in the relationship between the political blog Hot Air (HA) and its peers on the same day (day 1). The analysis presented below supplies the statistical test of this research question in the "Deviation" row under "Linear Term."

Table 20. *Trend analysis between HA and its peers on day 1*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1578.498	3	526.166	48.712	.001
Linear Term					
Unweighted	186.050	1	186.050	17.224	.001
Weighted	1518.627	1	1518.627	140.593	.001
Deviation	59.871	2	29.936	2.771	.063
Within Groups	7064.215	654	10.802		
Total	8642.713	657			

Note. P < .05

Table 20 indicates that HA does not predict the coverage of its peers on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' on day 1 [F (3, 654) = 48.71, p = .063].

Table 21. *Trend analysis between HA and its peers on day 2*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1201.061	3	400.354	35.185	.001
Linear Term					

Table 21 continued

Unweighted	91.678	1	91.678	8.057	.005
Weighted	1076.302	1	1076.302	94.589	.001
Deviation	124.759	2	62.380	5.482	.004*
Within Groups	7441.652	654	11.379		
Total	8642.713	657			

*Note. *p < .05*

Table 21 indicates that HA predicts the coverage of its peers on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor on day 2 [F (3, 654) = 35.19, p = .004].

Similar analyses were conducted for each blog for all five days. To avoid redundancy of presentations, all tables containing the results of trend analysis for each blog on each five days are not reported here. However, the conclusions of the analyses of all the tables are summarized in the table below (Table 22).

Table 22. *Trend analyses among political blogs and their peers*

Blogs and Days	Does Predict the coverage of the peers?	P-value
Hot Air and its peers- Day 1	No	0.063
Hot Air and its peers- Day 2	Yes	0.004**
Hot Air and its peers- Day 3	Yes	0.002**
Hot Air and its peers-Day 4	No	0.825
Hot Air and its peers- Day 5	Yes	0.042*
Newsbusters and its peers- Day 1	Yes	0.001***
Newsbusters and its peers- Day 2	No	0.133
Newsbusters and its peers- Day 3	Yes	0.021*

Table 22 continued

Newsbusters and its peers- Day 4	Yes	0.049*
Newsbusters and its peers- Day 5	Yes	0.009**
Michele Malkin- Day 1	Yes	0.001***
Michele Malkin- Day 2	Yes	0.009**
Michele Malkin- Day 3	Yes	0.005**
Michele Malkin- Day 4	Yes	0.007**
Michele Malkin- Day 5	No	0.091
Volokh Conspiracy- Day 1	Yes	0.038*
Volokh Conspiracy- Day 2	Yes	0.013*
Volokh Conspiracy- Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Volokh Conspiracy- Day 4	Yes	0.001***
Volokh Conspiracy- Day 5	Yes	0.002**
Red State- Day 1	Yes	0.001***
Red State- Day 2	Yes	0.001***
Red State- Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Red State- Day 4	Yes	0.001***
Red State- Day 5	Yes	0.001***
Daily Kos- Day 1	No	0.127
Daily Kos- Day 2	Yes	0.001***
Daily Kos- Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Daily Kos- Day 4	Yes	0.001***
Daily Kos- Day 5	Yes	0.001***

Table 22 continued

Huffington Post- Day 1	Yes	0.001***
Huffington Post- Day 2	Yes	0.001***
Huffington Post- Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Huffington Post- Day 4	Yes	0.050*
Huffington Post- Day 5	Yes	0.037*
Talking Points Memo-Day 1	Yes	0.004**
Talking Points Memo-Day 2	Yes	0.001***
Talking Points Memo-Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Talking Points Memo-Day 4	No	0.117
Talking Points Memo-Day 5	No	0.085
Crooks and Liars- Day 1	No	0.053
Crooks and Liars- Day 2	Yes	0.001***
Crooks and Liars- Day 3	Yes	0.001***
Crooks and Liars- Day 4	Yes	0.003**
Crooks and Liars- Day 5	Yes	0.001***
Firedoglake – Day 1	Yes	0.034*
Firedoglake – Day 2	Yes	0.043*
Firedoglake – Day 3	No	0.110
Firedoglake – Day 4	No	0.235
Firedoglake – Day 5	No	0.056

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

The summary of the results presented in the table above (Table 22) shows that in most of the days (39 out of 50) political blogs predicted the coverage of their peers regarding the rumor.

H5 predicted that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' by the conservative political blogs would be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

Correlation analyses among the conservative political blogs and their peers were conducted to test H5.

Hot Air and its peers

The results of the correlation analysis among the conservative political blog Hot Air and its peers are presented below in Table 23.

Table 23. *Correlation analysis between HA and its peers*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
HA	1	.403**	.304**	.268**	.223**	.150**
HA peers –Day 1	.403**	1	.502**	.450**	.340**	.368**
HA peers – Day 1	.304**	.502**	1	.503**	.451**	.341**
HA peers –Day 3	.268**	.450**	.503**	1	.503**	.451**
HA peers –Day 4	.223**	.340**	.451**	.503**	1	.504**
HA peers –Day 5	.150**	.368**	.341**	.451**	.504**	1

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

In this listing, we see the correlation among HA, HA peers – day 1 (r= .403, p < .01), HA peers – day 2 (r= .304, p < .01), HA peers – day 3 (r= .268, p < .01), HA peers – day 4 (r= .223, p < .01), and HA peers – day 5 (r= .150, p < .01). It is evident that the strength of the correlation becomes weaker on each subsequent day. Findings suggest that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by HA is positively correlated with the coverage of their peers on all five days.

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Similar correlation analyses were conducted for each conservative political blog in all five days. To avoid redundancy of presentations, all tables containing the results of correlation analysis for each conservative political blog on each five day are not reported here. However, the conclusions of the analyses of all the tables are summarized in the table below (Table 24).

Table 24. *Correlation analyses among conservative political blogs and their peers*

Blogs and Days	Is positively correlated with their peers?	Correlation value
HA- HA Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.403**
HA- HA Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.304**
HA- HA Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.268**
HA- HA Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.223**
HA- HA Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.150**
NB- NB Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.320**
NB- NB Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.242**
NB- NB Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.147**
NB- NB Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.100*
NB- NB Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.113**
MM- MM Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.389**
MM- MM Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.293**
MM- MM Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.283**
MM- MM Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.210**
MM- MM Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.266**
VC- VC Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.309**

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Table 24 continued

VC- VC Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.279**
VC- VC Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.270**
VC- VC Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.171**
VC- VC Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.198**
RS- RS Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.336**
RS- RS Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.236**
RS- RS Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.258**
RS- RS Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.193**
RS- RS Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.145**

Note. $*p < .05, **p < .01$

The summary of the results presented in the table above (Table 24) shows that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by each conservative political blog positively correlated with the coverage of their peers on all five days, supporting H5.

H6 assumed that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by the liberal political blogs would be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

Correlation analyses among the liberal political blogs and their peers were conducted to test H6.

Daily Kos and its peers

The results of the correlation analysis among the liberal political blog Daily Kos and its peers are presented below in Table 25.

Table 25. *Correlation analysis between DK and its peers*

Y	1	2	3	4	5	6
DK	1	.519**	.414**	.447**	.369**	.386**
DK peers – Day 1	.519**	1	.632**	.563**	.515**	.488**
DK peers – Day 2	.414**	.632**	1	.632**	.562**	.515**
DK peers –Day 3	.447**	.563**	.632**	1	.632**	.562**
DK peers – Day 4	.369**	.515**	.562**	.632**	1	.632**
DK peers – Day 5	.386**	.488**	.515**	.562**	.632**	1

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$

In this listing, we see the correlation between DK, DK peers - day 1 ($r= .519$, $p < .01$), DK peers – day 2 ($r= .414$, $p < .01$), DK peers – day 3 ($r= .447$, $p < .01$), DK peers – day 4 ($r= .369$, $p < .01$), and DK peers – day 5 ($r= .386$, $p < .01$). The findings suggest that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by DK is positively correlated with the coverage of their peers on all five days.

Similar correlation analyses were conducted for each liberal political blog on all five days. To avoid redundancy of presentations, all tables containing the results of correlation analysis for each liberal political blog on each five day are not reported here. However, the conclusions of the analyses of all the tables are summarized in the table below (Table 26).

Table 26. *Correlation analyses among liberal political blogs and their peers*

Blogs and Days	Is positively correlated with their peers?	Correlation value
DK- DK Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.519**
DK- DK Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.414**
DK- DK Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.447**

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Table 26 continued

DK- DK Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.369**
DK- DK Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.386**
HP- HP Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.493**
HP- HP Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.447**
HP- HP Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.360**
HP- HP Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.292**
HP- HP Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.289**
TPM- TPM Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.536**
TPM- TPM Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.472**
TPM- TPM Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.446**
TPM- TPM Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.467**
TPM- TPM Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.399**
CL- CL Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.422**
CL- CL Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.374**
CL- CL Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.337**
CL- CL Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.307**
CL- CL Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.333**
FG- FG Peers (Day 1)	Yes	.389**
FG- FG Peers (Day 2)	Yes	.386**
FG- FG Peers (Day 3)	Yes	.318**
FG- FG Peers (Day 4)	Yes	.291**
FG- FG Peers (Day 5)	Yes	.308**

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$

The summary of the results presented in the table above (Table 26) shows that the volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by each liberal political blog positively correlated with the coverage of their peers on all five days, supporting H6.

RQ6 asked the extent to which political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the volume of Internet searches about the rumor?

Regression analysis was conducted to answer RQ6. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 27.

Table 27. *Regression analyses with internet searches as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 1	.093	.054	1.725	.085
Political Blogs Day 1		.151	.011	13.403	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 2	.078	.047	1.668	.095
Political Blogs Day 1		.055	.011	4.945	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.562	.034	16.451	.001***

Table 27 continued

Intercept	Internet Searches Day 3	.181	.056	3.219	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.071	.013	5.338	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.286	.040	7.021	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 4	.229	.058	3.934	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.074	.013	5.364	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.174	.042	4.120	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 5	.236	.058	4.059	.001
Political Blogs Day 1		.092	.013	6.706	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.049	.042	1.180	.238

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As Table 27 indicates, the coverage by political blogs- day 1 of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted Internet searches – day 1 [F (1, 656) = 179.63, p < .001]; and political blogs – day 1 and Internet searches- day 1 jointly well predicted Internet searches -day 2

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[F (2, 655) = 236.01, p < .001] day 3 [F (2, 655) = 71.70, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 42.20, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 34.21, p < .001]. The coefficient of political blogs is positive in all the regressions, which indicates that a higher number of stories in political blogs is accompanied by a higher number of Internet searches on day 1 and each subsequent day after controlling Internet searches- day 1.

R^2 for the model were .215 (day 1), .419 (day 2), .179 (day 3), .114 (day 4), .094 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .214 (day 1), .417 (day 2), .177 (day 3), .111 (day 4), .092 (day 5).

The fall in R^2, except on day 2, indicates that the number of stories in political blogs explains less and less of the variation in the number of Internet searches as the number of days between the two increases. So one might claim that the role of political blogs on Internet searches reduces as each day progresses.

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the volume of Internet searches on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below in Table 28.

Table 28. *Regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 1	2.108	.143	14.736	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		1.419	.105	13.402	.001***

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Table 28 continued

Intercept	Political Blogs Day 2	.870	.134	6.459	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		.150	.097	1.546	.122
Political Blogs Day 1		.667	.031	20.955	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 3	1.077	.145	7.408	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		-.139	.105	1.321	.186
Political Blogs Day 1		.646	.034	18.802	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 4	1.350	.158	8.496	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		-.050	.115	.437	.661
Political Blogs Day 1		.531	.037	14.157	.001***
Intercept	Political Blogs Day 5	1.411	.161	8.755	.001

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Table 28 continued

Internet Searches Day 1		-.089	.116	-.767	.442
Political Blogs Day 1		.517	.038	13.562	.001***

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*

As Table 28 indicates, the volume of Internet searches- day 1 on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs *only on day 1* [F (1, 656) = 179.63, p < .001]. The Internet searches *did not predict* the coverage of political blogs on day 2 [F (2, 655) = 300.35, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 211.60, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 124.12, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 111.38, p < .001].

R^2 for the model were .215 (day 1), .478 (day 2), .392 (day 3), .275 (day 4), .254 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .214 (day 1), .477 (day 2), .391 (day 3), .273 (day 4), .251 (day 5).

The fall in R^2, except on day 2, indicates that the volume of Internet searches explains less and less of the variation in the number of stories by political blogs as the number of days between the two increases. So one might claim that the role of Internet searches on political blogs reduces as each day progresses.

H7 predicted that the volume of the conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H7. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 29.

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Table 29. *Correlation analysis between conservative political blogs and internet searches*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Conservative Political Blogs	1	.472**	.425**	.329**	.232**	.256**
Internet Searches -Day 1	.472**	1	.630**	.379**	.274**	.180**
Internet Searches- Day2	.425**	.630**	1	.633**	.377**	.271**
Internet Searches- Day 3	.329**	.379**	.633**	1	.633**	.378**
Internet Searches - Day 4	.232**	.274**	.377**	.633**	1	.631**
Internet Searches - Day 5	.256**	.180**	.271**	.378**	.631**	1

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

In this listing, we see the correlation between conservative political and Internet searchers –day 1 ($r= .472$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 2 ($r= .425$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 3 ($r= .329$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 4 ($r= .232$, $p < .01$), and Internet searches – day 5 ($r= .256$, $p < .01$). Findings suggest that the volume of the conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor on all five days, supporting H7.

H8 predicted that the volume of the liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H8. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 30.

Table 30. *Correlation analysis between conservative political blogs and internet searches*

Y	1	2	3	4	5	6
Liberal Political Blogs	1	.387**	.371**	.308**	.315**	.298**

Table 30 continued

Internet Searches - Day 1	.387**	1	.630**	.379**	.274**	.180**
Internet Searches - Day 2	.371**	.630**	1	.633**	.377**	.271**
Internet Searches- Day 3	.308**	.379**	.633**	1	.633**	.378**
Internet Searches - Day 4	.315**	.274**	.377**	.633**	1	.631**
Internet Searches - Day 5	.298**	.180**	.271**	.378**	.631**	1

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

In this listing, we see the correlation between liberal political blogs and Internet searches – day 1 ($r= .387$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 2 ($r= .371$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 3 ($r= .308$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 4 ($r= .315$, $p < .01$), and Internet searches – day 5 ($r= .298$, $p < .01$). Findings suggest that the volume of the liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' is positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor on all five days, supporting H8.

RQ7 asked the extent to which legacy media's coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the volume of Internet searches about the rumor.

Regression analysis was conducted to answer RQ7. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 31.

Table 31. *Regression analyses with internet searches as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 1	.266	.049	5.433	.001

Table 31 continued

Legacy Media Day 1		.318	.026	12.031	.001*
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 2	.133	.043	3.109	.002
Legacy Media Day 1		.119	.025	4.766	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.573	.033	17.097	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 3	.256	.051	4.987	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		.145	.030	4.853	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.304	.040	7.603	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 4	.319	.053	5.966	.001
Legacy Media Day 1		.129	.031	4.136	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.205	.041	4.934	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 5	.365	.053	6.766	.001

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Table 31 continued

Legacy Media Day 1		.127	.031	4.027	.001***
Internet Searches Day 1		.108	.042	2.579	.010**

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As Table 31 indicates, the coverage by legacy media –day 1 on the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor statistically predicted Internet searches – day 1 [F (1, 656) = 144.75, p < .001]; and legacy media –day 1 and Internet searches – day 1 jointly predicted Internet searches - day 2 [F (2, 655) = 234.57, p < .001]; day 3 [F (2, 655) = 68.81, p < .001]; day 4 [F (2, 655) = 35.89, p < .001]; day 5 [F (2, 655) = 19.35, p < .001]. The coefficient of legacy media is positive in all the regressions, which indicates that a higher number of stories in legacy media is accompanied by a higher number of Internet searches on day 1 and each subsequent day after controlling for Internet searches - day 1.

R^2 for the model were .181 (day 1), .417 (day 2), .174 (day 3), .099 (day 4), .056 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .180 (day 1), .415 (day 2), .171 (day 3), .096 (day 4), .053 (day 5).

The declining R^2 values, except on day 2, indicate that the number of stories in legacy media explains a decay in the number of Internet searches on subsequent days.

We were also interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the volume of Internet searches on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' statistically predicted the coverage of the legacy media of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with legacy media as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses are presented below in Table 32.

Table 32. *Regression analyses with legacy media as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 1	.515	.063	8.079	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		.567	.047	12.031	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 2	.378	.064	5.877	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		.181	.050	3.605	.001***
Legacy Media Day 1		.417	.037	11.102	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 3	.475	.068	6.948	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		.163	.053	3.060	.002**
Legacy Media Day 1		.309	.039	7.756	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 4	.504	.068	7.338	.001

Table 32 continued

Internet Searches Day 1		.027	.053	.507	.611
Legacy Media Day 1		.356	.040	8.893	.001***
Intercept	Legacy Media Day 5	.539	.070	7.681	.001
Internet Searches Day 1		.068	.054	1.252	.210
Legacy Media Day 1		.285	.040	6.958	.001***

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As Table 32 indicates, the volume of Internet searches – day 1 on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of the rumor by legacy media – day 1 [F (1, 656) = 144.75, p < .001]; and Internet searches – day 1 and legacy media – day 1 jointly predicted the coverage of legacy media – day 2 [F (2, 655) = 103.95, p < .001] and day 3 [F (2, 655) = 54.76, p < .001]. It *did not predict* the coverage of day 4 [F (2, 655) = 50.77, p < .001] and day 5 [F (2, 655) = 35.04, p < .001]. The coefficient of Internet searches is positive in all the regressions, which indicates that a higher number of Internet searches is accompanied by a higher number of stories in political blogs on day 1, day 2, and day 3 after controlling for legacy media – day 1.

R^2 for the model were .181 (day 1), .241 (day 2), .143 (day 3), .134 (day 4), .097 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .180 (day 1), .239 (day 2), .141 (day 3), .132 (day 4), .094 (day 5). The fall in R^2, except on day 2, indicates that the volume of Internet searches explains less and less of the

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variation in the number of stories by legacy media as the number of days between the two increases. So one might claim that the role of Internet searches on legacy media reduces as each day progresses.

H9 predicted that the volume of the newspapers' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the volume of Internet searches.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H9. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 33.

Table 33. *Correlation analysis between newspapers and internet searches*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Newspapers	1	.354**	.254**	.188**	.154**	.168**
Internet Searches –Day 1	.354**	1	.630**	.379**	.274**	.180**
Internet Searches –Day 2	.254**	.630**	1	.633**	.377**	.271**
Internet Searches- Day 3	.188**	.379**	.633**	1	.633**	.378**
Internet Searches –Day 4	.154**	.274**	.377**	.633**	1	.631**
Internet Searches –Day 5	.168**	.180**	.271**	.378**	.631**	1

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

In this listing, we see the correlation between newspapers and Internet searchers – day 1 ($r = .354$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 2 ($r = .254$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 3 ($r = .188$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 4 ($r = .154$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 5 ($r = .168$, $p < .01$). Findings suggest that the volume of the newspapers' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor on all five days, supporting H9.

H10 postulated that the volume of the network TVs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the volume of Internet searches.

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Correlation analysis was conducted to test H10. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 34.

Table 34. *Correlation analysis between network tv channels and internet searches*

Y	1	2	3	4	5	6
Network TV	1	.259**	.296**	.192**	.094*	.032
Internet Searches – Day 1	.259**	1	.630**	.379**	.274**	.180**
Internet Searches –Day 2	.296**	.630**	1	.633**	.377**	.271**
Internet Searches –Day 3	.192**	.379**	.633**	1	.633**	.378**
Internet Searches –Day 4	.094*	.274**	.377**	.633**	1	.631**
Internet Searches –Day 5	.032	.180**	.271**	.378**	.631**	1

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

In this listing, we see the correlation between network TV and Internet searchers – day 1 ($r = .259$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 2 ($r = .296$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 3 ($r = .192$, $p < .01$), Internet searches – day 4 ($r = .094$, $p < .05$), Internet searches – day 5 ($r = .032$, NS).

The findings suggest that the volume of the network television channels' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches on day 1, day 2, day 3, and day 4, mostly supporting H10.

H11 predicted that the volume of cable TVs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor would be positively correlated with the volume of Internet searches.

Correlation analysis was conducted to test H11. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below in Table 35.

Table 35. *Correlation analysis between cable tv channels and internet searches*

Y	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cable TV	1	.340**	.343**	.294**	.250**	.202**

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Table 35 continued

Internet Searches - Day 1	.340**	1	.630**	.379**	.274**	.180**
Internet Searches - Day 2	.343**	.630**	1	.633**	.377**	.271**
Internet Searches- Day 3	.294**	.379**	.633**	1	.633**	.378**
Internet Searches -Day 4	.250**	.274**	.377**	.633**	1	.631**
Internet Searches - Day 5	.202**	.180**	.271**	.378**	.631**	1

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

In this listing, we see the correlation between cable TV and Internet searchers – day 1 (r= .340, p < .01), Internet searches – day 2 (r= .343, p < .01), Internet searches – day 3 (r= .294, p < .01), Internet searches – day 4 (r= .250, p < .01), Internet searches – day 5 (r= .202, p < .01). Findings suggest that the volume of the cable TVs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is positively correlated with the volume of Internet searches on all five days, supporting H11.

H12 predicted that the correlations between the coverage of political blogs and legacy media on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor *and* the volume of Internet searches about that rumor would be higher on day 1 and be lower on each succeeding day (2 through 5).

Regression analysis was conducted to test H12. The results of the regression analyses are presented below in Table 36.

Table 36. *Regression analyses with internet searches as dependent variable*

X	Y	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error for B (SE B)	t	Significance Values (p)
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 1	.086	.053	1.627	.104

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Table 36 continued

Legacy Media		.106	.014	7.511	.001***
Political Blogs		.167	.032	5.168	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 2	.124	.055	2.256	.024
Legacy Media		.095	.015	6.478	.001***
Political Blogs		.167	.034	4.928	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 3	.203	.058	3.510	.001
Legacy Media		.079	.015	5.139	.001***
Political Blogs		.130	.035	3.663	.001***
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 4	.242	.059	4.124	.001
Legacy Media		.078	.016	4.932	.001***
Political Blogs		.085	.036	2.343	.019*
Intercept	Internet Searches Day 5	.239	.058	4.123	.001

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Table 36 continued

Legacy Media		.091	.016	5.863	.001***
Political Blogs		.032	.036	.895	.371

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

R^2 for the model were .246 (day 1), .208 (day 2), .136 (day 3), .099 (day 4), .094 (day 5). Adjusted R^2 were .243 (day 1), .206 (day 2), .133(day 3), .096 (day 4), .091 (day 5). These values indicate that the correlation between the coverage of political blogs and legacy media on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor and the volume of the Internet searches on that rumor is higher on day 1. The R^2 values also indicate that the correlations between the coverage of political blogs and legacy media on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor and the volume of the Internet searches on that rumor are lower on each succeeding day (day 2 through day 5).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

One of the main goals of this study was to test the hypothesis that political blogs, in many instances, are now playing a major role to set the agenda of the legacy news media. This hypothesis was tested by examining the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs and legacy media in the context of "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. This chapter analyzes the results presented in the previous chapter and discusses their theoretical implications and significance. The chapter also lists limitations of the study, offers recommendations for future studies, and concludes with final thoughts.

Summary of findings

We found that the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by political blogs significantly predicted the coverage of the rumor by the legacy media. If a story on the rumor was published by a political blog on a certain day, there was a significant chance that the legacy media outlets would also publish a story related to the rumor at a subsequent time. The legacy media may not have published the story to further propagate or reinforce the rumor, but to refute the rumor. However, the rumor would become part of the public agenda because the legacy media reported it. In that sense, political blogs would appear to have some intermedia agenda setting role with respect to the legacy media.

We found bi-directional agenda-setting relationships between the coverage of the political blogs and legacy media in general on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor. However, there was hardly any bi-directional relationship between the coverage of political blogs of the rumor and the volume of Internet searches on the rumor. Although, we found bi-directional relationship

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between the coverage of the legacy media of the rumor and the volume of Internet searched on the rumor, the findings suggest that the relationship fades away quickly.

Analyses of research questions and hypotheses

In this section, we examine the findings as they relate to each of the research question and hypothesis.

RQ1: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the legacy media's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor?

The theoretical importance of this question is that when the original agenda-setting theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the only media in existence was what is now referred to as the legacy media. There was no Internet-based media. Thus, agenda-setting theory was entirely centered upon the importance of the legacy media, and did not even consider the possible importance of other inputs. However, examples such as the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor suggest that these new media outlets may be having a role in agenda-setting. It is therefore important to know whether and to what extent the new media, such as political blogs, can predict the coverage of a specific issue by the legacy media.

The results of the study revealed that political blogs significantly predicted the coverage by the legacy media of the rumor over a period of five days. This tells us there must be at least some definite exceptions to the claim that the legacy media *always* set the public agenda. It does not seem possible to explain the pattern of data observed in the case of the 'Obama-is-a Muslim' rumor without returning to the main theory of this dissertation that at least on some occasions the agenda is set by political blogs other than the legacy media.

To find out whether there was any bi-directional relationship between political blogs and legacy media, i.e., to what extent the coverage of the legacy media statistically predicted the

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political blogs' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor, we conducted reverse tests. The results of the regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables found that the coverage of the legacy media predicted the coverage of political blogs on the first three days (day 1, day 2, and day 3). Legacy media's coverage did not predict the coverage of political blogs on day 4 and day 5. The strength of the relationship was also weaker on day 3 compared to day 1 and day 2. Whereas political blogs significantly predicted the coverage of the legacy media over a period of five days, legacy media predicted the coverage of political blogs over a period of three days. This tells us that although there was a bi-directional relationship between political blogs and legacy media, the relationship diminishes quickly.

RQ2: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the newspapers' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor?

This question involves a narrower focus than the previous question. In this case, we are focusing specifically on the activity of the newspapers. This is important because the original agenda-setting study by McCombs and Shaw (1972) focused primarily upon national newspapers. This was because their theory assigned a central role to the national newspapers in setting the agenda for all other media, and therefore set the public agenda. It is thus important to examine the impact of such newspapers now.

The data revealed that the content of the political blogs significantly predicted the contents of the four national newspapers on the specific issue of 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor over a period of at least five days. This observation is important because the national newspapers are one of the oldest segments of the legacy media. Even so, we still observe the pattern of the newest media predicting the content of the newspapers.

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Similar to RQ1, we also conducted reverse tests to find out the statistical predictability of the coverage by the newspapers on the coverage of political blogs. The results of regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables showed that the coverage of the newspapers did not predict the coverage of political blogs on day 2, day 3, day 4, and day 5. However, the coverage of the newspapers did predict the coverage of the political blogs on day 1. So, there was hardly any bi-directional relationship between these two media.

RQ3: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the network television channels' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor?

The reason this question is important is that even today, despite the growth of the new media, the majority of Americans still receive news from television, particularly from the three major network television channels, ABC, CBS, and NBC (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell & Enda, 2013).

The pattern of the results showed that the political blogs were predicting the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' by network television channels over a period of five days. However, the effect was not as robust as with the newspapers.

To find out the reverse relationship, i.e., to what extent the network television channel's coverage statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs; we conducted another series of regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses revealed a bi-directional relationship. The coverage of network TV predicted the coverage of political blogs over five days, except on day 3. Unlike newspapers, the relationship did not fade away quickly.

RQ4: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the cable television channels' coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor?

The importance of this question is that although news-only cable television channels are considered to be part of the legacy media, they are one of the most recent additions to the legacy media. It is believed that many cable news channels do not always verify their facts as rigorously and critically as most newspapers and network television news programs do (Morris, 2007). Whereas network television news bulletins are generally limited to 30 minutes, cable news channels are sometimes devoted entirely to news on a 24-hour basis. Cable television channels thus can devote large amounts of time to issues that would be only briefly mentioned or not discussed at all on network news.

The results revealed that the content of the political blogs significantly predicted the content of the cable news programs regarding the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' over five days, and that pattern was even more robust than with the newspapers. In fact, the pattern observed with these cable news channels was the strongest among the three legacy media segments investigated in this study.

We were also interested to find out any bi-directional relationship between political blogs and cable TV i.e., to what extent the cable television channel's coverage on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of political blogs of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses found that there was bi-directional relationship between these two media. The coverage of the cable television channels predicted the coverage of the political blogs over five days except on day 4. However, the relationship was weaker on day 3 and day 5.

H1: Conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the conservative cable television channel Fox News Channel's coverage of the rumor.

The theoretical importance of this hypothesis is that those who consume conservative media may wish to reinforce their conservative social and political views, and thus deliberately seek out information sources that serve this purpose. Conservative news outlets are aware of this tendency, and tailor their program contents to attract and satisfy such viewers. We also found the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor first appeared in conservative political blogs. Fox News Channel is generally considered to be the most conservative, far-to-the- right cable channel. The possible relationship between conservative political blogs and Fox News seems to be especially worthy of investigation.

The results showed that the coverage of the rumor by the political blogs significantly and positively correlated with the coverage of the rumor by Fox News on all five days. The strength of the correlation was strongest on day 1, and reduced gradually as the days passed.

This tells us that there was significant intermedia agenda-setting relationship between the conservative political blogs and Fox News Channel, although at this point we cannot yet determine which medium was setting the agenda for the other.

However, we do know that the stories related to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor appeared first in the conservative political blogs before appearing on the cable news channels [This issue was addressed in great detail in the qualitative content analysis section (chapter 3) of this dissertation].

It is possible to understand this correlation in terms of an overlap of personalities. Many of the founders and main contributors of conservative political blogs are also associated with Fox News, and frequently appear on the channel either as commentators or regular contributors. For example, Michele Malkin and founder of Red State, Eric Ericson, are paid contributors to the Fox News Channel.

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H2: Conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the conservative newspapers' coverage of the rumor.

This hypothesis is important because conservative newspapers are frequently claimed to echo the content of many other conservative news outlets, creating what authors such as Jamieson and Cappella (2008) refer to as the "conservative echo chamber."

The findings revealed that the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by the conservative political blogs significantly and positively correlated with the coverage of the rumor by the conservative newspapers on all five days. The strength of the correlation was strongest on day 1, and reduced gradually as the days passed.

This demonstrates that there was a significant intermedia agenda-setting relationship between the conservative political blogs and the conservative newspapers. This correlation by itself does not tell us which entity is setting the agenda for the other. However, since we know that the rumor first appeared in the conservative political blogs, and only appeared a few days later in the newspapers, the most plausible interpretation would be the political blogs were setting the agenda of the newspapers, rather than the other way around.

As with the overlapping personalities associated with Fox News and some of the conservative political blogs, a similar overlap can be observed between conservative newspapers and political blogs. In this case, InsightMag.com, the political blog that first published the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor, is a subsidiary of the conservative newspaper *The Washington Times*.

H3: Liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the liberal cable television channel MSNBC's coverage of the rumor.

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The theoretical importance of this hypothesis is that, as with conservatives seeking to reinforce their view in their selection of media, those who consume liberal media may likewise wish to reinforce their liberal political and social views, and thus deliberately seek out information sources that serve this purpose. News channels are aware of this tendency, and thus channels like MSNBC tailor their program contents to attract and satisfy such viewers. It is thus important to observe the pattern of coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by such liberal cable news channels.

The results showed that the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by liberal political blogs significantly correlated with the coverage of the rumor by MSNBC on all five days. The strength of the relationship was strongest on day 1, and reduced gradually as the days progressed. The correlation was actually stronger between the liberal political blogs and MSNBC compared to the correlation between the conservative political blogs and Fox News. This was somewhat surprising because we might have expected that the correlation between conservative political blogs and other conservative news sources would be stronger, rather than weaker.

H4: Liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the liberal newspapers' coverage of the rumor.

This hypothesis is important because a majority of Americans believe that there is a liberal media bias (Mendes, 2013). It is therefore important to observe the pattern of coverage of this rumor in the liberal media, as well as the possible intermedia agenda-setting relationship between liberal political blogs and liberal newspapers.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant and positive correlation between the coverage of the rumor by liberal political blogs and the coverage by liberal newspapers on all five days. This effect was somewhat stronger than the corresponding

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correlation between conservative media outlets. Moreover, to our surprise, this effect did not diminish as rapidly or as consistently as in the analogous cases with the conservative media.

This may possibly be understood as liberal newspapers paying special attention to the coverage by liberal political blogs. As with the overlapping personnel in conservative political blogs and conservative media, there may also be a similar overlap of personnel between liberal political blogs and liberal political newspapers.

RQ5: To what extent does the coverage of the political blogs statistically predict the coverage of their peers on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor?

The theoretical importance of this question is that the various political blogs are sometime thought to influence each other, especially those with a similar political orientation, and may have overlapping readership. Thus, what appears in one political blog may soon appear in other political blogs. Sometimes these blogs may merely repeat the contents of a previous story, but in other cases they may respond by disputing or contradicting the original story.

The results was somewhat mixed. For the conservative blogs, they strongly predicted the content of their peers. However, the tendency of liberal blogs to predict the coverage of their peers was much weaker.

This suggests that there is a strong intermedia agenda-setting relationship among various conservative political blogs, but although a similar pattern does exist among liberal political blogs, the relationship between the various liberal political blogs is considerably weaker.

H5: The volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by the conservative political blogs will be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

The importance of this hypothesis concerns the fact that there is some apparent connection among various conservative political blogs, which tend to share common themes,

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concerns, and readership. It would be valuable to examine whether the individual conservative political blogs each devoted similar amounts of attention to the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

The results showed that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation among the volume of posts that the five different conservative political blogs devoted to the rumor. It was observed on all five days, for all five conservative political blogs. The correlation was strongest on day 1, and generally reduced with each subsequent day.

This tells us that these conservative political blogs not only have a relationship with each other in terms of content, but also in terms of attention and space devoted to the same issue. This may be due to the fact that the blogs do not want to lose readership to other blogs by failing to cover the issues they believe their readership is interested in.

H6: The volume of the coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor by the liberal political blogs will be positively correlated with the coverage of their peers.

This hypothesis is important because there is some apparent connection among the various liberal political blogs, which tend to share common themes, concerns, and readership. It may be worthwhile to examine whether the individual liberal political blogs each devoted similar amounts of attention to the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor.

The results revealed that there was a statistically significant and positive correlation among the volume of posts that the five different liberal political blogs devoted to the rumor. It was observed on all five days, for all five liberal political blogs. This correlation was the strongest on day 1, and generally reduced with each subsequent day. The correlation was even stronger than for the conservative political blogs.

This suggests that these liberal political blogs not only have a relationship with each other in terms of content, but also in terms of attention and space devoted to the same issue. This may

be because the blogs do not want to lose readership to other blogs by failing to cover the issues they believe their readership is interested in. The fact that the correlation was stronger among the liberal blogs than for the conservative blogs implies that various liberal blogs may be even more concerned with losing their readership to each other if they fail to cover an issue that is important to their readers.

RQ6: To what extent does the political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predict the volume of Internet searches about the rumor?

The importance of this question is that the theory of agenda-setting claims that once an issue has been deemed to be important by the media, it will eventually be perceived to be so by the general public. This theory predicts that once a story reaches a high level of coverage in the media, as the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor did, it will soon be perceived as having great importance by the public. Previously, the only way to empirically measure the salience of an issue to the public was through conducting surveys. However, with the introduction of tools that aggregate Internet search behavior of the public (such as Google Trends), it is now possible to measure public perception of salience of any issue at a particular point in time, such as the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor. This salience should be reflected in the number of online searches as measured by Google Trends and other similar tools.

The results showed the coverage of the rumor by the political blogs significantly predicted the level of Internet searches related to the rumor on all five days.

This tells us that the content of these political blogs does predict the level of salience of an issue in the minds of the public.

We were also interested to find out any possible bi-directional relationships, i.e., to what extent the volume of Internet searches on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted

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the coverage of political blogs of the rumor. So, we conducted regression analyses with political blogs as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses found that there was hardly any bidirectional relationship between these two media except on day 1. Whereas the coverage of political blogs of the rumor statistically, and significantly, predicted the volume of Internet searches on the rumor over a period of five days, the volume of Internet searches did not predict the coverage of political blogs on four out of five days.

H7: The volume of the conservative political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor.

The importance of this hypothesis is that since the rumor began in the conservative political blogs, it may be assumed these conservative political blogs were more important to the process of agenda-setting than were the liberal political blogs. Thus, attention needs to be paid to what was happening in the conservative political blogosphere.

The findings showed that the volume of coverage by conservative political blogs of the rumor significantly and positively correlated with the volume of Internet searches related to the rumor on all five days. The correlation was especially strong on the first two days.

This tells us that the volume of coverage by the conservative political blogs is related in some meaningful way to the search behavior of the general public regarding the issue, but it does not reveal the nature of this relationship. From this correlation alone, we cannot infer causality, nor can we determine whether the connection between the two factors is direct or indirect in nature. Even so, this still suggests an important intermedia agenda-setting relationship of some type exists between the volume of the conservative blogs and the number of Internet searches.

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H8: The volume of the liberal political blogs' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches about that rumor.

The importance of this hypothesis is that although we know the conservative blogs were the first to report the rumor, there nevertheless was what seemed to be a strong response by the liberal blogs, even though this appeared somewhat later. Some of these liberal political blogs examined the issue in greater depth, and it is therefore possible to suspect the content of these liberal blogs had a substantial role on the way the coverage of the story eventually evolved, and the way the public eventually responded in terms of the number of Internet searches.

The results showed the volume of the coverage by the liberal political blogs related to the rumor did correlate positively and significantly with the number of related Internet searches on all five days. The correlation was substantial and significant, but was weaker than that seen in the conservative blogs in the first three days, but became stronger on day 4 and day 5.

This tells us that the volume of coverage by the liberal political blogs is also related in some meaningful way to the search behavior of the general public regarding the rumor, but it again does not reveal the nature of this relationship. From this correlation alone, we cannot infer causality, nor can we determine whether the connection between the two factors is direct or indirect in nature. Even so, this still suggests important intermedia agenda-setting relationship of some type exists between the volume of the liberal blogs and the number of Internet searches.

RQ7: To what extent does the legacy media's coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predict the volume of Internet searches about the rumor?

This question is important because the relationship still remains unclear regarding the connection between the increased level of Internet searches, the coverage by the political blogs, and the coverage by the legacy media. We have already seen that there was a correlation between

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the increased coverage by the political blogs and the Internet searches, but we have not yet considered the relationship between the legacy media's coverage of the rumor and the volume of the Internet searches.

The results showed the coverage by the legacy media significantly predicted the volume of Internet searches on all five days. This correlation was weaker than that observed between the political blogs and the Internet searches. The correlation became significantly weaker on day 4 and day 5.

This indicates there is a relationship between the coverage by the legacy media and the number of Internet searches, but it still does not reveal the nature of the relationship. While it is possible to suspect the coverage by the legacy media was causing the increased number of Internet searches, one could still equally suspect it was the coverage by the blogs, which was causing the increased Internet searches. However, it is also possible the increased level of Internet searches were being caused by some other factor entirely, so by itself, the existence of this correlation does not allow us to infer causality.

However, we were interested to see reverse relationships, i.e., to what extent the volume of Internet searches on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor statistically predicted the coverage of the legacy media of the rumor. So, we conducted a series of regression analyses with legacy media as dependent variables. The results of these regression analyses revealed that the volume of Internet searches predicted the coverage of the legacy media on the first three days. Internet searches did not predict the coverage of legacy media on day 4 and day 5. The strength of the relationship was also weaker on day 3 compared to day 1 and day 2. Whereas the coverage by legacy media significantly predicted the volume of Internet searches over a period of five days, Internet searches predicted the legacy media's coverage over a period of three days. This tells us

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that although there was a bi-directional relationship between legacy media and Internet search behavior of the public, the relationship diminishes quickly compared to the relationship between political blogs and Internet search behavior.

H9: The volume of the newspapers' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

The importance of this hypothesis is that although we have established there is a correlation between the coverage by the legacy media in general and the volume of Internet searches, we still have not determined which specific segment of the legacy media might be most strongly correlated with the Internet searches.

The results showed there was a significant and positive correlation between the coverage by the newspapers of the rumor and the Internet searches on all five days. The correlation was especially strong on day 1, but decreased on subsequent days.

This indicates that there is a meaningful relationship between the newspaper coverage of the rumor, and the Internet searches, but this does not tell us about the nature of this relationship.

H10: The volume of the network television channels' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

The importance of this hypothesis is similar to that of the previous hypothesis in that although we have established there is a correlation between the coverage by the legacy media in general and the volume of Internet searches, we still have not determined which specific segment of the legacy media might be most strongly correlated with the Internet searches.

The results showed there was a significant and positive correlation between the coverage by the network television channels of the rumor and the Internet searches on the first four days.

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The correlation was especially strong on day 2, but it became much weaker on day 4, and disappeared on day 5. The strength of the correlation was lower compared to that of newspapers.

This indicates that there is a meaningful relationship between the coverage by network television channels of the rumor and the Internet searches, but this does not tell us about the nature of this relationship.

H11: The volume of the cable television channels' coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor will be positively correlated with the volume of the Internet searches.

The importance of this hypothesis is the same as with H9 and H10, for although we have established there is correlation between the coverage by the legacy media in general and the volume of Internet searches, we still have not determined which specific segment of the legacy media may be most strongly correlated with the Internet searches.

The results showed there was a significant and positive correlation between the coverage by the cable television channels of the rumor and the Internet searches on all five days. The correlation was especially strong on day 2, but did not decrease substantially on subsequent days. This correlation was stronger than that found for the newspapers and much stronger than that for the network television channels.

This indicates that there is meaningful relationship between coverage of the rumor by cable channels and the Internet searches, but this does not tell us about the nature of this relationship. Since this correlation was the strongest of the three segments of the legacy media, this leads us to suspect that the cable television channels might have had a greater importance, but this correlation alone does not demonstrate causality.

H12: The correlations between the coverage of political blogs and legacy media on the volume of the Internet searches about the rumor will be higher on day 1 and be lower on each succeeding day (2 through 5).

This hypothesis is important because we are interested in the changes in the public's interest in the rumor over time. The ability to investigate issue salience as measured by such new digital tools as Google Trends data and other similar Internet search programs is a new facet of agenda-setting research.

The results showed that the correlations between the coverage by the political blogs and legacy media on the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor and the volume of Internet searches on that rumor was high on day 1, and decreased on subsequent days.

The results supported our hypothesis. There is no consensus among agenda-setting scholars on the time it takes for an issue to become important to the public from being important to the media. Some researchers found online agenda-setting takes place immediate, sometimes on day 1 (Roberts, Wanta & Tzong-Horng, 2002). In the case of "Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor," it was possible that someone would conduct a Google search on the rumor from the same digital device they used to read or watch n article/broadcast on the rumor.

Discussion of qualitative results

Just by examining correlation, it is not possible to infer causality or determine the direction of the spread of the rumor. However, by drawing upon qualitative data and reconstructing the history of the spread of the rumor, it may be possible to draw some more definitive conclusions on these matters. First of all, the examination of the chronology clearly shows the rumor had circulated within the new media – emails, websites and political blogs – long before it made any appearance in the legacy media. It spread first from emails to

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InsightMag.com. Only later did it make its first appearance in cable news (Fox News Channel) and from there spread to newspapers and network news channels. It is not reasonable to claim the rumor had spread from legacy media to the Internet media. Although the chronological order of appearance does not absolutely prove the direction of influence, examination of the contents can further illuminate this matter. For example, InsightMag.com (a political blog) site emails as the source of their information. Likewise, the original Fox News report of the rumor clearly sites the InsightMag.com website as the source of the information. Therefore it only makes sense to interpret the flow of the information as being from the political blogs to the legacy media, and not the other way around. This being so the case of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor is a clear and unambiguous example of a case in which the political blogs have set the agenda of the legacy media.

Theoretical implications

We have now found that 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor constitutes at least one clear and definitive example of a case in which the political blogs have set the agenda of the legacy media. This finding requires some reinterpretation of several major theoretical perspectives. The first and most important of these is the original agenda setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972). Their theory maintained that the legacy media set the public agenda. Subsequent studies found that a few elites within the media (e.g. *New York Times*) set the agenda for other media. However, our findings describe an example ('Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor) where a part of the new media (political blogs) set the agenda for the legacy media including the elite segments. The findings of this dissertation can be viewed as an important expansion of the existing body of knowledge on agenda-setting.

Another key theoretical construct is intermedia agenda-setting. The existing body of literature on intermedia agenda-setting suggests that segments of legacy media frequently follow their peers to confirm their own sense of news (McCombs, 2004; Shaw and Sparrow, 1992). Our findings demonstrate that the same types of behavior also exist among political blogs, adding an important new insight to the field. The reliance on peers has been explained in terms of similarity of backgrounds, values, and agendas among various members of the legacy media (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). We might explain the interaction among peers in the political blogosphere in the same fashion.

Another important, and to some extent surprising, observation is that at least in some cases components of the legacy media, such as Fox News Channel, act as if they consider political blogs as their peers. This is because they seem to mirror the content of the political blogs and take cues from them in the same manner the legacy media have historically done with their peers.

Researchers in the past have found some type of bi-directional intermedia agenda-setting relationships. Our study found mixed relationships. Sometimes, the relationship was bidirectional. At other times, there was unidirectional relationship. Therefore, we believe, more studies shall be conducted to find out the direction of relationship in intermedia agenda-setting research.

Another subject of intense debate in intermedia agenda-setting literature is which form of the media is the influencer and which is the influenced (Lim, 2006). Our findings provide an example where political blogs served as the influencer and the legacy media as the influenced. McCombs (2005) in his discussion of present trends and future directions of agenda-setting research has argued that there has been little or no research about the direction of influence

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between legacy news media and the Internet media such as political blogs. The findings of our study may begin to fill that void.

Has the concept of a singular "media agenda" lost its meaning? That is a question that is being prompted by the explosion of Internet media and political blogs and that is being debated by scholars who on the one hand express concern that the media are becoming too specialized and fragmented (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005), and on the other hand those who contend that Internet media display the same tendencies toward uniformity and homogeneity as the traditional media (Hindman, 2009; Lee, 2007; McCombs, 2005). Those in the "specialization and fragmentation" camp fear that democracy might be compromised or even endangered if members of the general public no longer share a common familiarity with current events and other important information of the day (Sunstein, 2001; Tewksbury, 2005). Results of the present study argue in favor of the uniformity point of view. Political bloggers may scorn some of the traditional news media rules and standards and may frequently criticize their mainstream colleagues. It turns out that their agendas and journalistic concerns differ little from those of these mainstream brethren. These findings run parallel to those of earlier research that has found substantial similarities between the agendas of blogs and those of the mainstream media (Lee, 2007; Meraz, 2009; Metzgar, 2007; Wallsten, 2007).

Various theorists (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Sunstein, 2001; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Tewksbury, 2005; Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) have noted their concerns about the consequences of a new media world where Internet permits people to find news sources that augment their own parochial interests and filter out the rest, causing society to splinter into groups of people who know a great deal about a few topics but who possess very little knowledge about broader issues. The findings of our study seem to confirm these concerns

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because political blogs indeed serve niche audiences than broader public. What is a greater concern is that these political blogs, which serve very narrow niche audiences, may command unwarranted attention and distort the agenda of the legacy media and society at large.

The essence of journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), is a discipline of verification (p. 71). The ethics code of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) asks reporters to "test the accuracy of information from all sources" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2006). For bloggers, the approach to truth-telling is more in line with the "marketplace of ideas" notion described by John Milton. In blogs, ideas are given a public airing before they have been fully vetted in the hope that truth will arise from the discussion that follows (Singer, 2003). Shirky (2003) characterized this model as the process of "publish, then filter" rather than the traditional gate-keeping model of "filter, then publish." The 'Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor' case seems to be a very good example of how the unrestrained practice of this "publish, then filter" approach could be potentially dangerous. One could easily imagine a future instance in which a false and malicious rumor about a presidential candidate influenced an election, but was not effectively debunked until after the election was over.

For several years, researchers have documented journalists' acknowledgment of and indebtedness to blogs (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008). A recent study (Heim, 2010) found that newspaper and wire service journalists who reported on the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign read political blogs in particular. More than half the survey respondents said they read political blogs on a daily basis, with the most widely read political blog among the reporters covering the campaign being the Huffington Post (Heim, 2010). One of the compelling findings of the online survey was that neutral and liberal blogs were considerably more extensively read among the campaign reporters than were conservative blogs. This finding

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held even among journalists who primarily reported on Republican candidates. In fact, among the 17 respondents interviewed who said they mainly wrote about the Republican presidential primary candidates or the Republican presidential ticket, the Huffington Post, a liberal blog, was the most commonly read (Heim, 2010).

While these findings were of interest, they were hardly surprising. Weaver and his colleagues (2007) reported that U.S. journalists are considerably less likely to self-identify as inclining to the right politically than is the public at large (25% of journalists vs. 41% of the public) and considerably more likely to self-identify as leaning to the left than is the public (40% vs. 17%). Conservative critics' contention that the U.S. news media are biased toward the liberal viewpoint is thus bolstered by Weaver's findings in the eyes of those same conservative critics. Moreover, regardless of the reasons for journalists' dependence on liberal and neutral political blogs as opposed to conservative ones, such information indebtedness might be seen as jeopardizing the presumed journalistic touchstones of objectivity and fairness.

Limitations of the study

This study had some limitations. One of them was that content analysis offers descriptive data only and not the direct evaluation of media consequences. Nevertheless, by employing a time-lag design, the author was able to make the claim that certain patterns of intermedia agenda setting seemed to be more credible than others. However, the study should be taken as exploratory and the results as tentative. If possible, this study should be replicated using reporters and bloggers as subjects with controls for complicating factors by means of random assignment to treatment conditions to corroborate the validity of the study's results.

The study selected 10 legacy news media entities and 10 political blogs in order to provide a sufficient sample for the study goals, but these choices had the undesirable effect of

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restricting generalizations to all legacy news media and the blogosphere. Therefore, future researchers would be well advised to expand the sample of legacy news media and blogs to permit a wider purview of the relationship under review.

We studied only one rumor and the results do not necessarily generalize to other cases. Just because the legacy media responded as it did to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor does not necessarily tell us how the legacy media would respond to other rumors in the future. It is possible to speculate that they have learned a valuable lesion from this incident.

Because this study is somewhat narrowly focused, it is challenging to make comparisons to other campaigns of a political nature or to situations in a non-political context. Furthermore, given the fluidity of blogs and political campaigns, these entities can be difficult for researchers to pin down and hold accountable. As the blogosphere and the political climate can change with little notice, intermedia agenda setting could similarly vary, and agenda-setting patterns pointed out in the conditions of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor might not gain traction in forthcoming election campaigns.

In the present study, all the blog posts were given equal value. For example, a 200-word blog post carried the same weight as a 500-word blog post. As the quantitative part of the study focused only on *content count* data, we did not analyze the *contents*. This might have thrown variance in the study.

This study was hindered by Type II error—or false negatives—although scholars and researchers for the most part agree that research should incline toward Type II error over Type I as Type I poses the greater threat. For the present study this tradeoff was balanced between Type I and Type II errors with preference for reducing Type I error uppermost in the author's mind.

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Most of the study was focused on correlation rather than causality. The design of the study was primarily a content analysis, which does not allow researchers to infer any causality. Determination of causality would have required a formal experimental design, which is very difficult to conduct on the type of issue under examination. However, this limitation was somewhat offset by the examination of the qualitative data and reconstruction of the history of the rumor.

Such limitations to the contrary notwithstanding, this study contributes valuable foundational work for future research into the nature of the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs and legacy media.

Suggestions for future research

Based on the findings of the study, the author of this dissertation developed a model of news cycle dubbed as "*cycle of media influence model*." The full model is displayed below.
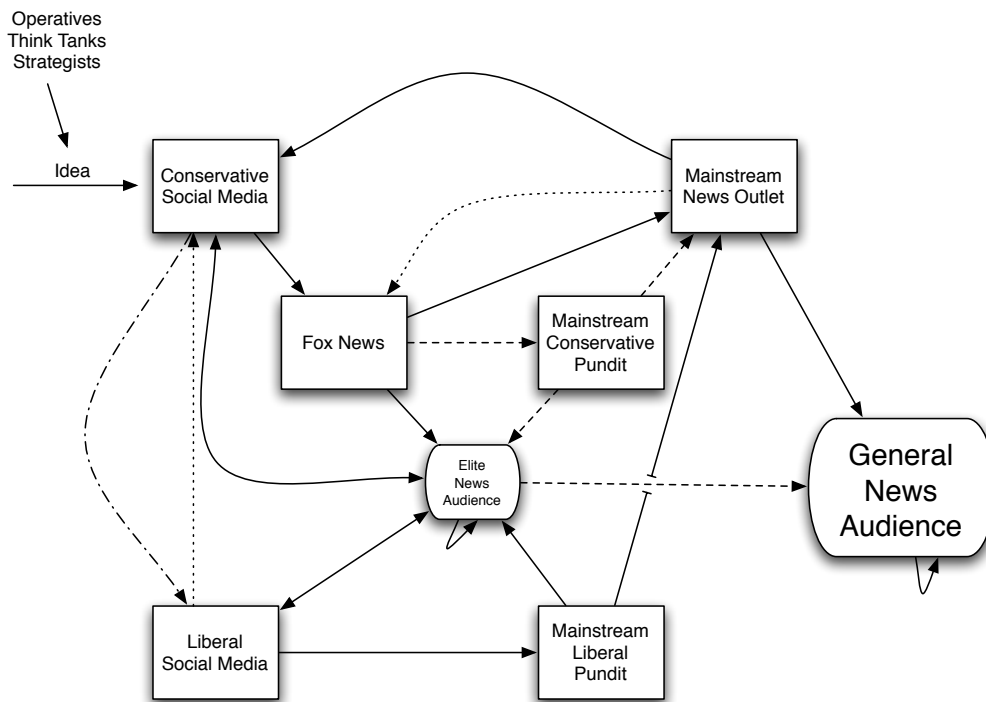

Figure 4: *Cycle of media influence model*

As the model illustrates, an idea or issue may be generated from a think tank or ideologically driven political operatives. Then the issue may come into play via partisan social media (including e-mail chatter). Smaller partisan outlets, such as blogs and other social media, can act as sources for bigger ones. Pundits from broadcast and print outlets may pick up or add onto their issues. Information may pass from conservative media to liberal media with a frame added by folks affiliated with liberal media.

Elite news audience, those who get information from a variety of sources, makes up a small fraction of overall audience. If only elite audience is exposed to an issue, it is likely that issue will not matter. However, partisan outlets can push issues onto the legacy or mainstream news agenda by creating an atmosphere of controversy.

As the cycle returns to beginning, smaller social media outlets use mainstream sources as a way to bolster the credibility of their own claims, even if sources contradict those claims. In this cyclic process, small partisan media outlets, such as political blogs, may set the news agenda of the legacy media.

The model has not been empirically tested. An obvious next step would be to attempt to test this model using the investigation of a different rumor.

There is general agreement among agenda-setting scholars that agenda setting is an incremental process that can take weeks or months to occur (McCombs, 2004), in contrast to results by other scholars that show that online agenda setting occurs rapidly (Lee, Lancendorfer & Lee, 2005). The present study tested intermedia agenda-setting effects over short periods of time, specifically, such agenda setting occurring between day 1 to day 5. It is acknowledged that there is a need to further explore the variable of time, particularly given the rise of real-time Internet communication and the arrival of an ever-accelerating news cycle. In addition, further

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study is called for to test the length of agenda-setting effects (if any) in the virtually nonstop news cycle and real-time setting of today in order to identify the ideal agenda-setting time lag.

Finally, research should also look for second-level agenda-setting effects of intermedia agenda-setting research between the political blogosphere and the legacy media.

Final Thoughts

Looking back, it can be said with certainty that agenda-setting scholars 42 years ago could never have predicted the manner in which new modes of information transmission such as political blogs would prompt a critical reconsideration of what comprises "the media" and "the public."

In the two years leading up to the national election of 2008, bloggers were on fire with conversation and debate about the U.S. presidential campaign, with observers pointing out that many election-related stories seemed to originate in the nontraditional media. For example, it was a blogger, not a legacy reporter, who broke the story that Obama, at the time the Democratic presidential candidate, had called blue-collar Pennsylvania voters "bitter." It was bloggers as well who inquired about Republican vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin's past, including questioning her about whether her youngest son was really hers and not her daughter's.

All that said, the question remains: Did the noise in the blogosphere during the campaign actually have an agenda-setting effect or directly affect public opinion? Some scholars make the claim that bloggers can influence journalists and their reporting despite the probability that bloggers' audience may not be sizable enough for them to have a direct impact on public opinion (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Woodly, 2008) while other scholars adopt the opposing viewpoint, arguing that bloggers do nothing more than draw upon stories found in the mainstream news outlets (Haas, 2005).

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Over the years there has been no shortage of intermedia agenda-setting research, but one shortcoming of that research has been a paucity of conjecture as to *why* such agenda setting takes place and the circumstances in which it is *most expected* to take place. Over the years, there have been numerous studies comparing the agendas of different media that often make note of the "news sociology" literature, which in turn frequently attributes the likeness in news content across media landscapes to journalists' dependence on such sources for information as press releases along with both their close accounting of their colleagues' and competitors' work, and the beliefs, attitudes and values they share (McCombs, 2004). Today, however, even though journalists still depend on press releases and check their colleagues' and competitors' work, they also can avail themselves of such hybrid media forms as blogs that challenge long-established values of journalism: objectivity and verification (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Wall, 2005; Woodly, 2008). As a result, research into intermedia agenda setting must take into account changes in the current media terrain and demonstrate how issue and attribute salience is transferred between old and new media modes.

It is by now a truism that mainstream journalists are of two minds about bloggers. They may see some bloggers (those, say, who write about news events) as a threat to their occupational prerogative (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008). Even though at the time blogging became popular a dozen years ago many journalists dismissed its practitioners as unschooled amateurs (Lasica, 2003), many of the same naysayers now embrace blogging and have established blogs of their own.

There is no denying the fact of the growing resemblances between bloggers and mainstream journalists. These similarities can be seen in the way bloggers are increasingly disposed to monitor their competitors' work in much the same fashion that mainstream

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journalists monitor their own colleagues' and competitors' reporting, namely, to authenticate and legitimize their journalistic acumen (Golan, 2006). In addition, political blogs have come more and more to resemble traditional news website. Two notable examples are *The Huffington Post* and *Talking Points Memo*, the two most popular liberal blogs. Their homepages openly mime the look of newspaper sites, with a main news item and accompanying headline flanked by smaller headlines organized by subject. They also feature numerous bloggers with mainstream journalism credentials and experience.

Research suggests that political bloggers' greatest impact may reside in their capacity to focus the mainstream media's attention on specific events. Two such examples are Obama's "bitter" comment and then-Mississippi Senator Trent Lott's praise for Strom Thurmond's segregationist record in 2002. As example after example has shown, bloggers can and often do post their thoughts about these and other similarly incendiary incidents without choosing to wait for verification or comment from the opposing side. However, when it comes to the more inclusive categories of issues and attributes, which is the typical focus of agenda-setting research, the advantage may still lie with the legacy news media. The real or perceived influence of political blogs, then, might be seen as trivial and ephemeral while that of the legacy news media is seen as substantial and indelible. It will be up to future studies to test these assertions as efforts to broaden our understanding of intermedia agenda-setting continue.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Data Collection Protocol for Blog contents

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study to investigate the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs' and legacy media's coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor during the 2008 presidential campaign in the United States.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the data collection process.

Procedure

All blog contents are available on World Wide Web. Access the "Google Blog Search" by visiting the website of the search engine at http://blogsearch.google.com/. Click on the "Advanced Blog Search" option of the search engine. In the "Find posts" category, insert the search terms "Obama Muslim" in the first box that says "with **all** of the words." Select "English" as "Language." Under the "Dates" category, select "posts written between 17 Jan 2007 and 4 Nov 2008." In the same category, select "anytime" as "post written." Leave the "By Author" category blank. Through the "In blogs" category, insert the following web addresses in the second box that says "at **this URL**," one at a time for each blog search: http://hotair.com/; http://michellemalkin.com/; http://newsbusters.org/; http://volokh.com/; http://redstate.com/; http://dailykos.com/; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/; http://talkingpointsmemo.com/; http://crooksandliars.com/; and http://firedoglake.com/.

After entering each URL one at a time, click on "Search Blogs." The following pages should show search results "sorted by relevance."

The unit of analysis for this study is individual blog post related to the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor.

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Read all the blog posts carefully to find out the relevant post. Include any post related to the rumor; any post suggesting Obama's faith, his father's background, his Kenyan roots; and any post related to Obama's friends, family members or colleagues of the Muslim faith. Furthermore, use your prudent judgment to find blog posts that may promote or refute the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor.

Exclude duplications. Delete posts those are only related to the Muslim community, the Muslim faith, the Arab community or Arab nations, the U.S foreign policy to the Islamic world, but do not have any connection with the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor.

On each day there may be none, one or several posts on each blog. A post can only contain one sentence or can be several paragraphs long.

Data Collection Process

The following steps should be taken in the data collection process. Please read the explanations carefully before you start collecting the data:

v1.   Media Category

       3- Political Blogs [Insert 3 for all]

v2.   Blog

       11- *Crooks and Liars*

       12- *Daily Kos*

       13- *Firedoglake*

       14- *Hot Air*

       15- *Michelle Malkin*

       16- *Newsbusters*

       17- *Red State*

18- *Talking Points Memo*

19- *The Huffington Post*

20- *The Volokh Conspiracy*

v3.   Political Orientation

1- Liberal [*Crooks and Liars, Daily Kos, Firedoglake, Talking Points Memo, The*

Huffington Post]

2-Conservative [*Hot Air, Michelle Malkin, Newsbusters, Red State, The Volokh*

Conspiracy]

v4.   Year [As shown in document list]

1- 2007

2- 2008

v5.   Month [As shown in document list]

1- January

2- February

3- March

4- April

5- May

6- June

7- July

8- August

9- September

10- October

11- November

12- December

v6.   Day [As shown in document list]

1-31

v7.   Is the blog post related to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

[Determine whether the overall context has a relationship to the Obama-is-a-Muslim

rumor?]

1-Yes

2-No

APPENDIX B

Data Collection Protocol for Newspaper Articles

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study to investigate the intermedia agenda-setting

relationship between political blogs' and legacy media's coverage of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim'

rumor during the 2008 presidential campaign in the United States.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the data collection process.

Procedure

All newspaper articles are available in the LexisNexis Academic database. Access the

LexisNexis Academic database through the website of the Morris Library of the Southern Illinois

University Carbondale at http://www.lib.siu.edu. Use the "Power Search" function in

LexisNexis, select "Major World Publications" as the source type and "specify date" between

01/17/2007 and 11/04/2008.

As "Search Terms" enter "obama w/50 muslim and rumor or secret or secretly or secretly

arab or he is an arab or he is arab or muslim name or false rumor." Click on "Search" to start the

search. The following page should show the search results as "Sources by Category." Through

the "Newspapers" link select the following newspapers, one at a time for each search: New York

Post, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Washington Times. Click on each

article for the coding procedure. Exclude double entries from the analysis.

The unit of analysis for this study is individual news article.

Data Collection Process

The following steps should be taken in the data collection process. Please read the

explanations carefully before you start the coding:

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v1.   Media Category

        1-Newspaper [Insert 1 for all]

v2.   Newspaper [As shown in document list]

        1- *New York Post*

        2- *The New York Times*

        3- *The Washington Post*

        4 - *The Washington Times*

v3.   Political Orientation

        1- Liberal [*The New York Times, The Washington Post*]

        2-Conservative [*New York Post, The Washington Times*]

v4.   Year [As shown in document list]

        1- 2007

        2- 2008

v5.   Month [As shown in document list]

        1- January

        2- February

        3- March

        4- April

        5- May

        6- June

        7- July

        8- August

        9- September

10- October

11- November

12- December

v6.   Day [As shown in document list]

1-31

v7.   Is the news report/article/editorial/op-ed/letter to the editor related to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

[Determine whether the overall context has a relationship to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?]

1-Yes

2-No

APPENDIX C

Data Collection Protocol for Television News Transcripts

Introduction

This protocol is designed for a study to investigate the intermedia agenda-setting relationship between political blogs' and legacy media's coverage of the "Obama-is-a-Muslim" rumor during the 2008 presidential campaign in the United States.

Please read the following instructions closely before starting the data collection process.

Procedure

All television news transcripts are available in the LexisNexis Academic database. Access the LexisNexis Academic database through the website of the Morris Library of the Southern Illinois University Carbondale at http://www.lib.siu.edu. Use the "Power Search" function in LexisNexis, select "Broadcast Transcripts" as the source type and "specify date" between 01/17/2007 and 11/04/2008.

As "Search Terms" enter "obama w/50 muslim and rumor or secret or secretly or secretly arab or he is an arab or he is arab or muslim name or false rumor." Click on "Search" to start the search. The following page should show the search results as "Sources by Category." Through the "News Transcripts" link select the following categories, one at a time for each search: "ABC News Transcripts," "CBS News Transcripts," "CNN Transcripts," "Fox News Network," "MSNBC," and "NBC News."

Click on each transcript for the coding procedure. Exclude double entries from the analysis.

The unit of analysis for this study is individual news transcript.

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Data Collection Process

The following steps should be taken in the content analysis. Please read the explanations

carefully before you start the coding:

v1.   Media Category

            2-Television [Insert 2 for all]

v2.   Television/Cable Network [As shown in document list]

            5- *ABC News*

            6- *CBS News*

            7- *CNN*

            8- *Fox*

            9- *MSNBC*

            10- *NBC News*

v3.   Year [As shown in document list]

            1- 2007

            2- 2008

v4.   Month [As shown in document list]

            1- January

            2- February

            3- March

            4- April

            5- May

            6- June

            7- July

8- August

9- September

10- October

11- November

12- December

v5.   Day [As shown in document list]

1-31

v6.   Is the news transcript related to the Obama-is-a-Muslim rumor?

[Determine whether the overall context has a relationship to the Obama-is-a-Muslim

rumor]

1-Yes

2-No

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Dissertation Title:

Intermedia agenda-setting relationships between political blogs and legacy news media:
A study of the 'Obama-is-a-Muslim' rumor

Major Professor: Dennis T. Lowry

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